

Elizabeth – college



Birth of a Princess

Elizabeth I was the daughter of King Henry VIII and his second wife, Anne Boleyn. When the little Princess was born on Sunday, the seventh of September, 1533, few could have predicted the glittering life ahead of her. Her birth was undoubtedly a great disappointment to her father, and a political disaster for her mother and all her supporters. For many years, Henry's main goal in life had been to father a healthy son to succeed him to the throne of England. Despite twenty years of marriage to the Spanish Catherine of Aragon, and the birth of several children, by 1533, Henry had only one living legitimate child, a daughter, Mary. Although there was no law in Tudor England preventing the accession of a woman to the throne as there was in France, the rule of a woman was considered undesirable. Not only was it thought that a woman was incapable of ruling a kingdom, there were also practical considerations that made female sovereignty problematic, such as her marriage, and the problem of the role her husband should have, as well as the risks of childbirth. It was unlikely that Henry would ever have a son by Catherine of Aragon (she was older than him, and her child-bearing days were numbered) and this troubled him considerably. Also he had fallen deeply in love with the young and dazzling Anne Boleyn and wanted to make her his bride. To marry Anne, however, he had to have his marriage to Catherine annulled, and annulling a marriage was never a simple process. For Henry, it proved colossal. The power to annul marriages lay with the Pope, and unfortunately for Henry, Catherine had very powerful family connections. She was the aunt of the great Emperor, Charles V, and the Pope could not afford to offend Charles by granting Henry his annulment. As time

progressed, it became clear to Henry that if he wanted to marry again, he would have to find a way of getting an annulment without the Pope's assistance. He and his advisors found the answer in breaking with the Catholic Church completely, and establishing an independent Church of England. This would give Henry complete power over matters ecclesiastical. This revolutionary step was made possible by the emergence in Europe at this time of a new branch of Christianity that rapidly gained the name of Protestantism. This had very important doctrinal differences to Catholicism, but Henry's prime concern was ousting the power of the Pope. In many ways the new English Church remained essentially Catholic. But the change of official religion (known as the Reformation) had far reaching effects on England. For centuries, monks, nuns and friars had been an integral aspect of English life, but with the old Church, this way of life came to an end. The monasteries were closed, and the monks, nuns, and friars, were forced into the towns and cities. They were granted a life pension so that they could look after themselves, and many found a new livelihood, but others fell into poverty and became beggars.

Now that Henry was Supreme Head of the Church in England, he could get his annulment. In the January of 1533 he married Anne Boleyn, who was already expecting his child. In the July of that year, although heavily pregnant, Anne was given a magnificent coronation. She and Catherine of Aragon were the only ones of Henry's wives to be formally crowned Queen of England. Both Henry and Anne believed with their whole heart that the child she was expecting was a boy, and had every reason to as the philosophers

and astronomers assured the jubilant king that this time he would have a son.

But the baby born proved to be a girl. This was disastrous, and no one felt the disaster more than Henry. He had moved mountains to marry Anne, had overridden the Pope, the Emperor, lost friends, lost the Church that he had once been a proud defender of, torn down the abbeys and monasteries, and put men to death whose only crime was their faith; all for what he already had, a daughter. He felt the humiliation deeply, and felt once again that he had not been blessed by God. There was little celebration at baby Elizabeth's birth. Bonfires were lit through out the land but with little enthusiasm. Anne Boleyn was unpopular. Many blamed her for the religious changes in the land and for the king's rejection of Catherine, who they had loved. However, Elizabeth was given a magnificent Christening at Greenwich when she was only three days old.

Read a contemporary account of Elizabeth's christening

From Elizabeth's birth onwards, Henry's feelings for the woman he had once loved passionately began to cool. His attention was taken by the other attractive ladies surrounding her, and he was openly tired of Anne's company. But while Anne was still Queen of England, Elizabeth's life was comfortable. She had been granted her own household at the Royal Palace of Hatfield, and her mother saw to it that she was well cared for. Amongst those attending the new Princess was her half sister, Princess Mary, now Lady as she was made illegitimate at the annulling of her mother's marriage to the King. Only the heir to the throne could be prince or princess in England, and

as an illegitimate offspring, Mary was no longer in line to the throne. This was a cruel twist of fate, and Mary understandably resented having to serve the daughter of the woman who had replaced her mother. Elizabeth's governess at this time was Margaret, Lady Bryan. She was Elizabeth's chief carer and responsible for her well-being. It was customary for royal children to live apart from their parents, although Anne ensured that she saw Elizabeth regularly.

