

the farm produce of their tenants. They relieved the indigent and distressed, entertained the stranger, and gave shelter to the wayfarer. But "by their indiscriminate doles and charities, they reared and fostered the horde of itinerant beggars, who, under the name of pilgrims, tramped from abbey to abbey all the year round." (OMAN.) Moreover the monasteries served as schools for the children of the gentry, and often provided the necessary funds for the maintenance of poor youths at the Universities. But they had long ceased to fulfil the object for which they were founded; they had in fact out-lived their time. In a rude and illiterate age they had been the resort of men of culture and learning, but since the Renaissance their places had been supplied by the Universities. Wolsey had suppressed some of the smaller ones and appropriated their wealth towards the support of schools and colleges. Some of the most magnificent of these monasteries, such as Fountains and Tintern, had been built in the most out-of-the-way places, and were practically useless, except so far as they afforded shelter for a few dozen monks. Moreover, the acquisition of enormous wealth, and the absence of any regular employment besides the "mere mechanical work of the Church services," had made the monks idle and self-indulgent, and they had lost a good deal of their once-deserved popularity.

NOTE 2.—Trial and execution of Anne Boleyn, 1536. The same year, which was rendered memorable by the dissolution of the smaller monasteries, witnessed the tragic end of the new Queen. Henry had grown tired of her as he had of Catherine, and he was also disappointed in not having a male heir, as only a daughter, the Princess Elizabeth had been born to him from the marriage. Moreover the Queen's unseemly familiarity with his courtiers, and her want of dignity and decorum suitable to her high position, had roused Henry's displeasure. But the real cause of his estrangement was that he had fixed his affections on Jane Seymour, a young lady of singular merit and beauty, and a maid of honour in Anne's Court. Suddenly Anne was arrested and sent to the Tower. Before a council of twenty-six peers, among whom were her own father and uncle, she was charged with being unfaithful to her husband, and found guilty and sent to the scaffold, together with four of her alleged paramours. But the whole affair is shrouded in mystery, and it is impossible to say whether she was actually guilty of the abominable charges laid against her, or the victim of a base conspiracy. In all probability she had been nothing more than indiscreet, and guilty of such flirtations as might be expected from a giddy, gay and frivolous young woman, who lacked refinement. She died making protestations of her innocence, and the day after her execution, the King, with most unseemly haste, married Jane Seymour, the daughter of a plain Wiltshire knight. Queen Jane died the next year, after giving birth to a son, the future Edward VI., and for the next three years Henry remained unmarried.