

ART. X. – *Queen Kateryn Parr (1512-1548)*.

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KATERYN PARR (1512-1548), the sixth and last wife of Henry VIII, has been portrayed – generally in BBC historical dramas – as a sober, pious, middle-aged woman in black who read a great deal, was not too attractive but was kind to the royal children – the future Queens Mary and Elizabeth, King Edward VI, and the Lady Jane Grey. A very different Kateryn Parr emerges in various – mostly American – historical novels. Here she is portrayed as a sort of a Tudor Scarlett O’Hara in Kendal green, born in a castle in the wild northlands, wed as a child to a series of old men, raised to the throne in the last tempestuous days of Henry VIII’s reign, and finally eloping in a mad, romantic moment with her new lover, the dashing Sir Thomas Seymour. It seems impossible that these two portraits could be of the same woman and, indeed, both owe more to fiction than to fact. The misunderstandings and untruths about Kateryn Parr’s life have been perpetuated over the centuries until they have become an accepted alternate history of a woman, the facts of whose real life have had too little exposure.

Kateryn, eldest child of Sir Thomas Parr and his wife, Maud Green, was born in Northamptonshire in 1512. She was the descendant on both sides of well-to-do gentry families, and in the case of the Parrs, a family of aristocratic pretensions.¹ The estates of the Parr family up until 1487 were centred on Kendal Castle in the wild borderlands of Westmorland. Cold, bleak and harassed by Scottish raiders, the borderlands were a rough and ready frontier where violence was endemic and life was hard. Kateryn’s grandfather, Sir William Parr, had been the companion and friend of Edward IV and had served him in a number of official capacities both at home and in Europe. He had married well as a result of the royal friendship. His wife, Elizabeth Fitzhugh, was a notable heiress who brought to her marriage vast chunks of Yorkshire and Northumberland and estates in five other shires.² Sir William certainly hungered to add a title to his name but his king died prematurely – leaving a child as heir and a war of succession to follow – and he never got it. Sir William died and was buried in Kendal and his considerably younger widow, Elizabeth Fitzhugh, remarried a country gentleman of Northamptonshire, Sir Nicholas Vaux of Harrowden Hall.³ In 1487 the new Lady Vaux moved herself and her children from the cold bleakness of the borders to the rolling fields of Northamptonshire. The Parrs never went back to Kendal.⁴

Sir Thomas Parr, Kateryn’s father, was the eldest son of the family. He grew up an affable, attractive, sports-loving sort of man among the *nouveau riche* gentry for which Northamptonshire was famed. His mother was ambitious, his step-father well-connected. By the time Sir Thomas reached manhood he was the close companion of the young King Henry VIII and a popular fixture at his court.⁵ At the advanced age of thirty, Sir Thomas, like his father before him, married an heiress barely in her teens – the thirteen-year-old Matilda Green.⁶ Young though she was, “Maud” Green made the rising courtier an admirable wife. She was appointed lady-in-waiting to Henry’s Spanish queen, Catherine of Aragon, and became one of her closest friends, remaining staunchly loyal until the day of her death. The first child Lady Parr bore Sir Thomas in 1512, a girl,

was named Kateryn for the queen. It is even possible that Catherine of Aragon stood as one of her godmothers.

The young Parrs lived mostly at court but maintained a house in Blackfriars in London. Both of them were later buried in that area at the Church of St. Anne's. However in all likelihood, Maud Parr's three children were born at Harrowden Hall in Northamptonshire where her husband's family lived not too far from her own. Unfortunately for Maud Parr, her husband, Sir Thomas, died suddenly in November 1517 leaving the twenty-two-year-old widow with three children under the age of six.⁷ Lady Parr never remarried. For the fourteen years remaining of her life she bent all of her energies into arranging advantageous marriages for her children.

Maud Parr was clever, patient, intelligent and ruthless. Any friend or relative well-placed at court who might help her was the subject of petitioning letters to further her children's cause. Her young son, William, was betrothed most brilliantly at the age of thirteen to the nine-year-old daughter of that redoubtable lush and gambler, Henry Bouchier, second Earl of Essex. That the marriage turned out to be a disaster was something Lady Parr could not have foreseen.

With her only son's marriage so successfully arranged, Maud Parr now turned to the matter of her two daughters' marriages. Her elder daughter, Kateryn, was barely eleven when Maud Parr began the first of her marriage negotiations. Her choice was the son and heir of Lord Scrope of Bolton, a distant cousin of the late Sir Thomas Parr. For over a year, Lady Parr and another cousin, Cuthbert Tunstall, the Bishop of Durham, wrote blandishing letters to the prospective groom's grandfather, Lord Dacre, pressing the advantages of the match.⁸ Lord Dacre was stubbornly unconvinced. After all, young Kateryn's dowry was not very impressive. Lady Parr had begged and borrowed to the limit of her credit to buy the marriage of her son to the Earl of Essex's daughter. There was little left over for dowries for her own daughters. After more than a year, Lady Parr was finally forced to the realization that despite the help of the Bishop of Durham, the negotiations were going nowhere and reluctantly broke them off.