Without a doubt, had Elizabeth been a boy, or had Anne borne Henry a son in the years immediately following her daughter's birth, then Anne's fate would have been very different. But like Catherine before her, Anne did not make this provision. Some time after Elizabeth's birth, she suffered a miscarriage, and later gave premature birth to a dead male child. It has been said, quite aptly, that she miscarried of her saviour. The same doubts that had plagued Henry over his marriage to Catherine now plagued him over his marriage to Anne and as time went on these doubts grew. When Catherine of Aragon died, possibly of cancer, Henry was free to dispose of Anne without facing petitions to have him take Catherine back. Anne's days were numbered. She was accused (probably falsely) of witchcraft, adultery, and incest, and was arrested and taken to the Tower of London. She was put on trial and found guilty on all accounts, and condemned to death. It was up to Henry how she died, decapitation or burning, and Henry chose the former. The customary method of execution was to cut off the head with an axe, but Anne requested to be put to death by the sword. Henry granted her wish and a swordsman was brought over from France as there was no one in England

skilled enough to do it. Anne was beheaded on Tower Green on the 19 of May of 1536. Elizabeth was only two and a half years old.

A Difficult Childhood

After the disgrace and execution of her mother, Elizabeth's life was never to be quite the same again. She was probably far too young to be greatly effected by her mother's sudden extinction, but her lifestyle changed considerably. The marriage of her father to her mother was annulled, and she was made a royal bastard. Later she was stripped of her title of Princess, as her sister had previously been, to become simply, the Lady Elizabeth. Elizabeth was a very bright child, and this change in her name did not escape her. She exclaimed " how haps it governor, yesterday my Lady Princess, today but my Lady Elizabeth?" Within days of Anne's death, Henry had married again, this time to Jane Seymour, a young woman who had been a maid of honour to Anne, just as Anne had been a maid of honour to Catherine. Although Elizabeth still had her own household, her governess found that the young child's needs were being neglected, and she felt obliged to write to the king asking him to ensure that Elizabeth was provided with all the clothes she needed, as the ones she had were too small.

Jane Seymour died a few days after giving birth to Henry's longed for son, Prince Edward. The King was devastated at her loss and gave her a royal burial at the Chapel of St. George in Windsor Castle. Like Elizabeth, Edward too had to grow up motherless, and from an early age, the two children formed a close bond. Although Elizabeth was getting along well with her half sister, Mary, the sisters were never close. They were of different religions,

Elizabeth a Protestant , Mary a Catholic; of very different ages, Mary being seventeen years older; of different family connections, and they had very different personalities. Edward and Elizabeth, however, were closer in age, of the same religion, and both shared a passion for learning. They were both given a very impressive education. From an early age they were taught Latin, Greek, Spanish, French, as well as all the other requirements of a classical humanist education; history philosophy, mathematics. When Elizabeth was four years old, Lady Bryan was replaced as governess by a young woman called Katherine Champenowne. Katherine was a sweet, motherly, well-educated lady, who came to love her young charge dearly. She became an important figure in Elizabeth's life, to all extent and purposes her mother-figure, and Elizabeth affectionately came to call her " Kat". She later married Elizabeth's cousin, John Ashley (or Asteley), which tied her even closer to the young royal. As well as Kat Ashley, Elizabeth's immediate household also included a Welsh woman named Blanche Parry, and Thomas Parry(possibly Blanche's brother). Blanche remained a close friend and confident of the Queen throughout her long life, and was given an elaborate tomb by Elizabeth when she died in the late 1580's. Blanche also taught Elizabeth some of her native Welsh language. Elizabeth was a gifted student and her talent was appreciated by those who had the privilege to teach her. Roger Asham, a well-known scholar of the day responsible for tutoring other talented students, regarded Elizabeth as his brightest star. Besides reading and writing, Elizabeth also spent her time learning to play musical instruments, which she came to do with a degree of proficiency, and also learnt needlework and art.

