

The Five Elizabeths.

By Mr. H. F. Bryant Peers

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On January 29th, 1536, Anne Boleyn gave birth to a dead male child and Henry became exasperated and frantic when it was discovered that Anne could not give him a male child, and on May 2nd he had her committed to the Tower of London on a trumped up charge of adultery with various persons, including her own brother, Lord Rochford. On May 15th she was condemned to death by an Assembly of 26 Peers and on the 19th she was beheaded by the sword on Tower Green, her head being struck off by a swordsman brought specially from Calais for the purpose. On the following day Henry married Jane Seymour! The discovery of Anne's misdeeds coincided in an extraordinary manner with Henry's disappointment in not obtaining by her a royal heir!

So, at the tender age of three, Elizabeth was left motherless. She had a half sister, Mary Tudor, daughter of her father by Katherine of Aragon, and some 16 years her elder. As the elder, Mary was obviously next in succession, until on October 12th, 1537, the young Edward was born to Henry's third wife, Jane Seymour. Jane died of a fever 12 days later.

The succession was now assured and Henry was very happy—he put on some show of remorse at the death of his wife but he had three other wives afterwards, so we attach little importance to his crocodile tears.

Elizabeth, so we are told, was a striking child and a very able one. At 16 she spoke French and Italian like English, Latin with fluency and Greek moderately well. Her tutor tells us she was "skilful in music but does not delight in it." Her father Henry was extremely clever at music and tradition says he composed the early English melody "Greensleeves."

On January 28th, 1547, Henry VIII died and at the age of nine Edward became Edward VI. His health began to fail in 1552 and by May, 1553, it was known that he was going to die. On July 6th of that year he expired where he had been born, at Greenwich Palace.

Now Comes the real Tussle for the Throne

The obvious successor was Mary, the elder daughter, but as a fanatical catholic she was thought to be unstable.

Elizabeth, on the other hand, had been branded illegitimate because in a desperate effort to save her neck, her mother Anne Boleyn had confided to Bishop Cranmer that she was already married at the time of her marriage to Henry.

The powerful and wily Duke of Northumberland having foreseen all this persuaded Edward just before his death, when he was delirious, to make a Will in favour of succession to Lady Jane Grey, great grand-daughter of Henry VII.

Having done this he married her off to his own nephew, Lord Guildford Dudley.

At the age of 16 Jane was told she was Queen and the shock caused her to faint. For some time she resisted all efforts to put her on the throne but finally yielded. On July 10th, four days after Edward's death, Queen Jane's proclamation was issued.

Mary, however, living quietly in Norfolk had early intimation of her brother's death, and gathering nobility around her, made for London with an army. Northumberland went to oppose her with his army but found them gradually melting away. On July 19th, just ten days afterwards, the Lord Mayor of London proclaimed Mary Queen, and both Jane Grey and her husband were committed to the Tower where, on February 12th, 1554, they were beheaded, she on Tower Green, just an hour after his execution on Tower Hill. Thus ended the disastrous nine days of queenship.

Mary was fairly safe on the throne, but her fanatical Catholic adherence caused much heart searching. An Elizabeth camp was rapidly growing under the leadership of Sir Thomas Wyatt who tried to prevent the marriage of Mary with Philip of Spain. Wyatt had seen the menaces of

the Spanish Inquisition and had become an enemy of Spain. Mary restored Mass and other ancient ceremonials that had been abolished by King Edward's Council. Elizabeth, the Protestant, refused to attend Mass and gave great offence to Mary and her Council who saw in her obstinacy a serious obstacle to the restoration of papacy in England. The faction that had attempted to sacrifice the rights of both daughters of Henry VIII, by proclaiming Lady Jane Grey Queen, gained hope from the dissension between the royal sisters.

On Palm Sunday, March 18th, 1554, Elizabeth was conveyed to the Tower of London and lodged in the Bell Tower. This caused a great deal of dissension, especially among Protestants and even as she entered the gates of the Tower and walked past the Warders and servants who had been drawn up in rank, a number of them fell on one knee and "prayed God to preserve her Grace," for which they were afterwards reprimanded. On April 13th, 1554, Wyatt was executed and from that time Elizabeth's imprisonment was less rigid.

She was allowed to walk in certain parts of the Tower so long as the Lieutenant was with her.

During Elizabeth's imprisonment, Mary was taken ill. The Chancellor "Gardiner" sent a Privy Council Warrant to the Lieutenant of the Tower for the immediate execution of Elizabeth. He knew the temper of the princess and no doubt he considered that in the event of the death of Mary he had sinned too deeply against Elizabeth to be forgiven, and therefore ventured a bold stroke to prevent the possibility of the sword of vengeance passing into her hand on her succeeding to the Crown.

Sir John Bridges (afterwards Lord Chandos), Lieutenant of the Tower, observing that the Queen's signature was not affixed to this illegal document for the destruction of the heiress of the realm, refused to execute the Warrant until he had ascertained the Queen's pleasure by a direct communication with her. Mary was much displeased and sent 100 of her most trusted troops to take charge of Elizabeth.

Had not Bridges taken this line, Elizabeth would have been beheaded and the whole course of history would have been changed.

The 100 men at arms were under the leadership of Sir Henry Bedingfeld, and Elizabeth when she knew they had come, inquired "whether he were a person who made conscience of murder if such an order were entrusted to him." Her mind evidently recurred on this occasion to the appointment of Sir James Tyrrel by Richard Third for the midnight murder of the youthful brethren of her grandmother, Elizabeth of York, less than 70 years earlier.

However, on May 19th Elizabeth was removed from the Tower to Woodstock in Oxfordshire, where she lived, still under guard, but with a greater degree of freedom than she had known for a long time.

Christmas, 1554, sees Elizabeth an honoured guest of Mary at the royal celebrations at Hampton Court, and in May, 1555, she was permitted to live at Hatfield in almost complete freedom.

On the morning of November 17th, 1558, Mary died, and amidst great rejoicings Elizabeth ascended the throne.

Here then is *Queen Elizabeth the First*.

I think one could sum Elizabeth Tudor up pretty well by saying she was *honest, sincere, ruthless, hard, a good friend, a dangerous enemy*. In many ways she was witty but caustic.

While the guest of William Petre at Ingatestone in Essex, she made a journey to Harwich where, we are told, she enjoyed the sea breezes for several days and was so well pleased with the entertainment she received, that she inquired of the Mayor and Corporation if she could do anything for them. They returned humble thanks to her Majesty, but said "they did not require anything at that time." When the Queen departed, she looked back at Harwich with a smile and said: "A pretty town, and wants nothing."

On a visit to Norwich in 1559 she found great fault with the clergy because so many of them were married. She said so

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