

The Five Elizabeths.

IT WAS WITH THE VERY GREATEST pleasure and interest that a large number of Fellows, Members and friends gathered at the British College of Nurses, Ltd., on March 11th, and listened to a lecture on "The Five Elizabeths" so ably delivered by Mr. H. F. Bryant Peers, Research Historian.

We are publishing an abridged form of the lecture for the interest of those members too far away to be present on this occasion.

The Five Elizabeths.

When we talk of *Five Elizabeths* we are right but if we prefix the word QUEEN, we are, strictly speaking, wrong.

The very word *Monarch* is made up of two Greek words meaning *to rule alone*. The king is the monarch and the queen is his CONSORT. Wives of reigning kings are generally known as and accepted as queens but in reality they are NOT reigning monarchs.

Our present Gracious Lady IS a Queen in her own right as her namesake before her and as Victoria and Mary. The Queen's husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, is of course her CONSORT.

William Third of Orange was a joint sovereign with his queen *Mary*. . . and at the Coronation it was necessary to have two *Coronation Chairs*. . . a copy of the historical Coronation Chair was made specially for this occasion. It has been kept in store but has never been used since. . .

So . . . you see, we are quite right to say *Five Elizabeths* but only two *Queen Elizabeths*.

We will first of all seek out our first ELIZABETH and we find that she was

Elizabeth Woodville, wife of King Edward Fourth.

She was born at Grafton Castle, Northamptonshire, about the year 1435. Her father, Sir Richard Woodville, had been one of the English Commanders at Rouen under the Duke of Bedford. She first of all married John Gray, probably in 1452, and after marriage she became one of the four ladies of the Bedchamber of Margaret of Anjou.

In the Wardrobe Book preserved in the archives of the Duchy of Lancaster she is mentioned as "*Lady Isobella Gray in attendance on the Queen's person.*" The name of Isobella seems to have been used in Latin writing instead of Elizabeth.

We are told that she was a vivacious girl, afraid of nothing but on the other hand, some writers of the time say she was moody. Be that as it may her husband, after receiving a Knighthood from the sword of Holy King Henry at the village of Colney, died of wounds received at the battle of St. Albans—on February 28th, 1461—and Elizabeth was left a widow.

Now it appears that this widow almost immediately set her cap at young *Edward Fourth* and it seems that she made a habit of wandering in his hunting preserves which was in the vicinity of her mother's dower house at Grafton. Local Northamptonshire tradition says she first of all met him by design under a tree in this forest . . . still known locally as the *Queen's Oak*.

Edward apparently tried every art to induce her to become his own on other terms than as sharer of his regal dignity. . . Elizabeth made the memorable reply—

"My Liege, I know I am not good enough to be your Queen, but I am far too good to become your mistress."

Edward struggled but on May 1st, 1464, he married her in the town of Grafton, near to Stony Stratford, and so we have our *First Elizabeth*.

(Edward, incidentally, was eldest of numerous family of Cicely Neville, Duchess of York, and he was born at Rouen in the Spring of 1441. When Duke of York his father reigned over that part of France which still submitted to English domination. He was crowned at Westminster, June 28th, 1461.)

She was acclaimed Queen at the ancient Palace of Reading and it was in Reading Abbey that she was declared queen.

About 20 months after the marriage, a girl child was born, *Elizabeth of York*. Then came two more daughters, *Mary* and *Cecily*, and on November 1st, 1470, a male heir *Edward of York* was born. Another son, *Richard Duke of York*, was born in 1472. After this came *Anne* 1474, *Katherine* 1479 and *Bridget* 1480. This *Bridget* became a Nun in the Convent at Dartford, Kent. On April 9th, 1483, Edward died at Westminster Palace and Elizabeth once more became a widow!

Now the dowager queen appointed May 4th for the Coronation of her son Edward V.

Gloucester on the other hand had other ideas on the subject because he was madly in love with power and decided to make a bold bid for the crown.

Under pretence of teaching Edward and his brother, Duke of York, procedure to be followed at the Coronation, he persuaded their mother to allow him to remove them to the Tower for this instruction. She was very unhappy about it and had many misgivings. On the other hand she had no reason to doubt that prolonged training for this ceremony was necessary and finally agreed to the parting. The boys were taken to the Tower and although well treated they were virtually prisoners.

It will be remembered that Gloucester was instrumental in the murder of these Young Princes there, and the bodies were buried beneath the archway of what is now known as the Bloody Tower.

On hearing of the murders the health of the queen gave way and indeed it well might have done because her own position became untenable. She, with her daughters, sought sanctuary with the Monks of Westminster, the Benedictines who normally gave such refuge. Indeed, even today we have a part of the Abbey grounds known as "Sanctuary" where such sanctuary used to be given in mediaeval times.

Henry Tudor was approached on behalf of the queen and she offered to recognise him if he were able to dispossess the usurper, now Richard III, and if he would agree to marry her daughter Elizabeth of York.

To this end the Duke of Buckingham, the Earl of Dorset and the queen's brother, Sir Edward Woodville, united at the *Battle of Bosworth Field* in 1485 when the decisive War of the Roses Battle was fought and Richard was defeated and slain by Henry, Earl of Richmond, who was at once acknowledged as *Henry Seventh*.

In the January following the battle (1486) Henry married Elizabeth of York and we now get our *Second Elizabeth*, the daughter of Elizabeth the first.

Little is known of Elizabeth's early life and habits. She always seems to have been overshadowed by her mother. We are told her figure in her late teens and early twenties was like that of her father, tall and elegant, her complexion brilliantly fair and her disposition, so one writer says, "is truly estimable."

We know that she was extravagant in some ways, mean in others. Her gifts to charity were numerous and she gave large sums to her sisters. In the summer of 1495 things reached a crisis and she had to pawn some royal plate for £500. Even then the king had to advance her £2,000 to cover her debts.

On the other hand we find her gowns were mended and turned by her tailor, Robert Addington, who charged her fourpence each for mending and turning, "newly hemmed when beaten out at the bottom" tuppence each. He is paid sixteen pence "for mending eight gowns of divers colours, for the Queen's grace, at 2d. a piece." We are told she wore only tin buckles on her shoes. On the other hand again we find her paying 13s. 4d. to a man who brought her a popinjay (parrot). For a pair of Clavicords we find her paying £4, all in crowns.

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