Henry's marriage to his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, was quickly annulled as neither she or Henry found each other agreeable. Although Anne remained in England as the King's "dear sister", she probably had little to do with Elizabeth. However, Henry's fifth wife, Katherine Howard, had a much more lasting impact upon her. Katherine was Elizabeth's cousin on her mother's side, and the young Queen took a great interest in her new little step-daughter, often having her with her, and playing with her. When she first dined in public, she gave Elizabeth the place of honour opposite her. To the young Elizabeth, who so far had spent her life in the shadows of the court, overlooked as insignificant, this must have been a momentous occasion. But this happy state of affairs was not destined to continue. It was discovered that Katherine had committed adultery, and just like Elizabeth's mother before her, she was taken to the Tower of London, condemned to death, and executed on Tower Green. This must have been a very painful and confusing episode for Elizabeth, who was still only eight years old. The extent of its impact upon her cannot be measured, but it is significant that Robert Dudley, her childhood friend and confidant when she later became Queen, said many years later that when she was eight years old, Elizabeth told him that she would never marry. In eight short years she had lost her mother and had had three stepmothers, two of whom were now dead. Also, no doubt, she had heard tales of the fate of her sister's mother, Catherine of Aragon, and it is not surprising that these combined events impressed in her a certain fear of what happened to women who married.

But life with Henry's sixth wife, Katherine Parr, proved to be rather tranquil for Elizabeth. Katherine was a motherly lady who did her utmost to give the

royal children a family home. She liked to have the children around her, and did much to reconcile Elizabeth and Mary to their father. But life was certainly not idyllic. During a stay at the royal court Elizabeth managed to offend her father profoundly, for which she was banished from the Palace. What exactly this offence was remains unknown, perhaps a remark or question about her mother or Katherine Howard, or perhaps a remark on religion or another of Henry's policies that a child would not think inappropriate. Henry's reaction was alarming, but with Katherine Parr's intervention, the episode blew over, and Elizabeth was allowed back to court. By this stage, Henry was far from well. He had a great ulcer on his leg that troubled him immensely and his enormous weight hindered his mobility considerably. It was becoming clear to all around him that his days were numbered. He died on 28 January 1547.

Elizabeth was with her brother, Edward, at the royal Palace of Enfield(London) when they were told of their father's death. She and her brother cried bitterly, holding each other close. Both children knew their lives were about to change considerably, and their tears may well have been from fear for the future, as well as grief for the death of their magnificent, if at times, tyrannical father. Both were now orphans. Elizabeth was thirteen years of age, and Edward was King of England at the age of only nine.

Portrait of the Lady Elizabeth

The Troubled Teens

The Queen dowager married indecently soon after the king's death, her old flame, the Lord Admiral, Thomas Seymour, brother of Edward Seymour, the
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King's Uncle and Lord Protector of England. Elizabeth, with her servants, went to live with the Queen and her new husband, and a new era of trouble began for her. Thomas Seymour, a dashing man in his late thirties, took an unhealthy interest in his new step-daughter, who had now just turned fourteen. He was charismatic and charming, and it is possible that Elizabeth developed a teenage crush on him. But whatever her adolescent feelings for him may have been, Seymour took advantage of them, and began to visit Elizabeth's bedchamber early in the mornings to romp in the bed with her. Sometimes the Queen herself accompanied him, and they would both tickle her. Another time, they teased Elizabeth in the garden, the Queen holding her while Seymour cut up her mourning gown for her father. What exactly happened between Elizabeth and Seymour will always be a mystery as the knowledge we have of her time with him and Katherine comes from the documents produced some time later when an investigation was taking place into Seymour's relations with Elizabeth and the other royal children. Certainly matters appear to have got out of hand, Seymour's interest in Elizabeth being blatantly sexual, and neither Katherine, Kat Ashley, or Elizabeth herself was comfortable with his behaviour. Elizabeth would reputedly rise early so that when he came to her bedchamber in the mornings she would already be up and dressed. Matters came to a head when Elizabeth was reputedly found alone with the Admiral, and Katherine, concerned and perhaps a little jealous of his attention in the young girl, thought it would be better for her to leave the household. Elizabeth accordingly left, although there was no enmity between the two women, and Elizabeth wrote often to the Queen, who was now heavily pregnant. She soon

gave birth to a daughter, who was named Mary, but Katherine did not survive the birth.