During the early years of her life, before her mother finally succeeded in finding a bridegroom for her, it is not known for certain where Kateryn Parr lived. Some authors have claimed that she was raised at court in the company of the Princess Mary and tutored by the renowned teacher, Juan Luis Vives.⁹ But Kateryn was four years older than Mary and ripe for marriage at eleven when the Princess was just sitting down to her schoolbooks. Although Kateryn probably did spend some time at court and may have studied under Vives, it is more than likely that the bulk of her childhood was spent in Northamptonshire, first at her grandparents', and later with her uncle, Lord Parr of Horton. The Parrs of Horton had a house full of girls and Kateryn was always close to her cousin, Maud, making her one of her ladies-in-waiting when she herself became queen.¹⁰ This closeness probably grew out of the days of childhood they shared together.

It has often been repeated that Kateryn was married off at the age of twelve to an insane man old enough to be her grandfather. This is not true. In 1529, just two years before her death, Lady Parr was finally successful in securing a bridegroom for her elder daughter, who was by now seventeen. It was not a particularly brilliant match but it was a suitable one. The bridegroom was a young man in his early twenties named Edward Borough.¹¹ He was the son of Sir Thomas Borough, Lord Borough of Gainsborough, a country gentleman of Lincolnshire. The Boroughs were an old gentry clan in the county,

not particularly distinguished but solid and well-established. The only problem with the match was that young Edward was seemingly in delicate health and a slight taint of insanity ran in the family. For Kateryn's new husband was the grandson of another Edward Borough, a man who spent the twilight years of his very long life in the grip of a madness which kept him a close prisoner in his son's house, unable to handle his own affairs.

It must have been with a great deal of trepidation that the seventeen-year-old Kateryn Parr set out for the wilds of Lincolnshire to begin married life with a sickly husband, his overbearing father, and a lunatic grandfather who lived locked up in the house. Later writers have confused the two Edward Boroughs, compounding the confusion by linking the Parr-Dacre letters with the Borough marriage. Thus has emerged the picture of a frightened twelve-year-old child sent north to marry an ancient lunatic running wild in Gainsborough Old Hall. The truth was slightly less dramatic but for Kateryn the situation could not have been easy.

The young couple remained briefly at the Old Hall and then moved about ten miles north-east of Gainsborough to the manor house of Kirton in Lindsey.¹² Edward Borough's health apparently stabilized for a time, and perhaps it was during the short years of her first marriage that Kateryn learned the nursing skills which were to prove so useful to her later on as queen. In 1532 Borough was well enough to serve as a justice of the peace for Lindsey but by April of the following year he was dead.¹³ Kateryn was left in an awkward position. Both of her parents by now were dead as well. Her mother had died after a brief illness the previous year. Her brother, William, was still a ward of the Earl of Essex and living in his household. Her younger sister, Anne, later the Countess of Pembroke, was unmarried and about to begin her long career as lady-in-waiting at court. Neither of them had homes of their own. And Kateryn had no children to bring her a portion of her father-in-law's estate. At her husband's death, she was twenty-one, a superfluous widow of an undistinguished county squire. Her sole income was her jointure settled on her by her father-in-law, the income from two small manors in Kent and one in Surrey.¹⁴ It was barely enough to live on, had she had a house to live in. It was hardly riches fit for a queen. Yet exactly ten years later the widowed orphan from Lincolnshire was Queen of England.

Left at Edward Borough's death essentially to her own devices, Kateryn Parr exhibited the charm and good sense of her father coupled to the pragmatic ambition of her mother. She was young, energetic and intelligent, and her red hair, grey eyes and creamy complexion must have brought her a great deal of attention. She liked to be merry, was fond of riding and hunting and an excellent dancer. And her mind was constantly active, with a curious questioning cast to it. She also had a gentleness to her nature that many later remarked on, as well as a healthy degree of discretion.

Kateryn's second husband, whom she married a year after Edward's death was a prudent choice and one with which, initially at least, she seemed happy. Her new husband was the twice-widowed John Neville, Lord Latimer of Snape Castle in Yorkshire. The Nevilles were a far more prominent family than the Boroughs, and Kateryn now found herself the chatelaine of a large established household in Yorkshire and stepmother to Latimer's two young children, John and Margaret. John Neville was a rebel and he and his stepmother were never too close, but Margaret adored her new mother and was a devoted daughter throughout her life.

For two years, from 1534 to 1536, Kateryn may have been content enough in her remote home in the north, but on 1 October 1536 Yorkshire exploded. Henry VIII had broken with the Pope over the matter of the royal divorce and on that date a riot broke out at Louth over the government's new controversial religious policy of suppressing the monasteries. It quickly grew into a major uprising, later to be known as the Pilgrimage of Grace, and the government feared it was the beginning of a religious civil war. On 4 October, the Earl of Shrewsbury wrote that three thousand rebels had gathered at Horne Castle and were threatening Lord Borough of Gainsborough, Kateryn's former father-in-law.¹⁵ A few weeks later, Kateryn's husband, Lord Latimer, was taken by a group of rebels from his home while his wife watched, and then held as a hostage.¹⁶

The rebels wanted a return to the old church and the old ways and conflicting stories began to arrive at Westminster. Lord Latimer was a helpless prisoner "sore constrained" by the rebel leader, Robert Aske. Lord Latimer was Aske's confederate who had engineered his own kidnapping in order to work for the rebel cause. No one was apparently sure of just where Lord Latimer stood in the matter of religious rebellion, although Kateryn must surely have known what the true story was.

