

2013

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“A WOMAN FOR MANY IMPERFECTIONS INTOLERABLE”:
ANNE STANHOPE, THE SEYMOUR FAMILY, AND THE TUDOR COURT

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University
and Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of History

by
Caroline E. Armbruster
B.A., Southeastern Louisiana University, 2010
December 2013

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many who helped me throughout the process of writing this thesis, as well as through my first two years of graduate school. First, I would like to thank my committee in the Department of History. My advisor, Victor Stater, has been a consistent source of advice and encouragement throughout this entire process. His lectures, seminars, and discussions have helped me become a better writer and historian. As a valued mentor, he has guided me through the difficulties that come with writing a thesis. Christine Kooi and Suzanne Marchand have both been invaluable sources of inspiration. Their courses have also made me a better writer and I have greatly appreciated their guidance.

Over the past two years I have formed many new friendships. My fellow graduate students have made the past two years enjoyable and provided me with advice and support. I would like to thank Clara Howell and Megan Spruell in particular. They began this process with me as fellow students of Tudor history. Since then, we have become close friends and travel companions. I cannot imagine my time at graduate school without their friendship and support. I would also like to thank other friends that I have made including Jason and Ali Wolfe, Michael Lane, Kat Sawyer, Amanda Allen, and numerous others.

I made the decision to pursue a career in history only a few years ago, while working on my Bachelor's degree at Southeastern Louisiana University. I owe thanks to Bill Robison, my former advisor, who first convinced me to attend graduate school. His classes sparked my interest in Tudor history and for that I am forever grateful.

I would also like to thank my friends back home, who always know how to help me forget the stress of graduate school. I am tremendously thankful to Victoria Fitzpatrick, Malinda Webster, and Gerilyn Dallmann for their constant friendship.

Finally, I want to thank my family – Kenny, Gretchen, Jack, and Max Armbruster. My parents have always worked to provide me with numerous opportunities and they have taught me the value of hard work, respect, and kindness. My family is an unending source of comfort and support. For their faith in me and for their love, I dedicate this work to them.

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the life and historical image of Anne Stanhope, Duchess of Somerset. Anne lived throughout most of the Tudor period (1510-1587). Throughout her long life, she rose from a mere lady in waiting to a duchess and wife of the Lord Protector. When her first husband, Edward Seymour, fell from power and met his end on the executioner's block in 1552, it was Anne's actions that saved the Seymour family from disgrace. While England endured centuries of religious transformation and political turmoil, Anne not only survived but ensured that her family remained influential and close to the throne. Her long court career, beneficial marriages, personal relationships, and devotion to religious reform made Anne an important noblewoman in Tudor England. This study looks at her role as a lady in waiting at court, her relationships with her husbands and children, and her activities as a patroness of reformist literature.

The majority of historical scholarship has perpetuated a negative image of Anne Stanhope. Historians throughout the centuries have blamed Anne for her husband's faults, particularly his decision to execute his brother, Thomas Seymour. This study will look closely at contemporary sources to show that this image is problematic. Once her image is restored, a more accurate account of Anne's life and her role in Tudor politics, society, and religion can be made. Anne's experience was unique in many respects, yet her life can be used to determine many universal characteristics among Tudor noblewomen. This work will use Anne as a framework for understanding the changing political and religious landscape of Tudor England.

INTRODUCTION

On 20 March 1549 Sir Thomas Seymour, Baron Sudeley and Lord High Admiral of England, approached the site of his execution on Tower Hill in London. He stood accused of thirty-three separate counts of treason, including plotting the abduction of the king, attempting to overthrow the current government, bribery, and extortion.¹ Less than a month earlier, Edward VI's parliament had, by an act of attainder, convicted him and sentenced him to death. Sudeley died "as he had lived, fierce, brave, proud, and revengeful."² He made no confession of his guilt before baring his neck to the executioner. With two blows of the axe, his head was severed from his body – both of which were buried within the grounds of the Tower. Edward VI commented briefly on the day's events, stating in his chronicle, "the Lord Sudeley, Admiral of England, was condemned to death and died the March ensuing."³ This much the young king, aged eleven in the spring of 1549, had to say regarding the execution of his uncle.

