

LADY JANE GREY

1537 – 1554

Lady Jane Grey's short, tragic life and nine-day reign as Queen of England have provided matter for novels, plays, and films. The events of her life have enough adventure and intrigue to warrant such attention, but the sensational facts often overshadow the fascinating writings that provide a window into the young woman's character and into the political conditions under which she lived.

Jane was the eldest child of Lord Henry and Lady Frances Grey, the Duke and Duchess of Suffolk. Born in October 1537 in Bradgate Park, near Leicester, she was raised in the highest aristocratic circles: her maternal grandmother was Mary Tudor, sister of Henry VII and widow of Louis XII of France. As a granddaughter of Henry VII she was in the line of succession to the throne of England after Henry's children Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth, a situation complicated by political and religious controversies concerning the legitimacy and hence the rights of Henry's two daughters (Protestants might think Mary born to an invalid union, and Catholics might think Elizabeth illegitimate). Jane's position as a possible heir to the throne proved catastrophic.

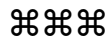


Although she was raised in luxury, Jane's life was unhappy. A bookish child, she was not close to her unsympathetic parents, whom she called "sharp and severe." They and other members of the aristocracy saw her as a possible bride for her cousin, Edward VI, who became king at a young age upon the death of Henry VIII in 1547. Edward did not want to marry Jane, however, so her parents betrothed her to Guildford Dudley, the youngest son of John Dudley, duke of Northumberland. Jane tried to refuse the match, but was beaten until she submitted, and was married to Guildford in May 1553 at the age of fifteen. On the urging of her parents, a month after the ceremony she and Guildford consummated their marriage (thus making it legally binding), but the two lived apart.

In July 1553 Jane's life was thrown into chaos. Young Edward VI, who had long been sickly, died before his sixteenth birthday on July 6. A firm Protestant, he had not wanted his Catholic sister Mary to inherit the throne, so on July 3, three days before he died, he complied with a request by the duke of Northumberland, Jane's father-in-law and Lord Chamberlain, to name Jane as his successor. Jane opposed the idea at first but finally consented. She was made Queen of England on 10 July 1553, but her coronation was extremely unpopular with the English people, most of whom regarded Mary as the rightful heir. It soon became apparent, moreover, that Jane had been set up as a puppet queen through whom the duke of Northumberland could rule the country. Mary herself was of course outraged. She declared herself queen on 9 July, as soon as she heard of her brother's death, and raised an army to march on London. Northumberland responded by raising his own army and leaving London to meet Mary's forces in battle. In his absence, his scheme fell apart when the royal council wavered, naming Mary queen instead of Jane. Jane was abandoned by her parents and by Northumberland, who attempted (unsuccessfully) to save his own life by pledging allegiance to Mary and converting to Catholicism. Jane and her husband were charged with treason and imprisoned in the Tower of London.

On 13 November 1553, Jane and Guildford were sentenced to death. Jane expected a pardon from her cousin, Queen Mary, but a revolt in early February 1554 and perhaps an understanding of political necessity hardened the new queen's heart and she signed the couple's death warrants. Mary offered Jane a reprieve if she converted to Catholicism, but the young woman refused, and she was beheaded on 12 February 1554. In his *Book of Martyrs* (1563), John Foxe quotes her final prayers and conversations, and describes her execution, including her pathetic request for help as, blindfolded, she groped for the block on which to lay her head.

Jane's surviving letters and other writings document both her domestic life and taste for learning, as well as her experiences as the "nine days' queen." They vividly show the terror felt by a teenage girl caught up in a political power struggle, but they also show that same girl's remarkable clarity of vision and the firmness with which she held to her own convictions in the face of death.



Letters

LADY JANE GREY TO HER FATHER¹
9 February 1554

Father, although it hath pleased God to hasten my death by you, by whom my life should rather have been lengthened;² yet can I so patiently take it, that I yield God more hearty thanks for shortening my woeful days, than if the world had been given unto my possession, with life lengthened at my own will, and albeit I am very well assured of your impatient dolours,³ redoubled in many ways, both in bewailing your own woe, and especially, as I am informed, my woeful state, yet, my dear father, if I may without offence rejoice in my own mishap, herein I may account myself blessed, that, washing my hands with the innocence of my fact, my guiltless blood may cry before the Lord, 'Mercy to the innocent.'