By late November, Aske was using Latimer – voluntarily or not, no one was certain – as his spokesman. The king, always quick to perceive a slight, decided that Latimer was guilty of treason and wrote to the Duke of Norfolk, his general in the north: "We desire you to use all good means with Lord Latimer – to induce (him) . . . to condemn that villain Aske and submit . . . to our clemency."¹⁷ An amnesty was announced in December, and leaving his wife and children unprotected Latimer hurried south to plead his case with the king. He swore that he had been forced against his will to join the rebels and only remained with them in an effort to get them to disband. Neither the king nor his Vicar-General, Thomas Cromwell, seemed convinced.

While Latimer was away in London, the rebels, feeling themselves betrayed by his absence, attacked his home. They took Kateryn and the children hostage and sent word to Latimer that if he did not return to Yorkshire immediately, his family and his home would be forfeit.¹⁸ Latimer rushed northward – a man at the end of his tether. Cromwell wanted to hang him for treason to the state; the rebels wanted to hang him for betraying their cause. Somehow, Lord Latimer managed to talk the rebels into leaving his house but the time of troubles was not over. The king's men, under the Duke of Norfolk, roundly defeated Aske's army and in January the grim business of trial and execution began. Norfolk and his lieutenants were charged with the task of gathering evidence of treason against Lord Latimer and the irony of the situation was that one of the Duke's chief lieutenants was Sir William Parr of Horton, Kateryn Parr's own uncle.

For months the Latimers held their breath waiting for the axe to fall. But in spite of Cromwell's desire to hang Lord Latimer, not enough evidence against him could be found to indict him for treason. Instead he spent the last seven years of his life paying a token blackmail to the Vicar-General, small gifts – including at one point the lease of his house in London – in order to remain at liberty.¹⁹

How the events of the Pilgrimage of Grace affected Kateryn Parr emotionally is conjectural. But for a sensitive and intelligent young woman the violence of those months which intimately involved her could hardly have failed to have left emotional scars. Certainly from this period on, Kateryn spent more and more time in London at her home in Charterhouse Yard and less with her husband in Yorkshire. Latimer had come

out of the Pilgrimage of Grace looking like a weak and vacillating man unable to protect his wife and children from the mob. It was a weakness Kateryn would have found hard to forgive.

After the violence and conservative provinciality of the north, Kateryn found London intoxicating. Well-educated, fluent in French and Latin, fascinated by philosophical and theological debate and by now totally out of sympathy with her husband's conservative Papist leanings, Lady Latimer began to gather around her at Charterhouse a circle of the leading intellectual lights of the day. The "new religionists" they were called. They were men whose sympathies lay with the new Church of England that Henry VIII had created in a fit of sexual and dynastic pique. As queen, Kateryn extended her patronage to those same men and others like them – Nicholas Udall, Roger Ascham, Matthew Parker, Miles Coverdale and John Parkhurst. And they, in turn, together with Kateryn's friend and supporter, Archbishop Cranmer, defined and recorded the parameters of the new religion – the Henrician Settlement. After long years in the north, Kateryn Parr had finally returned to the court circle that had bred her, to the world she understood.

On 2 March 1543, John Neville, Lord Latimer, died and was buried in old St. Paul's Cathedral in London.²⁰ His death left his widow once again in an extremely delicate position. Through her sister, Anne, a lady-in-waiting at court, Kateryn had met and fallen in love with Sir Thomas Seymour, the brother of the late queen, Jane Seymour. Sir Thomas wanted to marry Kateryn and by the middle of 1542, both of them knew that Lord Latimer, who had never fully recovered from the Pilgrimage of Grace, could not live much longer. But there was another complication and it was a major one. Kateryn had also come to the king's attention and Henry was on the look-out for a new wife.

While in London, Kateryn had taken the trouble to renew her childhood acquaintance with the Princess Mary. Mary must have remembered Lady Maud Parr well and her loyalty to Queen Catherine of Aragon, Mary's mother. This alone would have recommended Lady Latimer to the lonely princess, who would have been grateful for Kateryn's offer of friendship. Why Kateryn took the trouble to befriend the embittered Mary, at this point rejected and out-of-favour with her father, is a question. It was a dangerous thing to do, considering Lord Latimer's equivocal position with regard to the old religion and its stubborn adherents. But Kateryn never lacked courage and it may be that her credit with the king was so high that she saw no danger to herself in consorting with the staunchly Catholic Mary. If that were the case, Kateryn must have known Henry would never allow her to marry Seymour. In any event, as early as February 1543 Kateryn was advising Princess Mary on her wardrobe and ordering clothes for her.²¹ Kateryn loved fine clothes and must have delighted in outfitting the dowdy princess in a manner befitting her station. But she was uneasy, too. She was deeply in love with Seymour and had set her heart on marrying him. As she wrote to him five years later: "I would not have you to think that this mine honest good will toward you to proceed of any sudden motion or passion for as truly as God is God, my mind was fully bent the other time I was at liberty to marry you before any man I know."²²