The people of Tudor England were well acquainted with the execution of traitors who had once been close to the crown. Henry VIII, the current king's father, had killed wives, trusted counselors, and family members with rival claims to the throne. This execution, however, was the first of Edward's reign involving a traitor close to the young king. Thomas Seymour was Edward VI's maternal uncle – his sister, Jane Seymour, had been Henry VIII's third wife. Sudeley's elder brother, Edward Seymour the Duke of Somerset, was the Lord Protector of

¹ William Seymour, *Ordeal By Ambition: An English Family in the Shadow of the Tudors* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), 376-7.

² Seymour, *Ordeal By Ambition*, 244.

³ W. K. Jordan, ed. *The Chronicle and Political Papers of King Edward VI* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 10-11.

England and the most powerful man in the kingdom.⁴ When Sudeley attempted his political coup, it was his own brother whom he tried to remove from power and his nephew's government that he threatened. Edward VI's council engineered the attainder against Sudeley, preferring to take action against the accused "without further troubling or molesting in this heavy cause either his Highness or the Lord Protector."⁵ It was the Duke of Somerset, however, who "signed the warrant for the execution, though the signature is almost illegible."⁶ He may have felt guilt in sending his own brother to his death, but Somerset willingly removed Sudeley as a threat to his own position.

Friction between the brothers had existed for years, and it intensified upon the death of Henry VIII in 1547, when Edward Seymour, newly made Duke of Somerset, took the reins of his young nephew's government into his own hands through a political coup. Sudeley's actions in 1549 were a desperate bid for power, since his administratively astute brother had frustrated his political ambitions. The dispute was, however, more than a disagreement between brothers. Tudor politics were inherently personal, and the disagreement between Somerset and Sudeley was as much a factional conflict as a family squabble.

Both contemporaries and historians take much of the blame for Sudeley's execution away from Somerset and place it on his wife, Anne Stanhope – who supposedly persuaded her husband to execute his own brother. Sixteenth-century Protestant writers attempted to exculpate the duke from the crime of fratricide, for his administration had initiated the radical religious reform which characterized Edward VI's reign. Rather than slander the reputation of "the Good Duke"

⁴ Edward Seymour obtained various titles throughout his life – Viscount Beauchamp of Hache (1536-1537), Earl of Hertford (1537-1547), Duke of Somerset (1547-1552), and Lord Protector of England (1547-1549). In order to distinguish between members of the Seymour family, this work refers to Edward by his various titles, when appropriate.

⁵ A. F. Pollard, *England Under Protector Somerset: An Essay* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), 194; For clarity, this work has modernized all spelling.

⁶ Pollard, *England Under Protector Somerset*, 198.

with fratricide, they chose instead to accuse his wife of instigating the brothers' feud. Other writers were less inclined to portray the duke in a good light. They preferred to associate Somerset's decision to execute his brother with weakness, and they identified the events of early 1549 as the beginning of his own downfall.⁷ The root of this discord was, again, the Duchess of Somerset.

Allowing wives to take the blame for the misdeeds of their husbands was nothing new for sixteenth-century observers. When Henry VIII had Thomas More executed in 1535, many contemporaries chose to blame Queen Anne Boleyn. Rather than believe the king would willingly kill his old mentor and friend, critics of Anne chose to view her as the architect of More's demise.⁸ Many also believed Queen Anne to be the sole reason for Henry's break with the Roman Catholic Church in 1534. After her own execution in 1536, less than a year after Thomas More's death, many hopeful Catholics expected the king to renew his relationship with the papacy.⁹ Needless to say, Henry VIII did not return to Catholicism and, by the end of 1536, the radical campaign for the dissolution of England's monasteries had begun. Decades earlier, Henry's own grandmother, Queen Elizabeth Woodville, was accused of pressuring her husband, Edward IV, to execute his brother, George, Duke of Clarence.¹⁰ Edward IV's biographer, Charles Ross, argues rightly that the Edward "alone must bear responsibility for his brother's execution."¹¹ The same is certainly true of Edward Seymour and his own brother's judicial death.