And yet though I must needs acknowledge that being constrained, and, as you know well enough, continually assayed,⁴ yet in taking upon me I seemed to consent, and therein grievously offended the queen and

her laws; yet do I assuredly trust that this my offence towards God is so much the less, in that, being in so royal estate as I was, mine enforced honour blended never with mine innocent heart. And thus, good father, I have opened unto you the state wherein I at present stand; my death at hand, although to you perhaps it may seem woeful, yet to me there is nothing that can be more welcome than from this vale of misery to aspire to that heavenly throne of all joy and pleasure, with Christ our Saviour; in whose steadfast faith, if it may be lawful for the daughter so to write to the father, the Lord that hitherto hath so strengthened you, so continue to keep you, that at the last we may meet in heaven with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

I am,

Your obedient daughter till death,
JANE DUDLEY

A LETTER WRITTEN BY THE LADY JANE IN THE END OF THE NEW TESTAMENT IN GREEK, THE WHICH SHE SENT UNTO HER SISTER LADY KATHERINE⁵ IMMEDIATELY BEFORE SHE SUFFERED

I have here sent you, good sister Katherine, a book: which although it be not outwardly trimmed with gold, yet inwardly it is more worth than precious stones.

¹ *Lady Jane Grey to her Father* Here and throughout the titles given to Grey's writings are those used by John Foxe when they were first published, in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.

² *by you ... lengthened* I.e. as her father's daughter, Jane would have been expected to outlive him.

³ *dolours* Sorrows, sufferings.

⁴ *assayed* Tried, i.e. experiencing trials.

⁵ *Greek* Refers to the language of the book Jane Grey sends, and not the language in which her letter was written; *Katherine* Jane's middle sister, born in 1540.

It is the book, dear sister, of the law of the Lord. It is His testament and last will, which He bequeathed unto us wretches, which shall lead you to the path of eternal joy. And if you with a good mind read it, and with an earnest mind do follow it, it shall bring you to an immortal and everlasting life. It will teach you to live, and learn you to die. It shall win you more, than you should have gained by the possession of your woeful father's lands. For, as if God had prospered him, you should have inherited his lands, so if you apply diligently this book, seeking to direct your life after it, you shall be an inheritor of such riches, as neither the covetous shall withdraw from you, neither the thief shall steal, neither yet the moths corrupt.

Desire with David,¹ good sister, to understand the law of the Lord your God. Live still² to die, that you (by death) may purchase eternal life. And trust not, that the tenderness of your age shall lengthen your life. For as soon (if God call) goeth the young, as the old: and labour always to learn to die, defy the world, deny the devil, and despise the flesh, and delight yourself only in the Lord. Be penitent for your sins, and yet despair not. Be strong in faith, and yet presume not. And desire with Saint Paul, to be dissolved and to be with Christ,³ with whom even in death there is life. Be like the good servant, and even at midnight be waking, lest when death cometh and stealeth upon you like a thief in the night, you be with the evil servant found sleeping, and lest for lack of oil ye be found like the five foolish women, and like him that had not on the wedding garment, and then ye be cast out from the marriage.⁴ Rejoice in Christ, as I trust I do. Follow the steps of your master Christ, and take up your cross, lay your sins on His back, and always embrace Him. And as touching my death, rejoice as I do (good sister) that I shall be delivered of this corruption, and put on incorruption. For I am assured, that I shall for losing of a mortal life, win an immortal life. The which I pray God grant you, send you of His grace to live in His fear, and to die in

the true Christian faith: from the which (in God's name) I exhort you, that you never swerve, neither for hope of life, nor fear of death. For if ye will deny His truth to lengthen your life, God will deny you, and yet shorten your days. And if you will cleave⁵ to Him, He will prolong your days to your comfort and his glory. To the which glory God bring me now, and you hereafter, when it pleaseth Him to call you. Fare you well (good sister) and put your only trust in God, who only must help you.