But the king had set *his* heart on his daughter's friend. "Broken-hearted" after the so-called betrayal and execution of the hapless Catherine Howard in 1542, Henry was looking for someone completely different. Catherine Howard, like Anne Boleyn before her, had been a member of the voraciously ambitious Howard clan. Henry now went

wife-hunting among their political enemies. His late wife had been very young, promiscuous, ill-advised and poorly-educated. She had never learned the skill of diplomacy. The woman he now decided he would marry, the Lady Latimer, was exactly the opposite. Less lively than she once had been before the trauma of the Pilgrimage of Grace, Kateryn Parr had a sense of restraint and discretion that appealed to the ageing king. She had learned diplomacy in a hard school. What is more, she was a competent and efficient nurse and the king's ulcerated legs and ailing body were grateful for her attentions. Henry was an old bull of irascible and ferocious temper, subject to lightning changes of mood and capable of incredible cruelty. He had little family life as his children all lived apart in separate households. He suffered continually from suppurating ulcers on his legs, chronic indigestion and other less diagnosable but disagreeable ills. Mortality was staring him in the face, together with the superstitious terror of damnation for his part in the creation of the new religion. The torment of his long dying only increased his horror at this creation. But Kateryn's sense of religious certainty, of serene acceptance of the Church of England as a creation of God's will must have been soothing to him. Her reputation was spotless, her sense of duty absolute, and her looks at thirty-one still quite attractive. Henry decided that she was eminently suitable as a wife.

Kateryn received the news of Henry's marital plans with deep dismay. She was only too aware of the pitfalls that awaited Henry's wives. Better, she supposedly exclaimed, to be his mistress than his wife. But this was the chance the Parr family had been waiting for since old Sir William failed to get his title at the hands of Edward IV. What is more, the new religionists were jubilant. The king's increasing conservatism, played upon by the brilliant arch-conservative Bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner, worried them. Here was the chance, Archbishop Cranmer must have whispered in Lady Latimer's ear, to serve not only her king but her God. Over and over they told her, "This is your destiny. It is God's Will that you become Queen of England." And Kateryn Parr was a pragmatist. How could her mere affection for Sir Thomas Seymour weigh against the policies of Church and State and the ambitions of her family?

On 12 July 1543, Henry VIII married Kateryn Parr in the Queen's Closet at Hampton Court. It was a small wedding – the sixth for the groom, the third for the bride – with only a handful of friends in attendance. William Parr, Kateryn's brother, was not at the wedding and although she loved him, she acknowledged his ambition when she wrote to him tartly concerning the marriage: "(You are) the person who has most cause to rejoice . . ." ²³ The marriage began on a sombre note as three days after the wedding the plague broke out in London. ²⁴ It was an annual penance that London suffered every summer and the court then moved itself to the relative safety of the country.

In her new, elevated circumstances, Kateryn had about her, her sister, Anne, her stepdaughter, Margaret Neville, her cousin, Maud Lane, and her closest friend, Catherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk, as ladies-in-waiting. Together with the former Charterhouse circle of advanced thinkers, these were the nucleus of the Queen's court set. And during the last few years of Henry's life they were at constant loggerheads with the conservative faction led by the Bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner. To the conservatives, especially Bishop Gardiner and the Chancellor, Thomas Wriothesley, the new queen was a religious anathema and they spared no effort to dislodge her from Henry's affections.

Kateryn may in fact have taken her position as God's instrument too much to heart.

In the beginning, Wriothesley had only good to say about her. "(She is) a woman in my judgement, for virtue, wisdom and gentleness, most meet for his Highness; and sure I am his Majesty had never a wife more agreeable to his heart than she is."²⁵ But Kateryn's outspoken religious sentiments alienated Wriothesley and after a time his position changed dramatically and he turned on her, becoming her implacable foe.

For a while, Kateryn's marriage went smoothly. To her husband she brought two gifts, the ability to nurse him with patience and her talent for reconciliation. Alienated from both of his daughters, Mary and Elizabeth, Henry found himself in a very short time living as a father under the same roof with all of his children for the first and last time in their lives. It was Kateryn's talent for diplomacy that held together a family of such varied, explosive and conflicting temperaments. And she began to enjoy her new position with its privileges. She ordered new clothes in sumptuous fabrics, patronized the Dutch jeweller, Peter Richardson, kept two dwarf jesters, pet parrots, an impressive flight of falcons and a stable of greyhounds. Often the queen set out on horseback to hunt for deer with her crossbow and sent haunches of venison as gifts to her friends. She was also fond of music and was a graceful dancer, being "disposed to mirth in company",²⁶ and had in her household both a company of minstrels and one of players.

