

Original Documents.

ORIGINAL LETTER ADDRESSED TO HENRY IV., KING OF ENGLAND, BY ELISABETTA, DUCHESS OF BAVARIA, DATED NOV. 24, 1400.

COMMUNICATED BY EDWARD A. BOND, ESQ., ASSISTANT KEEPER OF MSS.
BRITISH MUSEUM.

The following document (found not long since among the burnt fragments of the Cottonian collection, in the British Museum) will be found interesting in connection with the subject of royal match-making in early times, where the initiative is taken in behalf of the lady. It is a letter from Elisabetta, one of the daughters of Barnabo Visconti, Lord of Milan, and wife of Ernest, Duke of Bavaria-Münich, ancestor of the Electors, to Henry the Fourth of England, a little more than a year after his elevation to the throne; offering him in marriage, for himself or one of his sons, the daughter of her sister Madalena, widow of Frederic, Duke of Bavaria-Landshut. The style is amusingly simple and unreserved, and may fairly incline us to attribute the first composition of the epistle to the Duchess herself rather than to an official secretary. It is some shock to feelings of gallantry to find that so frank a proposal from a lady should have not found ready acceptance from our English monarch. But there is this to plead in his excuse; according to the testimony of contemporary writers, Henry's heart was already occupied. It is said that, while enjoying the hospitality of the Court of Brittany, where he was liberally entertained for some time, immediately before his triumphant return to his own country from banishment, a strong attachment had grown between him and the Duke's consort, Joanna of Navarre. The suspicion was confirmed by the fact that subsequently (two years after the date of the present letter) Henry and the widowed Duchess were united; and, certainly, the energy shown by the lady in smoothing the way to the alliance gives ground for believing that, on her side too, this was a veritable love-match. The excuse for rejection of the offer in regard to the Princes, Henry's sons, was doubtless grounded on their extreme youth, the eldest, Prince Henry, being at the time only twelve years of age. A previous passage in the history of her family may account for the present proposal having suggested itself to the mind of the Duchess. It appears that, during his exile, Henry had taken some steps towards a union with Lucia Visconti, a younger sister of Elisabetta; but that an objection was raised to the match from the then unpromising state of Henry's circumstances. That the mind of the elder sister should have recurred to this incident at a later period, when the exiled Prince had become firmly settled on the throne of England, was natural enough. After all, Lucia was destined to wed an Englishman. She was married to

Edmund Holland, Earl of Kent, in the year 1407, and eventually died in this country in 1424.

A short statement will explain the relationship between the persons mentioned in the letter. Two daughters of the numerous family of Barnabo Visconti, Lord of Milan, entered by marriage into the house of Bavaria; viz., Elisabetta, Henry's correspondent, and Madalena. The former of these was united to Ernest, Duke of Bavaria-Münich; the latter to this Duke's uncle, Frederic, Duke of Bavaria, of the line of Landshut. Madalena's marriage took place in the year 1382; her husband died in 1393. They had three children: two of them daughters. Elisabetta, the younger, (celebrated as the "Schöne Elsa") was married, in 1400, to Frederic I., Elector of Brandenburg; and, as the date of our letter is the 24th of November of the same year, it is safe to conclude that the damsel so highly extolled by her aunt Elisabetta was the elder sister, Magdalena. The date of her parents' union shows her age to have been not above seventeen years. It is needless to trace her history beyond the period of this early failure of her marriage prospects. A high alliance had been contemplated for her; but in place of the sovereign of a great country, she was eventually contented to accept the hand of the comparatively obscure Prince Johann Mainhard, Count of Görtz, to whom she was married in the year 1403. It is worthy of remark that neither in the letter itself nor the address does the duchess give to Henry the title of king. The epistle is on paper and written in an Italian hand.

"*Illustrissime Princeps et domine gratiose! Vestræ celsitudini præsentibus significamus quod est nympha quædam illustris, miræ venustatis, apud omnesque tam multipliciter commendata quod ipsa vobis aut cuicumque terræ principi, qui quod tam decens est corporis elegantia conspexisset, tamque mente conspicuam et inter homines sic laudabiliter conversantem cognovisset, utique desideranda foret et legitimis gratisque suis amplexibus copulanda; illustrissimi quondam Frederici Comitis Palatini Reni, Baviaræ Ducis, filia et soboles peramata, ex ejus consorte legitima illustri Magdalena, sorore nostra karissima, sibi propagata. Pro quâ et quamplures terræ majores et principes nobis supplicarunt, ad nosque suas transmisere petitiones. Non autem scimus in hoc sæculo quempiam ad quem majus sit nobis desiderium et urgens affectus, quam ut ipsa vestro aut alicujus natorum vestrorum consortio matrimoniali fœdere jungeretur. Nam et illud domui Baviaræ congruentissimum valdeque reputarem honestum. Ad hujus rei plenitudinem Altissimus, qui omnis boni principium est atque finis, cunctaque fieri ducit in optatum, vos si reddiderit inclinatum (*sic*) id ipsum in vestra litera aspicere delectabit et gaudium nobis afferet immensum. Omnis naturæ creator vestræ sanitatis, nobis solatio, conservator sit et auctor. Datum in oppido nostro Wasserburg, xxiiij. die mensis Novembris, anno etc. quadringentesimo.*

"*Elisabetta de Vicecomitibus Mediolani, gratiâ Dei Comitissa Palatini Reni et Baviaræ Ducissa.*"

In dorso.—"*Illustrissimo principi domino Henrico, Angliæ Hybernæque domino, domino nostro gracioso.*"

"*Litera Vicecomitissæ Mediolani.*"

TRANSLATION.

"Most illustrious Prince and gracious Lord. The intention of our

present letter is to make known to your Highness that there is a certain damsel of wondrous beauty, and held in such high regard by all for her many good qualities, that she could not fail to be desired and sought after as an object of legitimate and dear embrace by yourself or any other prince of the earth who should know of her elegance of person, her superiority of mind, and her admirable bearing in the world. She is the daughter and beloved offspring of the late most illustrious Frederic Count Palatine of the Rhine, Duke of Bavaria, born to him of his rightful consort the illustrious Magdalena, our dear sister.

“Very many magnates and princes of the land have already made suit to us for her hand, in person, or by message. But we know of none in this world to whom it would be more our wish and urgent inclination to unite her in marriage than to yourself or one of your sons. For we should consider it an alliance highly suitable and honourable to the house of Bavaria.

“If the Almighty, who is the beginning and end of every good thing, and who brings all things to pass according to His will, should render you disposed to carry out this matter, we shall be delighted to receive your letter to that effect; and it will give us unbounded joy.

“May the Creator of all nature keep and confirm you in health, for our consolation!

“Given in our town of Wasserburg,¹ the 24th day of November, in the year Fourteen Hundred.

“Elisabetta de’ Visconti, of Milan, by the grace of God Countess Palatine of the Rhine, and Duchess of Bavaria.”

(*Indorsed.*)—“To the most illustrious Prince, the lord Henry, Lord of England and Ireland, our gracious lord.”

“Letter of the Viscountess of Milan.”

¹ A town in Upper Bavaria, situated on the river Inn, east of Munich.