

CHAPTER LXVI
THE STORY OF LADY JANE GREY

As soon as King Edward VI. was dead, Northumberland, with several other nobles, went to Lady Jane Grey, and offered her the crown. They knelt to her, kissing her hand and greeting her as their Queen.

It was a great thing to be Queen of England, but Lady Jane was not glad. She was sad and frightened. She trembled as the duke spoke to her, then covering her face with her hands, she fell fainting to the ground.

When she came to herself again she cried bitterly for sorrow at the death of her cousin, whom she had loved dearly. She was only a very little older than he and, like him, she was fond of learning; indeed they had often had the same masters.

Lady Jane was even more clever than Edward. She could speak and write Greek and Latin, and she knew some Hebrew. This was more wonderful in those days than it would be now, for then very few people had any [Greek and Hebrew] learning at all.

As Lady Jane wept for her cousin, the nobles tried to comfort her by reminding her how great she herself now was. But that did not comfort her. It frightened her.

“I cannot be Queen,” she said. “I cannot bear so great an honour. I am not fit for it.”

“It is your duty,” said the duke. “You cannot put away from you the duty God gives you.”

With tears running down her face, Lady Jane fell upon her knees, and clasping her hands said, “Then if it must be so, God give me strength to bear this heavy burden. God give me grace to rule for His glory and the good of the people.”

The next day Lady Jane was taken in state to the Tower. But no crowds gathered to greet and cheer her as their Queen. A few people came out of idle curiosity, but they were all silent. Not one voice cried, “God save the Queen!”

But while these things were happening, the Princess Mary did not sit still. She raised an army and claimed the crown. Northumberland marched against her with another army, leaving Lady Jane in the Tower. No sooner had he gone, than many of the lords, who had joined him in helping to put Lady Jane on the throne, began to regret it. They one and all declared for Queen Mary and, marching to the Tower, demanded the keys in her name.

Lady Jane's father, who had been left to guard the Tower, was afraid to resist, and he opened the gates to Mary's friends. Then running to his daughter's room he told her that her reign was at an end.

“Dear father,” she said, “these are the happiest words I have ever heard since you told me that I must be Queen. May I go home now?” she added.

But alas! it was easier to enter the Tower than to leave it, and she was kept fast prisoner. Meanwhile Mary had been proclaimed Queen in the streets of London.

Instead of the gloomy silence which had greeted Lady Jane Grey, the people shouted with joy, “God save the Queen! God save the Queen!”

The news spread fast. The church bells rang, the people sang and shouted, bonfires were lit, everywhere there was feasting and rejoicing. Mary was Queen.

The news travelled on. It reached Northumberland and his army. The duke knew when he heard it that his cause was lost, that his hopes and his fortunes were fallen and broken. Only one thing was left to him. He, too, took off his cap and shouted with the rest, "God save the Queen!" Poor Lady Jane, the ten-days Queen, was forgotten.

But even that could not save Northumberland, and he was taken back to London a prisoner. The people hated him, and they shouted, "Traitor, traitor, death to the traitor!" as he was led through the streets, till in fear and shame he hid his face from them as he entered the Tower, out of which he never again came.

Mary was so glad and happy to have won the crown that she was at first kind to every one. She would not put Lady Jane and her husband to death—an innocent girl was not to blame, she said. But she kept them both prisoners in the Tower. It is even thought that Mary would have spared the life of Northumberland. But many of the nobles hated him. It was decided that he must die, and his head was cut off.

The new Queen's gentleness did not last long. When once she felt herself secure upon the throne, she proved to be as self-willed as her father, Henry VIII., had been.

Mary was a Roman Catholic, and she made up her mind to bring England back to that faith. At first many of the people were glad of this, for although they did not wish to come under the rule of the Pope again, they did not like the new religion. But when Mary let it be known that she meant to marry Philip of Spain, the people were very angry. Spain was a Roman Catholic country. The English hated the Spaniards, and were afraid of them. The Spaniards they knew were cruel. They had in their country a terrible court called the Inquisition.

Inquisition means to seek out. If any one was suspected of thinking for himself in matters of religion he was brought before this court and asked searching questions, so that the truth might be sought out. Sometimes the questions were so difficult to answer that innocent people made themselves appear guilty. But whether innocent or guilty those who were brought before this court were nearly always tortured, and often condemned to be burned to death.

However much the English wished to return to the Roman Catholic religion, they did not wish this terrible Inquisition to be brought into their country. They tried to make Mary marry an Englishman. But Mary was very proud and haughty. "There is no Englishman my equal. I will not marry a subject," she said.

No one was pleased with this marriage, and the Protestants were very much afraid. Anything, they thought, would be better than to allow a Spaniard to rule in England. So a plot was formed to put Mary from the throne, and to set either her sister Elizabeth or Lady Jane Grey in her place.

But the plot failed. All the leaders were beheaded, and hundreds of their followers were hanged. Gentle Lady Jane, who had never wished to rule, was blamed for this rebellion. She was brought out of the Tower where she had been kept prisoner, and her beautiful head was cut off. Her husband, father and brother were also put to death. The Queen had begun to earn for herself her terrible name of "Bloody Mary."