

F ◊ R E W ◊ R D

‘Why does anyone want to read history?’ Sometimes, to my horror, I have heard that asked. I will tell you why everyone should want to read history. Firstly, because it explains where we are today. A tree is not explicable without roots and a trunk; nor a flower without a stem; nor a family without a family tree, even if you only go back a generation or two. We are what we are because of what has gone before us. History gives individuals and a community (whether family, church or nation) their sense of identity. Without it we can survive, perhaps, but we are more lost than we need be, less sure of who we are. Isn’t the popularity of programmes like *Who Do You Think You Are?* testimony to our need to be conversant with our past?

Secondly, history helps us to face the future. Without a grasp of our past, we are less able to weather the storms of change within and attacks from without that assail every community as the years go by. History reminds us that the challenges we face are nothing new; old problems recur in fresh guises; circumstances and contexts vary, but not the fundamental forces that drive human beings, whether great or lowly. The mistakes people have made in responding to difficulties help us, if we are wise, to do better this time. Too often, as is frequently lamented, we do not learn from history, but it doesn’t have to be that way.

But what if you are a Christian? Even more reason to read history. You need to see how God has exercised His sovereignty in history – what we call His ‘providence’ in the public sphere as well as in the lives of individuals. You need to see how the Church has survived often turbulent waves on the oceans of succeeding generations; how Christ

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our Head has governed His body; how Satan has ceaselessly attacked yet never destroyed the Bride of Christ – and of course he never will for Christ has promised He will build His church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).

And then there are the lives of countless heroes and heroines of the faith such as we have in this book – worthy successors to those of Hebrews 11, ‘of whom the world was not worthy’ and with whom we await ‘something better’ (Hebrews 11:38,40).

These are some of the reasons, whether you are a Christian or not, but especially if you are, why you should read a book like this. Elaine Snuggs has researched widely and deeply to portray for us four remarkable women living through a fascinating period in history, a period with immense consequences for this nation and indeed the world. That period was the Reformation of the sixteenth century as it was ground out in England. The women are both well known (Katharine Parr, sixth and surviving wife of Henry VIII, and Lady Jane Grey, the Nine Days Queen) and not so well known (martyr Anne Askew and Catherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk). In Anne Askew, you will see courage under fire and eventually in death; so too in Lady Jane Grey, executed at sixteen but maintaining remarkable steadfastness of faith in her final days. In Katherine Parr, you will see a woman thrust by God – not Henry VIII ultimately – into a position of prominence and exercising wisdom to survive and quietly exert influence for the gospel, including enabling books to be published and publishing her own spiritual autobiography. As for Catherine Willoughby, the story of her escape and exile with husband and family during Mary’s reign, is as exciting as many novels. These were not flawless heroines but in their times of trial showed themselves to be brave, intelligent, educated women, of strong character and radiant spirit, living for the Lord who had saved them and whom they had come to know as the only Saviour and Redeemer by grace alone through faith alone, facing circumstances that, in terms of difficulty and danger, far transcend anything we are likely to have faced.

We need to remember of course that persecution and being in danger of losing one’s life is a reality for many of our fellow believers

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world-wide. We in 'the West' are far from being in danger of our lives, but perhaps that is not the point. What these women show is that the bottom line for a Christian is what a much later martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, once said: when Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die. That is true for us all spiritually; for these four women it was also physically a real threat (for two, actually experienced) and we do well to remember that if we call ourselves Christians, our lives belong to Christ in every way: 'You are not your own, for you were bought with a price' (1 Corinthians 6:19,20).

We may hope that the physical reality of that may not be something we have to face, but it is good to be reminded of what holding fast the faith has meant for many in the past, and does so for many today.

For those in the tradition of the Protestant Reformation, indeed for Christ's disciples of any tradition, these women are our spiritual ancestors. Their DNA is, to some extent, ours. Elaine Snuggs has richly and winsomely given us their stories. To help you understand what you are and to help you face your Christian future, read this book. You will be challenged and inspired to love Christ more, to live for Him better.

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INTRODUCTION

It all began with Lady Jane Grey. Some twenty years ago, I read a Christian novel¹ about her, which stirred and intrigued me. It was a dramatic and moving story, but what particularly caught my interest was her strong Christian faith. I wanted to check that out further, for the trouble with historical fiction is that it is difficult to know where fact ends and imagination takes over. So, like a good ex librarian, I headed to my local library to see if I could find a reliable biography. The book² I emerged with was very helpful and challenged much of what I had previously thought I knew about her. She really was not just a quiet, scholarly girl who was plucked from obscurity in the dying days of Edward's reign, but someone of significance who had been brought up with the intent that she would fulfill her parents' ambitions. So what followed was not really too surprising. Though clearly written by someone who had little understanding of Jane's love for God, it did show how important He was in her life. Shortly afterwards, I was lent a book³ which really opened my eyes. It was written in the nineteenth century and the section telling the story of Jane's life was so sentimental that it was of little interest, but, after it, came real treasure. All of her writings which have survived were reprinted there, and her character, and especially her faith, fairly leapt from the page.