—PUBLISHED 1563

*A Certain Prayer of the Lady Jane
in the Time of her Trouble*

O Lord thou God and Father of my life, hear me poor and desolate woman, which fleeth unto thee only in all troubles and miseries. Thou O Lord art the only defender and deliverer of those that put their trust. And therefore, I, being defiled with sin, encumbered with afflictions, unquieted with troubles, wrapped in cares, overwhelmed with miseries, vexed with temptation, and grievously tormented with the long imprisonment of this vile mass of clay, my sinful body, do come unto Thee, O merciful Saviour, craving Thy mercy and help, without the which so little hope of deliverance is left, that I may utterly despair of my liberty. Albeit, it is expedience, that seeing our life standeth upon trying, we should be visited some time with some adversity, whereby we might both be tried whether we be of Thy flock or no, and also know Thee and ourselves the better: yet Thou that saidst Thou wouldst not suffer us to be tempted above our power, be merciful unto me, now a miserable wretch, I beseech Thee; which, with Solomon, do cry unto Thee, humbly desiring Thee, that I may neither be too much puffed up with prosperity, neither too much depressed with adversity; lest I, being too full, should deny Thee, my God; in being too low brought, should despair and blaspheme Thee, my Lord and Saviour.⁶ O merciful God, consider my misery, best known unto Thee; and

¹ *David* Cf. 2 Samuel 11.

² *still* Always.

³ *Saint Paul ... Christ* Cf. Philippians 1.23.

⁴ *good servant ... sleeping* Cf. Mark 13.33–37; *lack ... women* Cf. Matthew 25.1–13; *him ... marriage* Cf. Matthew 22.1–14 and Luke 14.16–24.

⁵ *cleave* Cling.

⁶ *Solomon ... Saviour* Cf. Proverbs 30.7–9.

be Thou now unto me a strong tower of defence, I humbly require Thee. Suffer me not to be tempted above my power, but wither be Thou a deliverer unto me out of this great misery, or else give me grace patiently to bear Thy heavy hand and sharp correction. It was thy right hand that delivered the people of Israel out of the hands of Pharaoh, which for the space of four hundred years did oppress them, and keep them in bondage; let it therefore likewise seem good to thy fatherly goodness, to deliver me, sorrowful wretch, for whom thy son Christ shed His precious blood on the cross, out of this miserable captivity and bondage, wherein I am now. How long wilt thou be absent? Forever? Oh, Lord hast thou forgotten to be gracious, and hast thou shut up thy loving kindness in displeasure? Wilt thou be no more entreated? Is thy mercy clear gone forever, and thy promise come utterly to an end forevermore? Why dost thou make so long tarrying? Shall I despair of thy mercy? Oh God, far be that from me; I am thy workmanship, created in Christ Jesus; give me grace therefore to tarry at thy leisure, and patiently to bear thy works, assuredly knowing, that as thou canst, so thou wilt deliver me, when it shall please thee, nothing doubting or mistrusting thy goodness towards me; for thou knowest better what is good for me than I do; therefore do with me in all things what thou wilt, and plague me what way thou wilt. Only, in the meantime, arm me, I beseech thee, with thy armour, that I may stand fast, my loins being girded with verity, having on the breast-plate of righteousness, and shod with the shoes prepared by the gospel of peace; above all things, taking to me the shield of faith, wherewith I may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked; and taking the helmet of salvation, and the sword of thy spirit, which is thy most holy word; praying always, with all manner of prayer and supplication, that I may refer myself wholly to thy will, abiding thy pleasure, and

comforting myself in those troubles that it shall please thee to send me; seeing such troubles be profitable for me, and seeing I am assuredly persuaded that it cannot but be well all thou doest. Hear me, O merciful Father, for His sake, whom thou wouldst should be a sacrifice for my sins; to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory. Amen!

—PUBLISHED 1563

*Certain Pretty Verses Written
by the Said Lady Jane
With a Pin*

*Non aliena putes homini quae obtingere possunt,
Sors hodierna mihi, tunc erit illa tibi.*¹

Do never think it strange,
Though now I have misfortune
For if that fortune change,
The same to thee may happen.

JANE DUDLEY

*Deo juvante nil nocet livor malus.
Et non juvante nil juvat labor gravis;
Post tenebras spero lucem.*²

If God do help thee,
Hate shall not hurt thee.
If God do fail thee,
Then shall not labour prevail thee.