The new queen concerned herself, too, with the great universities of Oxford and Cambridge, using her influence to soften the effect of the 1545 Chantry Act which threatened to strip the universities of the income they received from religious foundations just as the monasteries had been stripped. She wrote to the administrators of Cambridge that she had interceded with the king on their behalf and that "according to your desires, attempted my Lord the King's Majesty for the stay of your possessions".²⁷ Her intercession was successful and the universities kept their land.

As a staunch supporter of the English reformed religion and the new learning, Kateryn also organized the first folio of Nicholas Udall's translation into English of the *Paraphrases* of Erasmus. So persuasive was she that she managed to induce the conservative Princess Mary into translating a section herself with the aid of her chaplain, Francis Malet.²⁸ It is interesting to note that when Mary became queen, she condemned the very work she had translated as heretical. Above all, Kateryn was concerned in making available to the English populace cheap and readily available English language Bibles and religious commentary. She became an enthusiastic propagandist for the projects. And she began to write herself, adding her own books to the new learning.²⁹ Her first attempt at literature was a curious choice. She translated from Latin a work entitled, *Psalms or Prayers taken out of Holy Scriptures*, by John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester. This was the same Bishop Fisher whom her husband had had executed for treason. Perhaps because of this fact, Kateryn published the translation anonymously. But this fooled no one at court, for the queen subsequently ordered a number of presentation copies of the work "gorgeously bound in gilt on leather" to give to her circle of friends. In 1545 her own book, *Prayers and Meditations*, was published and in 1547, after Henry's death, *Lamentation of a Sinner* was brought out to the critical acclaim of her court circle, including the Princess Elizabeth's mentor, Sir William Cecil.

The royal marriage was still a happy one in 1544. Henry seemed delighted with his choice of a wife and sent to the continent for fashionable jewels and toys to give her. In July 1544, when he left for France to lead a siege against the French at Boulogne, he appointed Kateryn, Queen-Regent of England. Not since the early days with Catherine

of Aragon, had he accorded a wife such an honour. A contemporary description of her at this time is of a woman who dressed with the consciousness of her rank and title.

(The queen) wore an underskirt, showing in front, of cloth of gold and a sleeved overdress of brocade lined with crimson velvet and the train was two yards long. She wore hanging from the neck two crosses and a jewel of very magnificent diamonds, and she wore a great number of splendid diamonds in her headdress.³⁰

But her position never blinded her to who she was or where she had come from. To the end of her days, every document she signed, official or not, bore the initials "KP" for Kateryn Parr.

By 1545 Kateryn's position as queen was becoming increasingly dangerous. Although scrupulously careful to maintain the most cordial relations with the Imperial ambassadors, her reputation on the continent had become one of political intriguer. In June, Emperor Charles V's ambassador in London wrote to him of the rumours that Kateryn had sent her secretary to Germany to intrigue with the Lutheran princes.³¹ Kateryn had little experience in international affairs and the rumours did her reputation no good at home. She began to be indiscrete with her increasingly irritable husband, playing devil's advocate in religious arguments and daring to dispute with him during discussions. Henry's irritation turned to anger. It was the sign her enemies had been looking for. Capitalizing on the king's bad temper, the conservatives initiated the trial for heresy of Anne Askew, calculated to implicate the queen and her closest friends and expose them as heretical conspirators against the established church.

Askew, a self-proclaimed prophet from an upper class family, had left home and husband to preach her religious tenets to the "new religion" faction at court. But she soon overstepped herself by declaring that the sacrament of communion was symbolic and not physical and she was arrested on charges of heresy. Under torture she was urged to implicate as her patrons and fellow heretics those nearest to the queen. Although Kateryn herself was not mentioned, the motives behind the plot were intended to compromise her hopelessly in her husband's eyes. William Parr, Kateryn's brother, was in particular difficulty, having been selected by virtue of his position on the Privy Council as one of the men who questioned Anne Askew under torture. Together with Lord Lisle (John Dudley, later Duke of Northumberland), whose wife was also under suspicion of heresy, Parr begged Askew to recant and swear to her certainty that the sacrament became flesh. From the rack Askew steadfastly refused, answering: "that it was a great shame for them (Parr and Lisle) to counsel contrary to their knowledge".³² (One can see the two men shuddering at that remark.) If Askew would not recant, neither would she incriminate the members of Kateryn's circle. She died resolute in her beliefs but neither Gardiner nor Wriothesley gave up their attempts to bring the queen to the block, for nothing less than her disgrace and death would suit their needs.