When contemporaries sought the cause of the Seymour brothers' conflict, however, many decided that Anne Stanhope was culpable. Her alleged complicity in Sudeley's execution formed

⁷ Edward Seymour was the victim of two political coups, one in 1549 and another in 1551. The latter led to his execution in January 1552, nearly three years after his younger brother's death.

⁸ Eric Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 201.

⁹ Ives, *Anne Boleyn*, 362.

¹⁰ Charles Ross, *Edward IV* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), 243-244.

¹¹ Ross, *Edward IV*, 244.

the basis of her infamous reputation among contemporaries and this image has persisted in modern scholarship on the period. Alison Weir, the well-known author of popular works on the Tudor period, refers to Anne as “a lady who... ruled both her husband and her family with a will of steel, and whose pride [was] notorious.”¹² William Seymour, a biographer of the Seymour family, states that “she was a proud, domineering woman, with a passion for precedence and an overwhelming interest in personal aggrandizement.”¹³ Susan James, a biographer of Queen Catherine Parr (Henry VIII’s sixth wife), describes Anne as “arrogant and unreasonable.”¹⁴ Contemporary scholarship thus believes Anne Stanhope’s greatest fault was excessive pride. Her supposed arrogance brought her into conflict with Thomas Seymour and his wife, the Dowager Queen Catherine Parr. As her husband was Lord Protector and the most powerful man in the kingdom, Anne believed herself to be the first woman in the kingdom. Without a queen consort at the side of Edward VI, both Anne and Catherine (her former mistress) fought for precedence at court. This squabble caused the husbands, the Seymour brothers, to quarrel with one another as well. This version of the events, accepted overwhelmingly by scholars throughout history, has given Anne an unfortunate reputation.

This notorious image of the Duchess of Somerset has kept historians from obtaining a balanced analysis of her life and its significance to the study of the Tudor period. In her work, *Wicked Women of Tudor England: Queens, Aristocrats, Commoners*, Retha Warnicke investigates the truth behind Anne Stanhope’s notorious image and finds that it is almost completely inaccurate.¹⁵ The only scholar to question Anne’s reputation, Warnicke also delves

¹² Alison Weir, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (New York: Grove Press, 1991), 540.

¹³ Seymour, *Ordeal By Ambition*, 221.

¹⁴ Susan James, *Catherine Parr: Henry VIII’s Last Love* (Gloucestershire, UK: The History Press, 2008), 273.

¹⁵ Retha M. Warnicke, *Wicked Women of Tudor England: Queens, Aristocrats, Commoners* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 77-104.

into the stories of other supposed immoral women – Henry VIII’s wives, Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard; Lettice Knollys, Countess of Essex and Leicester; as well as Thomas More’s wives, Jane Colt and Alice Middleton. With regard to Anne Stanhope, Warnicke successfully exposes contemporary sources as hostile or misinformed in order to resuscitate the Duchess’s character. Her focus is, however, on disproving the wickedness of these six women. The short biography at the end of the chapter on Anne Stanhope is straightforward and – aside from Warnicke’s thoughts on the precedence quarrel between the Duchess and Queen Catherine Parr – lacking much insight into the significance of her life and career as a noblewoman in Tudor England. Warnicke also states that Anne “did not have great influence over public policy,”¹⁶ in order to support her conclusion that the Duchess of Somerset did not force her husband to execute his brother. This statement, however, is not completely accurate. Anne certainly did not control her husband. As this work will show, both the Duke and Duchess believed Thomas Seymour deserved death. With regard to public policy, however, the couple worked together in more or less of a political partnership – first at court under Henry VIII and later as Duke and Duchess of Somerset. The impact of this partnership is difficult to assess, but this study will attempt to do so.