—PUBLISHED 1563

¹ *Non ... tibi* Latin; paraphrased below.

² *Deo ... lucem* Again, a paraphrase of the Latin follows.

 IN CONTEXT

from John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments of These Latter and Perilous Days* (1563)

In November the Archbishop Cranmer¹ (notwithstanding he had earnestly refused to subscribe to the King's will, in disinheriting his sister Mary, alleging many and pithy reasons for her legitimation) was in the Guildhall of London, arraigned and attainted of high treason, with the Lady Jane, and three of the Duke of Northumberland's sons, which all at the entreaty of certain persons were had again to the Tower.

In this mean while Cardinal Poole² being sent for by Queen Mary, was by the Emperor³ requested to stay with him, to the intent (as some think) that his presence in England should not be a let⁴ to the marriage, which he intended between Philip⁵ his son and Queen Mary: for the making whereof, he sent a most ample ambassade,⁶ with full power to make up the marriage betwixt them: which took such success, that after they had communed of the matter a few days, they knit up the knot.

This was done about the beginning of January, and was very evil taken of the people, and of many of the nobility: who for this and for religion, conspiring among themselves, made a rebellion, whereof Sir Thomas Wyatt,⁷ knight, was one of the chief beginners: who being in Kent, said, that the Queen and the counsel would by foreign marriages bring upon this realm most miserable servitude, and establish popish religion. About the 25 of January, news came to London of this stir in Kent, and shortly after of the Duke of Suffolk, who was fled into Warwickshire and Leicestershire, there to gather a power. The Queen, therefore, caused them both with the two Carews of Devonshire to be proclaimed traitors: and sent into Kent against Wyatt, Thomas Duke of Norfolk,⁸ who being about Rochester bridge, forsaken of them that went with him, returned safe again to London, without any harm done unto him, and without bloodshed of either party. After the Duke of Norfolk was sent the Earl of Huntington in post, who entering the city of Coventry before the Duke, disappointed⁹ him of his purpose. Wherefore the Duke in great distress committed himself to the keeping of a servant of his own in a park, who like a false traitor betrayed him. And so he was brought up to the Tower of London.

In the mean while Peter Carew,¹⁰ hearing of that was done, fled into France: but the other were taken, and Wyatt came towards London in the beginning of February, from whom the Emperor's ambassadors sped themselves away in haste all by water. The Queen, hearing of Wyatt's coming, came into the city into the Guildhall, where she made a vehement oration against Wyatt, declaring that she

¹ *Archbishop Cranmer* Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556), Archbishop of Canterbury who, against his better judgment, signed the document making Jane Grey the successor to Edward VI's throne.

² *Cardinal Poole* Reginald Pole (1500–58), Roman Catholic Cardinal and near relative of the Tudor monarchs.

³ *Emperor* Charles V (1500–58), Holy Roman Emperor (1519–58), and King of Spain (1516–56).

⁴ *let* Hindrance.

⁵ *Philip* Prince of Spain (1527–98), son of Charles V.

⁶ *ambassade* Emissary and his staff.

⁷ *Sir Thomas Wyatt* Son of poet famous for developing the English sonnet, Wyatt (1521?–54) organized an armed rebellion against Queen Mary's marriage to Philip of Spain.

⁸ *Thomas ... Norfolk* Thomas Howard (1473–1554), leader of Mary's forces against Wyatt.

⁹ *disappointed* Thwarted.

¹⁰ *Peter Carew* British nobleman (1514?–75) who supported the Wyatt rebellion.

neither had, not would consent to marry otherwise than should seem to the counsel to be for the wealth of the realm. Wherefore she desired them of the city to stick to her in the suppressing of rebellious Traitors, and defending her royal estate.