Leaving the household was not the end of Elizabeth's troubles with the Admiral. Shortly after his wife's death, Seymour began to seek Elizabeth's hand in marriage. Elizabeth turned him down. Seymour was deeply jealous of the influence his brother had in the country and over the boy king, and he planned a coup to give himself that power. He planned to abduct the king, marry him to Lady Jane Grey, and marry himself to Elizabeth. His plans failed, and he was arrested for treason. His plan to marry Elizabeth implicated her in the plot. It was high treason for an heir to the throne to marry without the consent of the Monarch, Privy Council and Parliament, and Elizabeth stood in great danger from those who felt that she was complicit in his marital schemes. Her servants were arrested and sent to the Tower, and she herself was closely guarded. She was also subjected to a rigorous questioning on her relations with the Admiral by Sir Robert Tyrwhit. She was only fifteen years old, but one careless word from her could have sealed the fate of all those who were dear to her, and possibly have cost her her own life as well (although it is doubtful that Elizabeth's death was the object of the government, their main concern being to condemn the Admiral). In such extremely difficult, and what must have been very frightening, circumstances, and with virtually no assistance, Elizabeth managed to uphold her innocence. The Admiral, however, was found guilty of high treason and condemned to death. The effect of all this on Elizabeth must have been immense. Certainly it took its toll emotionally and physically, and Elizabeth was unwell for some months after. However, as well as effecting her

health, it also effected her reputation and this was a great concern to Elizabeth aswell. She was always very sensitive about what people thought of her, and she wanted the rumour that she was pregnant by the Admiral suppressed. She wrote to the Protector asking for a proclamation to be made saying these things were untrue. But while this was considered, it was not implemented. During the investigation, Elizabeth had been painfully parted from her governess, and it was sometime before they were reunited.

In these troubled years, Elizabeth's relationship with her brother suffered. They were no longer as close as they had been, and during and immediately after the Seymour scandal, Elizabeth was forbidden to attend court. She was eventually allowed to return, however. To try and recapture her virginal image, Elizabeth dressed as the perfect Protestant lady. She wore plain black and white gowns, refused to decorate herself with jewellery and other finery, and refused to wear make up. Her sobriety was much commented upon, and even her brother called her " sweet sister temperance".

Following the disgrace and death of his brother, Thomas, Edward Seymour was replaced as Protector by John Dudley, Earl of Warwick, soon to be the Duke of Northumberland. He was the father of Elizabeth's childhood friend, Robert Dudley, and they may have seen each other a number of times during the Duke's government. Edward had enjoyed a rather healthy childhood, but from 1553 onwards, he began to be very ill with possibly a form of consumption (TB). It became clear to Northumberland that the young boy was not likely to survive into adulthood, and he thus had to make preparations for the succession. The heir in English law was Edward's sister, Mary, but she was an ardent Catholic, and her accession would undoubtedly

put an end to Northumberland's reforms of the church, and his personal power. To prevent a Catholic succession, Northumberland devised a scheme that would both preserve Protestantism, and his own influence. If both Mary and Elizabeth were excluded from the succession, then the crown fell on either the Stuart line through Henry's oldest sister Margaret, or the Suffolk/Grey line through his younger sister, Mary. Henry VIII had excluded from his will the claims of the Stuart line, and so the crown would fall directly on Frances, Duchess of Suffolk. Both Mary and Elizabeth were again bastardized, and excluded from the succession, and Frances was set aside in favour of her daughter, Lady Jane Grey. Northumberland had further married his youngest son, Guildford Dudley, to Jane, thus ensuring the influence of the Dudleys. Three days after Edward died, on 6 July 1553, Lady Jane Grey was proclaimed Queen. The coup, however, failed. Mary put up a strong and successful fight for her throne, and gained the overwhelming support of the English nation. She was proclaimed Queen on the 19 of July in the capital, and five days later, Northumberland was arrested, and later executed. Mary triumphantly entered London amidst the cheers of the people, and Elizabeth was given the privileged of riding with her.

The Second Person

Mary's accession had begun well for Elizabeth, but the irreconcilable differences between them, primarily their differing faiths, soon caused problems. Mary was suspicious of her sister, and was reluctant to acknowledge her as heir to the throne. Indeed, it was not until her final illness that she did accept Elizabeth as the heir. Now that she was Queen, Mary set about restoring the Catholic faith in England. She also negotiated to