This work will build upon Warnicke’s conclusions in order to provide a more comprehensive examination of Anne Stanhope’s story. The ability to look beyond her supposed “wickedness” is a necessary step toward doing this. As a noblewoman and a member of the Seymour family (a prominent force in Tudor politics), Anne’s experience is essential for a better understanding of the period. Her marriages, encounters at court, sympathy for religious reform, impact on her children’s education, and her contribution to her family’s survival – all attest to her significance. In her work, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family*,

¹⁶ Warnicke, *Wicked Women*, 77.

Property and Careers, Barbara Harris argues that “the tiny number who combined marriage with appointments at court” occupied “the most powerful, socially desirable position open to aristocratic women.”¹⁷ What did these women, like Anne Stanhope, accomplish once they attained these positions? What sort of impact did they have on Tudor politics and religion? What sort of relationships, personal and political, did they form at court? How did marriage affect such women’s sense of agency? This work will attempt to answer such questions.

Though not strictly a biography, this study will use the basic outline of Anne Stanhope’s life in order to discuss various aspects of her experience as a Tudor noblewoman and as a member of the Seymour family. Chapter One looks at Anne’s career as a young lady at the court of Henry VIII and her first marriage to Edward Seymour. An investigation of her personal relationship with Edward is necessary for understanding events later in her life, as well as for understanding fully the concept of marriage between aristocratic men and women. Chapter Two provides an account of Anne’s time as a great lady under Queen Catherine Parr. It was at this point that she fully embraced the reformed faith. Finding that most of the other women in Queen Catherine’s Privy Chamber held similar religious beliefs, Anne formed many enduring personal and political relationships. It was also during this time that her husband, as Earl of Hertford, became a leading advisor to Henry VIII. This work will also explore her political relationship with Edward Seymour and how it compared to other married couples at court. Chapter Three explains the supposed conflict between Catherine Parr and Anne Stanhope, and, consequently, examine the true nature of Thomas Seymour’s downfall. Chapter Four examines Anne’s time as Duchess of Somerset under Edward VI, when her husband was Lord Protector of England. During this period, she became a major patroness of reformist literature. In 1549 and 1551, the

¹⁷ Barbara Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 61.

Duke of Somerset was the victim of political coups at court. The former lost him the Protectorate, the latter his life. The Duchess was imprisoned in the Tower of London until the next reign. Chapter Five looks at the remainder of Anne's life throughout the reigns of Queens Mary and Elizabeth Tudor. Released from prison and restored to her titles, Anne was determined to keep the Seymour family in the current monarch's good graces. Despite the political blunders of her son, Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford, she died a wealthy and powerful woman in 1587. The Seymour family also continued to serve the crown long after the Tudor line died out.

Anne Stanhope's experience was unique in many respects, yet her life can be used to determine many universal characteristics among Tudor noblewomen. By looking beyond her notorious historical reputation, this work will use Anne as a framework for understanding the changing political and religious landscape of Tudor England.

CHAPTER ONE: TO COURT

The Beginning of a Career

By the time of her death in 1587, Anne Stanhope was a wealthy and influential woman. She had lived through the reigns of four monarchs and had served in the households of six queens consort. In her lifetime, she rose from a mere lady in waiting to the upper ranks of the peerage. Consecutively a viscountess, countess, and ultimately a duchess, she knew how important royal service was for political and social standing. As a young woman new at court, Anne Stanhope could never have known the heights she would eventually reach. Yet her career was promising from the start.

Born in 1510 to Sir Edward Stanhope and his second wife, Elizabeth Bouchier, Anne's family connections ensured that she would easily find a position at the royal court. Her father had fought for Henry VII at the Battle of Stoke and against the Cornish Rebellion, after which he was knighted. Anne would not have known her father, though, for he died in 1511 – when she was still an infant. As a result, she was probably brought up by members of her maternal family. Elizabeth Bouchier, her mother, was a descendant of Edward III through his youngest child, Thomas of Woodstock. Edward III had many children and numerous descendants, so the Bouchiers were certainly not considered members of the royal family. Elizabeth did, nevertheless, provide her daughter with a royal lineage and noble connections. Anne's maternal grandfather, Fulk Bouchier, held the title Baron FitzWarin. His son, John, became the Earl of Bath in 1536.¹

¹ Warnicke, *Wicked Women*, 87.