From the time of the Anne Askew affair until Henry's death, Kateryn was subjected to a barrage of persecutions and attempts to have her prosecuted for heresy. Echoes of this can be heard in the rumours reported at court during 1546. Prophecies abounded – of a new queen, of the present queen's death, of the Duchess of Suffolk supplanting her friend on the throne. This gossip even found its way into official dispatches.³³ A portrait of Kateryn, perhaps painted about this time, shows a woman with tired eyes, tense mouth and tightly controlled emotions.³⁴ Henry, who was dying slowly and painfully,

found himself increasingly annoyed with his outspoken wife. Gardiner and Wriothesley persuaded him to let them attempt to prove a charge of treason against Kateryn and Henry appeared to agree, giving them permission to search the quarters of her ladies-in-waiting for treasonable books and even going so far as to have a warrant for Kateryn's arrest drawn up. The undocumented stories from this period claim that Kateryn was ignorant of the plotting of the two men and that it was not until Henry's physician warned her of what was going on that she became aware of her danger.³⁵ This seems highly unlikely. After the Askew affair, only a fool could fail to realize what her enemies intended and Kateryn Parr was far from a fool. She managed by complete submission to Henry's attitudes and opinions and an uncharacteristically dramatic outburst of hysterics to convince her husband that she only argued with him to take his mind off his physical ailments. "And it is even so, sweetheart?" the king is reputed to have replied. "Then perfect friends we are now again as ever at any time heretofore."³⁶ Thus mollified, he received his wife back into his arms and his favour.

During these enormously difficult last years Kateryn's most powerful ally was Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury. Author of the *Book of Common Prayer*, and unofficial head of the new religionists, Cranmer was a canny politician and a match for Gardiner and Wriothesley. While Cranmer stayed close to Henry, Kateryn had some measure of safety from the conservatives. Finally, on the morning of 28 January 1547, the ordeal was over. Henry VIII of England died and left as his heir, Edward VI, a nine-year-old boy who adored his stepmother. Kateryn was the only real mother Edward had ever known. She had been responsible for placing Anthony Cooke, John Cheke and William Grindal in Edward's household as tutors and the new king's religious views agreed entirely with her own. With her position as wife to the king over and a new king on the throne, Kateryn's power to influence policy was gone and so was the danger to her life.

She retired to her much loved dower manors of Hanworth and Chelsea. "Howbeit, the time is well abbreviated, by what means I know not, except the weeks be shorter at Chelsea than in other places", the new Queen-Dowager wrote a month later.³⁷ She wrote the words to her erstwhile fiancé, Sir Thomas Seymour, and they signalled the beginning of a clandestine love affair that set the court, now in official mourning, on its ear. Once again, as in the case of religious disputation with a king, Kateryn's emotional need overcame her hard-learned prudence.

Seymour had sensibly left for the continent after Kateryn's marriage to Henry. But now he had returned, for the widowed Queen-Dowager was a far greater prize than the widowed Lady Latimer had been, and if Seymour was anything, he was an ambitious man. Henry was hardly laid to rest beside Jane Seymour in the vault of St. George's, Windsor, when Sir Thomas Seymour appeared to lay siege to his widow. Wed to three less than romantic husbands, widowed thrice, schooled to duty rather than to inclination, walking an emotional tightrope for years with only her religion and an assorted set of other people's children to love, Kateryn Parr, now thirty-five, was quite literally swept off her feet by the impetuous uncle of the king. Before the burning evidence of Seymour's passion – not to mention his ambition – all of Kateryn's objections, her self-restraint, her common sense melted.

Within weeks of Henry's death, Seymour had become her lover in fact as well as name, visiting her in secret at her manor in Chelsea. Riding out at night across the fields

from London to be let in by his royal “portress” at the postern gate and riding off again at dawn, Seymour cut a figure that to Kateryn’s love-starved heart was irresistible.

When it shall be your pleasure to repair hither (she wrote to him), ye must take some pain to come early in the morning, that ye may be gone again by 7:00. And so, I suppose, ye may come without suspect. I pray you let me have knowledge overnight at what hour ye will come, that your portress may wait at the gate to the fields for you.³⁸

They wrote each other love letters, Seymour signing his, “From the body of his whose heart ye have”, and Kateryn, “By her that is yours, to serve and obey during her life.” But like Henry, Seymour didn’t want a mistress, and by the end of February Kateryn was signing herself, “By her that is, and shall be, your humble, true, and loving wife during her life.”

They managed to keep their marriage secret until the end of June, hoping to get King Edward, who was after all Seymour’s nephew and Kateryn’s stepson, to propose the match himself and thus remove any scandal attached to such a hasty union. But Edward was not always amenable to manipulation and the news leaked out before he had decided to officially suggest the match. At court, the news was greeted with anger and disbelief. Kateryn’s marital impatience was condemned by those closest to the king. What, asked the Privy Council, if she were found to be pregnant? No one would know for certain if the child were the late king’s or the knight’s. The Privy Council was needlessly worried; Kateryn was not pregnant. But the overhasty marriage, typical as it was of Seymour’s reckless, ambitious nature, was later to become one of the charges in the indictment against him for high treason.