As concerning Wyatt, after that he coming to Southwark could not be received that way into London, returning another way by Kingston with his army, he came up through the streets to Ludgate, whereas returning thence, was resisted at Temple Bar and there apprehended, which was upon Ash Wednesday: at what time at the apprehension of the said Wyatt there was a general pardon by the Herald proclaimed, promising generally pardon of life. Yet that notwithstanding, gallows and gibbets were erected in all parts of the city and suburbs of London to the number of twenty or thereabouts (three being set up in Cheapside). Whereupon, diverse of the captains and soldiers of Wyatt were hanged, and he himself afterward executed at Tower Hill and then quartered, whose head after being set up upon the gallows at Hayhill, was there stolen away, and great search made for the same: concerning whose cause and matter I partly refer them to the English Chronicles, such as list more fully to be satisfied therein, and partly hereafter more shall be touched among other things done in the month of April.

The 12 day of February was beheaded the Lady Jane, to whom was sent Master Fecknam alias Howman,¹ from the Queen, two days before her death, to commune with her, and to reduce² her from the doctrine of Christ to Queen Mary's religion, the effect of which communication here followeth.

THE COMMUNICATION HAD BETWEEN THE LADY JANE AND FECKNAM

FECKNAM. Madame, I lament your heavy case,³ and yet I doubt not but that you bear out this sorrow of yours with a constant and patient mind.

JANE. You are welcome unto me, Sir, if your coming be to give Christian exhortation. And as for my heavy case, (I thank God) I do so little lament it, that rather I accompt⁴ the same for a more manifest declaration of God's favour toward me, than ever He showed me any time before. And therefore there is no cause why either you or other which bear me good will, should lament or be grieved with this my case, being a thing so profitable for my soul's health.

FECKNAM. I am here come to you at this present sent from the Queen and her Council, to instruct you in the true doctrine of the right faith: although I have so great confidence in you, that I shall have (I trust) little need to travail with you much therein.

JANE. Forsooth, I heartily thank the Queen's Highness, which is not unmindful of her humble subject: and I hope likewise that you no less will do your duty therein both truly and faithfully, according to that you were sent for.

FECKNAM. What is then required of a Christian?

JANE. That he should believe in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, three persons and one God.

FECKNAM. What? Is there nothing else to be required or looked for in a Christian, but to believe in God?

JANE. Yes, we must believe in Him, we must love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind, and our neighbour as ourself.

¹ *Fecknam... Howman* John de Feckenham (1515?–85), prominent clergyman sent to give spiritual counsel to Jane Grey in the final hours before her execution.

² *reduce* Restore (to Catholicism).

³ *case* Circumstance.

⁴ *account* Account.

FECKNAM. Why? Then faith justifieth not, nor saveth not.

JANE. Yes verily, faith (as Saint Paul¹ sayeth) only justifieth.

FECKNAM. Why? Saint Paul sayeth, if I have all faith without love, it is nothing.

JANE. True it is, for how can I love him, whom I trust not, or how can I trust him whom I love not? Faith and love goeth both together, and yet love is comprehended in faith.

FECKNAM. How shall we love our neighbour?

JANE. To love our neighbour, is to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, and give drink to the thirsty, and to do to him as we would do to ourselves.

FECKNAM. Why? Then it is necessary unto salvation to do good works also, and it is not sufficient only to believe.²

JANE. I deny that, and I affirm that faith only saveth, but it is mete³ for a Christian, in token that he doth follow his master Christ, to do good works: yet may we not say that they profit to salvation. For when we have done all, yet we be unprofitable servants, and faith only in Christ's blood saveth.

FECKNAM. How many sacraments are there?

JANE. Two. The one, the sacrament of Baptism, and the other the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

FECKNAM. No, there are seven.⁴

JANE. By what scripture find ye that?

FECKNAM. Well, we will talk of that hereafter, but what is signified by your two sacraments?

JANE. By the sacrament of Baptism, I am washed with water, and regenerated by the spirit, and that washing is a token to me that I am the child of God. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper offered unto me, is a sure seal and testimony that I am by the blood of Christ, which He shed for me on the cross, made partaker of the everlasting Kingdom.

FECKNAM. Why? What do you receive in that sacrament? Do you not receive the very body and blood of Christ?

JANE. No surely I do not so believe. I think that in the supper, I neither receive flesh nor blood, but only bread and wine:⁵ which bread when it is broken, and the wine when it is drunken, putteth me in remembrance how that for my sins the body of Christ was broken, and His blood shed on the cross. And with that bread and wine I receive the benefits that cometh by the breaking of His body, and shedding of His blood for our sins on the cross.