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marry Prince Philip, the son of the Emperor Charles, who she did eventually marry at Winchester in 1554. The marriage was immensely unpopular in England. Spain was the greatest power in Europe, and it was feared that England too would fall under its dominance. In opposition to the planned marriage, Thomas Wyatt, a gentleman from Kent, raised a rebellion against it. Beyond the intention of getting the Queen to renounce the marriage, the plans of the conspirators remain vague. When they were captured for questioning, it emerged that one of their plans was to have Elizabeth marry Edward Courtenay, Earl of Devon, to ensure a native-born succession to the throne. Thus, Elizabeth again found herself implemented in a dangerous political plot, that some considered had the far more sinister intention of placing her on the throne, rather than just securing her marriage. Given Elizabeth's dislike of marriage, and her distaste for rebellion, it is extremely unlikely that she was a party to their schemes, or if she knew of their plans, approved of them, but the very use of her name by the conspirators, and the existence of circumstantial evidence that suggested that Elizabeth may well have had knowledge of the intended revolt, were enough to put her under suspicion. Elizabeth denied any knowledge of Wyatt's plans, but the Queen's close advisor, Simon Renard, was hostile to the Protestant heir to the throne, and pushed Mary and her Councillors to bring her to trial. Elizabeth was not put on trial, but she was taken as a prisoner to the Tower of London. The thought of going to the place from where so many had never returned, including her own mother, terrified her, and she desperately declared her innocence in the hope of not going. But to no avail. On Sunday, 18 of March 1554, she was taken by boat to the Royal Fortress. At first, Elizabeth refused to enter, declaring emphatically that she was innocent, and a loyal subject of <https://assignbuster.com/elizabeth-college/>

the Queen, but she did eventually go in. She was imprisoned in the Bell Tower. Some of her familiar servants were imprisoned with her, including Kat Ashley. Elizabeth stood in great danger. Her very existence was considered a threat to the Queen, and to the Spanish marriage, and the Queen's advisors urged her execution. Mary was reluctant to shed blood, but she had succumb to pressure to execute the Lady Jane Grey against her will, and powerful persuasion could have led her to sign her sister's death warrant. But the lack of evidence against Elizabeth, Wyatt's declaration of her innocence as he went to his death on the block, and Elizabeth's increasing popularity in the country, worked in her favour, and she was soon released from the Tower. She was not given her freedom, however, and was taken as a prisoner to the manor of Woodstock, near Oxfordshire. On her way there, the crowds greeted her with warm cheers and gifts, demonstrations of their support in this difficult time.

Elizabeth was kept a virtual prisoner at Woodstock for a year. The manor itself was dilapidated, and so Elizabeth had to be lodged in the Gatehouse. There was little room for her servants, and Thomas Parry, who was responsible for her financial accounts, had to lodge in the nearby town. Elizabeth was guarded by Sir Henry Bedingfield's hundred men, and watched closely. She was prevented from seeing Kat Ashley, everyone who visited her had to be accounted for, and she was not allowed to communicate with anyone without supervision. Bedingfield was perhaps overly strict with his young charge, but his vigilance was as much for Elizabeth's benefit as for the Queen's. Elizabeth's life was sort by ardent supporters of the Queen, and hidden away in obscurity, Elizabeth may well have been the successful

victim of an assassin. Although Bedingfield's constraints irritated her, Elizabeth certainly appears to have appreciated his efforts, affectionately calling him her " gaoler", and when she became Queen bore him no ill will, and teased him that if she should need to keep someone closely confined, she would summon him.

Following her marriage to Philip, Mary soon believed herself to be pregnant. This was welcome news to her supporters, but alarmed Protestants. If Mary bore a healthy child, then the hope of restoring the Protestant faith in England looked lost for good. The news of Mary's pregnancy also concerned Elizabeth. It seemed now that her chance of becoming Queen was further away than ever, and she reputedly even considered escaping from England to France to avoid a life of imprisonment. However, as the months passed, it became clear that Mary was not pregnant at all. Mary was now increasingly unhappy, and increasingly unpopular. Her policy of burning Protestants at the stake was hated, as was her involving England in a war with France in which Calais, England's last foothold in France, was lost.

At her husband's bequest, Mary reluctantly accepted Elizabeth as heir to the throne. After Elizabeth, and passing over the Suffolk line, the most powerful claimant to the throne was Mary, Queen of Scots, granddaughter of Henry VIII's eldest sister, Margaret. Mary had not long married the French heir to the throne, Francois, and the French and Spanish were enemies. Thus, even though Elizabeth was a Protestant, it was in Philip's best interest to secure her accession to the throne to avoid the French obtaining it.

Elizabeth was at her childhood home of Hatfield when Mary died on the 17 of November, 1558. She was reputedly eating an apple underneath an Oak tree in the great park when the news of her accession to the throne reached her. Elizabeth was now just twenty five years old, and Queen of England. For the first time in her life, her destiny lay in her own hands, and Elizabeth knelt on the ground and whispered in Latin what she truly must have felt: “ This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes”.

Further Reading:

Alison Plowden, The Young Elizabeth

David Starkey, Elizabeth

Alison Weir, Children of England

Anne Somerset, Elizabeth I

Words

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