The last months of Kateryn Parr’s life were darkened by the plots and intrigues instigated by her new husband in his obsessive desire for power, and in his almost pathological jealousy of the Lord Protector, his brother. The Lord Protector’s wife, Anne Stanhope, Duchess of Somerset, loathed Kateryn and took every opportunity to let her know it. This feeling was heartily reciprocated on the Queen-Dowager’s part. Jewellery, land, and precedence at court all became reasons for the Somersets and the Seymours to quarrel with bitter animosity. The restraints under which Kateryn Parr had been compelled to live during her years as queen were swept away and emotions poured from her. She was furious with the Lord Protector for his cavalier treatment of her and she hated the royal pretensions of his wife, formerly one of the lesser ladies of the court. On one occasion, Kateryn wrote angrily to her husband: “It was fortunate we were so much distant (from the Lord Protector) for I suppose I should have bitten him.”³⁹ The Lord Protector’s wife, she referred to as “that hell”. Her spirited nature which had gone into hiding in the shadow of the block had once more reasserted itself.

Kateryn spent much of her time at Chelsea. With her was the fourteen-year-old Princess Elizabeth. Elizabeth loved and admired her stepmother and Kateryn in turn was very fond of her. But Seymour’s ambitions put a strain on the relationship. In December of 1547, Kateryn had become pregnant by her husband to the great joy of both. The danger of childbirth was a thing she had so far managed to avoid. But now she was nearly thirty-six, an advanced age in the sixteenth century to become a mother for the first time, and her health was precarious. Seymour’s behaviour with the Princess Elizabeth at this period was at best imprudent, at worst seductive. What his intentions were, he alone knew. But the worst interpretation was put on them and Elizabeth was

removed from Kateryn's custody and sent to Sir Anthony Denny at Cheshunt. Elizabeth was very upset, both at the separation and at the gossip. At fourteen, she had seen where gossip of that nature could lead, having had both a mother and a stepmother die on the block for unchastity.

I was replete with sorrow to depart from your highness (she wrote to Kateryn), especially leaving you undoubtful of health . . . I weighed it more deeper when you said you would warn me of all evils that you should hear of me, for if your grace had not a good opinion of me you would not have offered friendship to me that way . . .

Kateryn did not blame Elizabeth for the gossip nor apparently did she blame her husband. Her letters to him continue to be warm and loving. And whatever she may have felt in private, in public she represented the gossip as a plot to take Elizabeth from her. Seymour saw the removal of the princess as a direct attack upon his honour, as indeed it was, and moved heaven and earth to secure another ward in direct line to the throne, the Lady Jane Grey. Evidently the knight believed in keeping a potential queen in his pocket.

In June of 1548, six months pregnant, Kateryn removed from Chelsea to her dower manor of Hanworth, not far from Hampton Court, to avoid the summer plagues of the city. Seymour stayed behind pushing his various suits at court.

I gave your little knave your blessing (Kateryn wrote to him), who like an honest man stirred apace after and before. For Mary Odell being abed with me had laid her hand upon my belly to feel it stir. It hath stirred these three days every morning and evening so that I trust when ye come it will make you some pastime. And thus I end, bidding my sweetheart and loving husband better to fare than myself.⁴⁰

And Seymour, knowing the dangers of her pregnancy, wrote back with concern.

I hear my little man doth shake his poll . . . (and) I do desire your highness to keep the little knave so lean and gaunt with your good diet and walking, that he may be so small that he may creep out of a mousehole.

Later that month, Kateryn left Hanworth and moved to her husband's estate of Sudeley Castle in Gloucestershire, taking her husband's ward, Jane Grey, with her. The last weeks of that summer of 1548 were the halcyon days of peace that Kateryn had not known since her childhood. Far removed from the traumas and frustrations of London and the court, with the nine-year-old Jane for company, Kateryn could await the birth of her child with tranquility. On 30 August, she went into labour and gave birth to a daughter, Mary Seymour, named for the stepdaughter she had always loved. Nine days later Kateryn Parr was dead of puerperal fever. Dr Huicke, having infected her, was unable to save her.

It was alleged later at Seymour's trial for high treason that on her death bed, his wife had accused him of poisoning her. But it is unlikely that she really believed this even if she said it. Delirium is one of the symptoms of puerperal fever, and Kateryn may have accused Seymour of something while delirious which his many enemies later seized on and used against him. Seymour had no reason to wish his wife dead, and in his own shallow way he loved her. In a lucid moment days before she died, Kateryn dictated her will, leaving everything she owned to her husband, "wishing them to be a thousand

times more in value than they are".⁴¹ She was buried at Sudeley Castle chapel in an unmarked grave. Seymour wasn't there and the child, Jane Grey, was chief mourner.

Seymour was stunned by Kateryn's death. All his ambitions lay in the dust; his affairs at court drifted. When he finally recovered from the shock, his behaviour without his wife's restraining hand became erratic, his intriguing more reckless and irrational. A man of much daring, little ability, and a profound lack of subtlety, Sir Thomas Seymour attempted to unseat his brother from the Lord Protectorate and, for his pains, was executed for high treason seven months after his wife's death. At his funeral, the Bishop of Worcester called him "a man the furthest from the fear of God that I ever knew or heard of in England . . . surely he was a wicked man, and the realm is well rid of him".⁴²

The memories that Kateryn Parr left behind her were more gentle. Loving, kind, merry, pious, the memory of her warm heart helped save her brother's life when the much-put-upon Princess Mary became the dour bigot, Queen Mary I, and afterward, ensured his position at the court of Elizabeth I, who never forgot either the Parrs or the Seymours. As Queen of England, Kateryn had taken the motto "To be useful in what I do", and her grace and sincerity are reflected in her life and in her writings.