FECKNAM. Why? Doth not Christ speak these words: "Take, eat, this is my body?"⁶ Require we any plainer words? Doth He not say it is his body?

JANE. I grant He sayeth so: and so He sayeth I am the vine, I am the door,⁷ but He is never the more for that the door nor the vine. Doth not Saint Paul say that He calleth things that are not, as though they were?⁸ God forbid that I should say that I eat the very natural body or blood of Christ. For then

¹ *Saint Paul* One of Christ's Apostles, St. Paul is best known for spreading Christian teachings and uniting small bands of Christians into a unified Church

² *good works ... believe* The role of faith or good works in the salvation of the soul was a major point of contention between Protestants and Catholics.

³ *mete* Appropriate, fitting.

⁴ *seven* Catholicism recognizes seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, the Eucharist, Marriage, Holy Orders, and Last Rites.

⁵ *the supper ... wine* This refers to the Protestant skepticism regarding the doctrine of transubstantiation (the Catholic belief that the bread and wine of communion physically become the body and blood of Christ when consecrated). Protestant doctrine holds that this act is purely symbolic, for reasons Grey outlines below.

⁶ *Take ... body* Cf. Mark 14.22.

⁷ *I am ... door* Cf. John 10.9 and 15.1–10.

⁸ *He calleth ... were* Cf. Romans 4.17.

either I should pluck away my redemption, either else there were two bodies, or two Christs, or else twelve bodies. One body was tormented on the cross. And then if they did eat another body: then either He had two bodies, either else if His body were eaten, then it was not broken upon the cross: or else if it were broken upon the cross, it was not eaten of His disciples.

FECKNAM. Why? Is it not as possible that Christ by his power could make His body both to be eaten and broken, as to be borne of a woman without seed of a man, and as to walk upon the sea having a body, and other such like miracles as he wrought by his power only?

JANE. Yes verily: if God would have done at His supper any miracle He might have done so: but I say that then He minded no work nor miracle, but only to break His body, and shed His blood on the cross for our sins. But I pray you answer me to this one question: where was Christ when He said, "Take, eat, this is my body?" was He not at table when He said so? He was at that time alive, and suffered not till the next day. Well, what took He but bread, what brake¹ He but bread, and what gave He but bread? Look what He took, He brake, and look what He brake He gave, and look what He gave, they did eat, and yet all this while He Himself was alive and at supper before His disciples, or else they were deceived.

FECKNAM. You ground your faith upon such authors as say and unsay both with a breath, and not upon the church to whom ye ought to give credit.

JANE. No, I ground my faith on God's word, and not upon the church, for if the church be a good church, the faith of the church must be tried by God's word, and not God's word by the church, neither yet my faith. Shall I believe the church because of antiquity, or shall I give credit to the church that taketh away from me the half part of the Lord's Supper, and will not let any layman receive it in both kinds but themselves: which thing if they deny to us, then deny they to us part of our salvation? And I say that is an evil church, and not the spouse of Christ, but the spouse of the devil that altereth the Lord's Supper, and both taketh from it and addeth to it. To that church (say I) God will add plagues, and from that church will he take their part out of the book of life. Do they learn that of St. Paul when he ministered to the Corinthians in both kinds? Shall I believe this church? God forbid.

FECKNAM. That was done for a good intent of the church, to avoid an heresy that sprung on it.

JANE. Why shall the church alter God's will and ordinance for a good intent? How did King Saul?² God the Lord defend.

With these and such like persuasions he would have had her lean to the church, but it would not be. There were many more things whereof they reasoned, but these were the chiefest.

These words following were
spoken openly.

After this Fecknam took his leave saying that he was sorry for her. "For I am sure," quoth he, "that we two shall never meet."

JANE. "True it is," said she, "that we shall never meet, except³ God turn your heart. For I am assured, unless you repent and turn to God, ye are in an evil case: and I pray God in the bowels of His mercy to send you His holy spirit, for He hath given you His great gift of utterance, if it please Him to open the eyes of your heart."

—1563

¹ *brake* Broke.

² *King Saul* Old Testament King of Israel who violated God's commandments and had his kingdom taken away.

³ *except* Unless.