1 D. Meroff, *Coronation of Glory: The Story of Lady Jane Grey* (Zondervan, 1979)

2 A. Plowden, *Lady Jane Grey and the House of Suffolk* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1985)

3 N.H. Nicholas, *Literary Remains of Lady Jane Grey* (Harding, Triphook and Lepard, 1825)

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I read on, and my quest for the real Jane and all I could find out about her, led me to three other ladies: Anne Askew, Katherine Parr and Catherine Willoughby. I was strongly drawn to them all. What outstanding Christian women, and what lives they had led. They were deeply challenging. I was fascinated by the Reformation and they had each experienced its dramas and dangers and been transformed by its teaching. Yet so much of what I was reading was from secular books and I was surprised that these women were not better covered in Christian literature. The notable exception was Faith Cook's *Lady Jane Grey, Nine Day Queen of England*⁴. Surely their stories were waiting to be told in a way which emphasised the centrality of their faith in their lives. Their lives were linked together so they made a natural quartet, and the seed was sown for a book about all four of them together.

Sometimes, we talk of ordinary people living at extraordinary times, and the times certainly were extraordinary, but there is nothing ordinary about these ladies – quite the opposite – for all were remarkable women. Three lived at the very top of society; two were queens and one a duchess, and even Anne Askew was a gentlewoman (in today's terms, that made her roughly upper middle class). They were well-educated, intelligent and articulate. They had strong characters and personalities, but what is striking above all, is the strength of their love for God, and how He used their lives. They all have left their own witness to that faith in writing. Anne Askew described her examinations in great detail. Lady Jane Grey left several letters and also an account of her debate with John Feckenham. Catherine Willoughby's forty-four letters to William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth's Lord Burghley, have survived, though without his replies to her, and Katherine Parr even wrote a book. She called it *Lamentations of a Sinner*, and in it she lamented her earlier life before her spiritual eyes were opened and she was brought to faith.

The extraordinary times had much to do with the Reformation. The lives of these women were bound up with it, and, among them, they lived through all the most significant Reformation years, from Henry VIII's break with Rome, to the Elizabethan religious settlement

4 F. Cook, *Lady Jane Grey, Nine Day Queen of England* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2004)

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and beyond. The sub-theme of this book, and the thread which runs through it, is the story of the Reformation, a complex story briefly told with broad brush strokes and with a mention of some of its significant people. These were times of instability and upheaval, especially from 1540, when factionalism became entrenched at court in Henry VIII's last years, through the reigns of two of his children, to the achievement of more settled times after the succession of his brilliant second daughter, Elizabeth, in 1558. This period is when much of the action in these ladies' lives occurred. With so much going on around them, and not infrequently impacting on them personally, I have stepped back from their stories at intervals to fill in this information in separate 'background' sections.

I have used the words 'Reformers', 'Evangelicals' and especially 'Protestants' interchangeably throughout to describe the same group of people, despite the fact that the word Protestant was not used in England until the mid 1550s. It seems clearer to use it for the whole period and rather unhelpful not to. I have also, on occasion, mildly modernised some of the sixteenth-century quotations if the meaning seems particularly obscure, or added explanatory words in brackets.

Of course, it is not just language that has changed in the intervening centuries. In Tudor England, people lived, ate, spoke and thought in ways which are strange to us. Living in our age, it is hard to appreciate just how important a part religion played in national life. Everyone was expected to go to church regularly and expected to hold the same beliefs. Before the Reformation, the Church, led by the Pope, declared what these were and, after the break with Rome, the monarch, as Supreme Head of the Church, had a crucial role in deciding its official doctrine. This was upheld by statute and enforced by the power of the state. Thus, the personal religious views of each of the Tudor monarchs was of great importance.

Rather than starting straight in with the life of Anne Askew, we begin with a first chapter which sets the scene, and gives a whistle-stop tour of the events and the people who figured large in the reign of Henry VIII, when the Reformation ushered in times of great change. These were also times when heresy laws meant that deviation from

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official doctrine was a capital offence and so death was a lurking danger for those who loved their Lord and refused to compromise, as all four women knew only too well. Their lives showed that they had taken to heart the words of the Apostle Paul:

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen : for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

I. TIMES OF GREAT CHANGE

HENRY VIII AND THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

On 31st October 1517, an Augustinian monk pinned a notice on the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg in Germany. His name was **Martin Luther** and this public declaration of his '**95 Theses**' was a protest against the way the dubious church practice of indulgences were being sold locally. To his surprise, his actions proved to be a catalyst. Others took his theses, printing them in their thousands, and sending them around Germany. Wherever they went they provoked a strong reaction. This has come to be seen as the **start of the Protestant Reformation**, but what followed was far more than a protest against church corruption. Luther's theology was still developing, but, within a couple of years, his study of the Bible, and most especially of the New Testament book of Romans, would transform his thinking and his relationship with God, and, ultimately, his attitude to the Church. That would be quickly followed by an outpouring of publications, as books flowed from his pen and the new invention of printing took his writings far beyond Wittenberg to other German towns and to other countries. Within a relatively short time, the Reformation would find a foothold across Europe, from Spain to Italy, and from France to Poland, and that in spite of the determined opposition of the Catholic Church and most secular rulers. In time, people from all ranks of society would be impacted, from the aristocracy to peasants.

It was the **Bible** which was at the heart of the movement. The Reformation meant a freeing from the accumulation of much church teaching and tradition, mentally sweeping it away and going back, as it were, to New Testament times to make a fresh start. No wonder