God withstood my will (she wrote) . . . and through his grace and goodness made that possible which seemeth to me most impossible; that was, made me to renounce utterly mine own will, and to follow his will most willingly.⁴³

She followed a destiny that led from a manor house in Northamptonshire through revolution and violence to the crown of England, and she died, perhaps providentially, before her world fell apart. Her legacy was felt by all who knew her, and by those who followed the "new" religion, but most importantly her influence was felt in the reign of the child who carried forward both the religion Kateryn Parr had almost died for, as well as her love of music and poetry, the child who was her "humble daughter", Elizabeth I.

Notes and References

- ¹ "Sir Thomas Parr (1407-1461)", CW2, lxxxi, 15-25.
- ² Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem, Second Series, Henry VII, iii, 346-9.
- ³ Godfrey Anstruther, *Vaux of Harrowden*, 7-36.
- ⁴ During the next one hundred years, various male members of the Parr family made the journey to Westmorland to oversee the estates which were the heart of the Parr patrimony in and around Kendal. The Parrs held this land until William Parr, Marquis of Northampton's death in 1571, when his widow traded it with the Crown for more conveniently located estates in the south. Although they ceased to live at Kendal Castle in 1487, the family always maintained an interest both in northern affairs and in their northern lands.
- ⁵ W. C. Richardson, *Tudor Chamber Administration, 1485-1547*, 103-4; J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, 18; *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, Vol. ii, 1490: BM Cott MS Tiberius Eviii froob.
- ⁶ Lucy Toulmin Smith, *The Itinerary of John Leland, 1535-1543*, viii, 124; *VCH Northamptonshire*, IV 77-78.
- ⁷ P.R.O.:P.C.C. 14 Ayeloff (1517).
- ⁸ B.M. Addit MS 24, 965 f. 48 (11 July 1523); f. 50 (30 July 1523); f. 134b (17 December 1523); *Letters and Papers (op. cit.)*, Vol. IV, ii, 162 (15 March 1524), 189 (25 March 1524).
- ⁹ Anthony Martienssen, *Queen Katherine Parr* (1973).
- ¹⁰ *Letters and Papers (op. cit.)*, Vol. XXI, i, 1384.
- ¹¹ P.R.O.:P.C.C.:F.12 Thrower (Probate 11).

- ¹² *Letters and Papers (op. cit.)*, Vol. V, i, 1694.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, 419(3).
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. XII, ii, 187(6).
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, 536.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 729.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1174.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. XII, 169, 173.
- ¹⁹ BM Cott MS Vespasian Fxiii, 236, f. 131.
- ²⁰ William Dugdale, *History of St. Paul's Cathedral*, 48; J. Weever, *Funerary Monuments*, 371.
- ²¹ *Letters and Papers (op. cit.)*, Vol. XVIII, i, 443.
- ²² Dent-Brocklehurst MS, Sudeley Castle.
- ²³ *Catalogue of the Library of Henry Huth*, V, 1695-5 (London, 1880).
- ²⁴ *Letters and Papers (op. cit.)*, Vol. XVIII, i, 886.
- ²⁵ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, Vol. I, 180-9. *Letters and Papers (op. cit.)*, Vol. XVIII, i, 894.
- ²⁶ John Gough Nichols, *The Legend of Sir Nicholas Throckmorton*, 18.
- ²⁷ BM Lansdowne MS 1236 f. 11.
- ²⁸ BM Cott MS Vespasian F3/f37.
- ²⁹ Susan E. James, "The Devotional Writings of Queen Catherine Parr", CW2, lxxxii, 135-9.
- ³⁰ BM MS Addit 8219 f. 114.
- ³¹ *Letters and Papers (op. cit.)*, Vol. XX, i, 971; Vol. XXI, i, 272; *Cal. State Papers (op. cit.)*, Vol. X, 278-83.
- ³² *Letters and Papers (op. cit.)*, Vol. XXI, i, 1181.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 289.
- ³⁴ National Portrait Gallery.
- ³⁵ John Foxe, *Acts & Monuments*, S. R. Cattley (ed.), 553-61.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 559-60.
- ³⁷ Dent-Brocklehurst MS, Sudeley Castle.
- ³⁸ Bodleian: Ashmolean MS 1729, 4.
- ³⁹ Cecil MS, Hatfield House; also, Samuel Haynes, *A Collection of State Papers . . . Collected by William Cecil*, 61.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; and Haynes, *ibid.*, 62.
- ⁴¹ P.R.O.:P.C.C.:Populwell (1548); also, Haynes (*op. cit.*), 77-8.
- ⁴² John Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials of Henry VIII & etc.*, II, i, 198.
- ⁴³ Dent-Brocklehurst MS, Sudeley Castle.

