Katherine Parr

To Be Useful in All That I Do

BORN: 1512; MARRIED: 12 JULY 1543; WIDOWED: 28 JANUARY 1547; DIED: 5 SEPTEMBER 1548

*There has probably been more interest in the wives of Henry VIII than in the King himself, although it is impossible not to wonder about the man that brought these six women together in history. Their lives were all unique, yet all had fates ultimately decided by the same man. Two were divorced, with one getting a much better deal than the other. Two were beheaded, one falsely accused, the other probably not. One died shortly after giving birth to the male heir Henry so desperately longed for. One survived as his widow.*

Katherine Parr, the last of Henry's wives was a different choice for the aging King. She was the daughter of Thomas Parr of Kendal, a modest country squire who had distinguished himself in the service of both Henry VII and Henry VIII. Thomas Parr died in 1517 and his widow chose not to remarry. She encouraged the education and advancement of her children, a trait Katherine would show in her treatment of her future step-children. Katherine's brother, William, was given the title of Marquess of Northhampton in 1547.

Katherine was first married to Sir Edward Burough, but was widowed shortly after in 1529. Her second husband was Sir John Nevill, Lord Latimer. He was a wealthy landowner in Yorkshire and had an estate there called Snape Hall. He died in 1542 and had no children by Katherine.

By this time, Katherine was becoming well known for her learning and overall sensitive and caring nature. She was also gaining an interest in the rising Protestant faith.

Not much is known about Henry's courtship of Katherine. However, before the King stepped in, she may have been considering marrying Thomas Seymour, brother to the late Queen Jane and uncle to Prince Edward. Katherine rejected Seymour's proposal in order to marry the King, although she probably didn't have much of a choice in the matter. 18 months had gone by since Kathryn Howard's execution by the time Henry and Katherine Parr were married on July 12, 1543.

Henry's health had been declining such that his last wife must have been as much a nurse as anything else. Katherine managed to soothe the King's temper and bring his family closer together. Although the Queen was scarcely older than the Princess Mary, she, along with Elizabeth and Edward, saw Katherine as a stabilizing mother figure. Katherine arranged for the best tutors for the children and encouraged them in their learning.

Katherine's interest in Protestants almost proved to be her undoing. Factions at court were envious of the Queen's influence on Henry and sought to destroy her by linking her with the 'heretical' religious reformers. But Katherine wisely made a show of her submissiveness to the King when confronted and probably saved her life. Katherine outlived Henry, who died January 28, 1547.

Prince Edward succeeded as Edward VI. His older uncle, Edward Seymour, Lord Somerset, became Protector since the young king was not yet 10 years old. The other Seymour brother, Thomas, once again sought the hand of Katherine Parr, and this time she was free to accept.

Katherine was soon pregnant with Seymour's son, and gave birth to a daughter named Mary at Sudeley Castle on August 30, 1548. Unfortunately, Katherine did not recover from the childbirth and died on September 5.

Katherine Parr is buried at St. Mary's Church at Sudeley Castle.