

DESCRIPTION OF HENRY VIII

Sebastian Giustiniani to the Venetian Senate

10 September 1519

His Majesty is twenty-nine years old and extremely handsome. Nature could not have done more for him. He is much handsomer than any other sovereign in Christendom; a great deal handsomer than the King of France; very fair and his whole frame admirably proportioned. On hearing that Francis I¹ wore a beard, he allowed his own to grow, and as it is reddish, he has now a beard that looks like gold. He is very accomplished, a good musician, composes well, is a most capital horseman, a fine jousting, speaks good French, Latin, and Spanish, is very religious, hears three masses daily when he hunts, and sometimes five on other days. He hears the office every day in the Queen's chamber, that is to say vesper and compline.

He is very fond of hunting, and never takes his diversion without tiring eight or ten horses, which he causes to be stationed beforehand along the line of country he means to take, and when one is tired he mounts another, and before he gets home they are all exhausted. He is extremely fond of tennis, at which game it is the prettiest thing in the world to see him play, his fair skin glowing through a shirt of the finest texture. He gambles with the French hostages, to the amount occasionally, it is said of from 6.000 to 8.000 ducats in a day. He is affable and gracious, harms no one, does not covet his neighbor's goods, and is satisfied with his own dominions, having often said to me, "Sir Ambassador, We want all potentates to content themselves with their own territories; We are satisfied with this island of Ours." He seems extremely desirous of peace.

He is very rich. His father left ten millions of ready money in gold, of which he is supposed to have spent one-half in the war against France, when he had three armies on foot; one crossed the Channel with him, another was in the field against Scotland, and the third remained with the Queen in reserve.

His revenues amount to about 350.000 ducats annually, and are derived from estates, forests, and meres, the customs, hereditary and confiscated property, the Duchies of Lancaster, York, Cornwall, and Suffolk, the County Palatine of Chester, and others, the principality of Wales, the export duties, the wool staple, the great seal, the annates yielded by Church benefices, the Court of Wards, and from New Year's gifts; for on the first day of the year it is customary for His Majesty to make presents to everybody, but the value of those he receives in return greatly exceeds his own outlay. His Majesty's expenses may be estimated at 100.000 ducats, those in ordinary having been reduced from 100.000 to 56.000, to which must be added 16.000 for salaries, 5.000 for the stable, 5.000 for the halberdiers, who have been reduced from 500 to 150, and 16.000 for the wardrobe, for he is the best-dressed sovereign in the world. His robes are very rich and superb, and he puts on new clothes every holiday.

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¹ Francis I (1494-1547), King of France (1515-1547)