BOOK 1, CHAPTER 5

Of the King's Actions Concerning His Marriage to the Queen, and What the French Ambassador Proposed to Dissolve It

And so, once the cardinal and the confessor had sworn themselves to secrecy, the king threw himself into exploring the matter: he gave his nights to it, conferring with various theologians over the arguments in favor propounded by the cardinal, based upon several places in Leviticus and Deuteronomy (badly misinterpreted), as well as scouring the apostolic letters by which Pope Julius II had permitted his marriage to Queen Doña Catherine. Finding nothing to his purpose or satisfaction, neither in the places of Scripture nor in the pope's dispensation, he thought it best to abandon it and proceed no further therein, and all those the king had secretly consulted in the course of a year were of the same opinion. And so he would have done, if, on the one hand, the cardinal had not delved so deeply or been so insistent with the king, or, on the other, if the king himself, weary of the queen's saintly life and stricken with love for Anne Boleyn, had not been overwhelmed with passion and the false hopes she fed him of lawfully dissolving his marriage to the queen.

Around this time, ambassadors came to King Henry from France, asking that his daughter, the Princess Doña Mary, who had been betrothed (as we have said) to the dauphin, marry the duke of Orleans, King Francis's second son. Among the envoys was the bishop of Tarbes. The delegation in question, including Gabriel de Gramont, bishop of Tarbes (1486–1534), arrived at the English court in April 1527. Two years later, Henry was to repeat the story of Gramont's speech before the legatine court. J.J. Scarisbrick opines that "It is incredible that an ambassador would have dared to trespass upon so delicate a subject as a monarch's marriage. Nor was it likely that he should have suggested that Mary was illegitimate when her hand would have been very useful to French diplomacy." Salvador Miranda, by contrast, claims that Gramont was sent as French ambassador to England to secretly try to break the marriage of the English king and Catalina of Aragón and propose to him the hand of Marguerite d'Orléans, widow of Duke Charles d'Alençon." Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, 153. "Biographical Dictionary—Consistory of June 8, 1530," in CHRC.

1 Sander, De origine ac progressu, 17–21.
2 In the margin: “Leviticus 18[16], Deuteronomy 25[5–6].”
3 The delegation in question, including Gabriel de Gramont, bishop of Tarbes (1486–1534), arrived at the English court in April 1527. Two years later, Henry was to repeat the story of Gramont's speech before the legatine court. J.J. Scarisbrick opines that "It is incredible that an ambassador would have dared to trespass upon so delicate a subject as a monarch's marriage. Nor was it likely that he should have suggested that Mary was illegitimate when her hand would have been very useful to French diplomacy." Salvador Miranda, by contrast, claims that Gramont was sent as French ambassador to England to secretly try to break the marriage of the English king and Catalina of Aragón and propose to him the hand of Marguerite d'Orléans, widow of Duke Charles d'Alençon." Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, 153. "Biographical Dictionary—Consistory of June 8, 1530," in CHRC.
been discussed and that, if lawful means could be found for dissolving the marriage of the king and queen, the king would assuredly marry the king of France's sister. Wolsey did as the king commanded, imparting the matter to the bishop and adding that it would not be proper for any of King Henry's vassals to be the first to raise such an issue, taking so a great burden upon themselves as well as the hatred of the entire realm, such as would befall any who tried to place the king's marriage (a fact accepted by all) in jeopardy or doubt. As for the bishop, he was well placed to do this, as man who looked to the good of his king and desired to firmly establish the tranquility and peace of both kingdoms. Wolsey's arguments seemed sound to the bishop, who, having shared it with his fellow ambassadors, decided to attempt the business. One day, in the presence of King Henry and his council, he said that it was a fact well known among all Englishmen and Frenchmen that there was nothing more desirable or beneficial to all than peace between those two kingdoms; to establish this and tighten it with bonds of loving friendship, it had been agreed that the most serene princess of Wales, Doña Mary, should marry the duke of Orleans—and he did not doubt that this marriage would be of great advantage and glory to both nations. But another path occurred to him, incomparably better suited to achieve what was desired, if he had leave to propose it.

But why—he said—may I not expound it, since I speak in this council, among men who are not only Christian, but exceedingly pious and prudent, who, without any concern for their private interests, always keep the public good as the aim of all their deliberations? How much more advantageous would it be, if persons of mature years (and not children), the heads of kingdoms they have successfully governed (and not other, lesser royals, without experience), and indeed the monarchs themselves made this match and bound themselves together, rather than their children? For our part, it is common knowledge that the duchess of Alençon, the sister of our Most Christian King, has the age and all other attributes for marriage that might be desired in a princess—and that she lacks nothing but a husband, one whose dignity of person and state might add luster to her royal blood, rather than diminish or obscure it. If there were in England such a leading man, or (as I should say) the first, the very head of all nobles and lords, who had no wife—such a one ought to marry that lady, for the universal good, tranquility, and security of both realms. Your Majesty, O Henry, most mighty king, if we are willing to consider the reality and the truth, rather than the false appearances of things, is free of the ties of matrimony and lord of himself, to take any woman he chooses. I say this not only according to my judgment, but also that of all