Anne's extended family connections included a stepbrother, Michael Stanhope, from her father's first marriage. Michael served at court with Anne from a young age and became a chief ally and friend of her husband, Edward Seymour. In 1512, a year after Sir Edward Stanhope's death, Elizabeth Bouchier married again – this time to Sir Richard Page. Through her mother Anne also had two stepsisters, Catherine Verney (from a previous marriage) and Elizabeth Page. It is clear that Anne Stanhope came from a prominent family and, because familial networks were useful political alliances, a well-connected one as well.

Historian Anthony Martiensen states that “Anne never allowed anyone to forget that she was descended through her maternal great-grandmother from Thomas Woodstock,” considering “herself therefore to be of Royal blood.”² This is, according to Martiensen, evidence of her “snobbery and pride.”³ In a society that valued social standing, however, an individual's ancestry mattered. A “dash of royal blood” was particularly important with regard to marriageable women, as this was an attractive quality for procreation.⁴ All four of Henry VIII's English queens – Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Catherine Howard, and Catherine Parr – were descended remotely from medieval kings. It was this quality that made them eligible for royal marriage in the eyes of many of Henry's subjects. Anne Stanhope's similar background counted for much in Tudor England. Naturally, Anne began her career at a young age by serving as a lady in waiting at court.

Referring to royal service as a “career” for women is both useful and logical. Women like Anne Stanhope spent most of their lives at court. It was there they often met their husbands,

² Anthony Martiensen, *Queen Katherine Parr* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Limited, 1973), 125.

³ Martiensen, *Queen Katherine Parr*, 125.

⁴ Antonia Fraser, *The Wives of Henry VIII* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1992), 234.

made social alliances, and later launched their own children on a similar path.⁵ Anne's generation was, in particular, shaped by its experiences at court. It was in the households of queens that Anne came into contact with new ideas about religion. She also made a number of useful attachments with other women at the Tudor court. These personal alliances would be of great importance to Anne and her family during moments of crisis.

Though there is no record of Anne Stanhope's arrival at court, it is likely that she began as a maid of honor in the 1520s.⁶ Her first position was under Henry VIII's first wife, Queen Catherine of Aragon.⁷ The responsibilities of maids of honor, as well as all ladies in waiting, varied considerably. These duties could, at times, be "of a very menial nature." The queen's ladies and maids served her at meals, often holding a cloth ready "for when she list to spit or do otherwise at her pleasure."⁸ Ladies also helped the queen dress and kept her company in her chambers. More importantly, they attended her during formal audiences, banquets, and on visits outside of the court. Here they could watch and learn from their mistress, using the court as a "finishing-school and marriage-market."⁹

It was in Queen Catherine's household that Anne made, arguably, the most significant personal connection of her life, Princess Mary Tudor. Henry and Catherine's only living child, Mary was born in 1516 – making her a mere six years younger than Anne Stanhope. It is clear that the two formed a close friendship. Mary retained affection for her mother's memory long

⁵ Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 211.

⁶ Any date before this is unlikely, as Anne (b. 1510) would have been too young to serve at court. She certainly waited on Catherine of Aragon, who was Henry VIII's first queen until 1533. Queen Catherine lost her position at court to Anne Boleyn, however, in 1531. Thus, Anne must have become a lady in waiting at some point in the 1520s.

⁷ Patrick Fraser Tytler, ed. *England Under the Reigns of Edward VI and Mary* (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1839), 1: 51; Princess Mary Tudor writes to Anne Stanhope – "...when you were one of her Grace's [Catherine of Aragon's] maids..."

⁸ Anne Somerset, *Ladies in Waiting: From the Tudors to the Present Day* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), 13.

⁹ Somerset, *Ladies in Waiting*, 13.

after Queen Catherine's death in 1536. This affection often extended to those individuals, such as Anne, who had served her mother loyally. Despite the fact that the two women's religious beliefs diverged beginning in the 1530s, Mary never lost her fondness for Anne.

In 1533, Henry VIII divorced Catherine of Aragon and proclaimed a pregnant Anne Boleyn the new queen consort of England. Queen Anne gave birth to the Princess Elizabeth later that year and the newly-styled "Lady" Mary lost both her mother (who was banished from court) and her position as her father's heir. In 1536, Catherine of Aragon died a few months before Henry VIII had Anne Boleyn executed. The king then moved on to his third wife, Jane Seymour, who was kind to Mary and worked to bring her back under her father's wing. Soon back at court and in her father's good graces, Mary could now show her gratitude to those who had supported her mother. Throughout the 1530s and 1540s Anne and Mary exchanged gifts, played cards and chess, and paid visits to one another.¹⁰ When Anne gave birth to her first child in February 1537, Mary did not hesitate to congratulate and support her friend. She gave money to Anne's nurse and to her midwife.¹¹ A month later, Mary visited Anne and her child and, once again, gave money to the nurse.¹² Anne gave birth for the second time the next year, and Mary presented her with similar gifts for the child's christening.¹³ When writing letters to Anne, Mary always referred to her affectionately as, "my Good Gossip" and "my good Nann."¹⁴ She often signed her letters as "your assured friend to my power during my life."¹⁵

¹⁰ Frederick Madden, ed. *Privy Purse Expenses of the Princess Mary, Daughter of King Henry the Eighth, Afterwards Queen Mary* (London: William Pickering, 1831), 33, 46, 49, 57, 58, 97, 113, 143, 149, 184.

¹¹ Madden, *Privy Purse Expenses*, 16.

¹² *Ibid.*, 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁴ Tytler, *England Under the Reigns of Edward VI and Mary*, 51.

¹⁵ *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII: Volume 19 Part 1: January-July 1544, June 1544, 1-5, 620.*

When Jane Seymour supplanted Anne Boleyn as Henry VIII's queen, Mary was not the only one to benefit. Anne Stanhope had probably transferred from Catherine of Aragon's household to that of Anne Boleyn in 1533 (like most of the young ladies at court). While serving Queen Anne, she married Sir Edward Seymour. A year later, Edward's sister was the new queen of England. It was Henry VIII's third marriage that allowed Anne Stanhope and her husband to begin their slow climb up the ranks of the peerage.

A Promising Marriage

Anne Stanhope wed Sir Edward Seymour sometime in early 1535, certainly before 9 March.¹⁶ She probably knew him well before this, however, for Edward had been at court since 1514. He served in various positions, beginning as a page of honor to Henry VIII's sister, Mary Tudor, when she became queen of France. He then attended Emperor Charles V, Catherine of Aragon's nephew, on his visit to England in 1522. In 1523 he participated in the invasion of France and was knighted that November. A year later, he became an esquire of the king's household before serving as master of horse for the Duke of Richmond, Henry's VIII's illegitimate son. He also accompanied Cardinal Thomas Wolsey on his embassy to France in 1527. By 1531, Edward was an esquire of the body to Henry VIII himself.¹⁷ At the time of his marriage to Anne Stanhope, Edward Seymour was in good favor with the king, who likely considered him a dedicated servant.

¹⁶ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII: Volume 8: January-July 1535, March 1535*, 1-10, 361.

¹⁷ Barrett L. Beer, "Seymour, Edward, duke of Somerset." in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/101025159/Edward-Seymour> (accessed July 22, 2013).

Edward was born in 1500, making him a full decade older than his new wife. The eldest son of Sir John Seymour and Margery Wentworth, Edward (like Anne) was a remote descendant of Edward III. He first married Catherine Fillol sometime before 1518. She gave him two sons, John and Edward. At some point, Edward repudiated his first wife because of a possible infidelity on her part. Catherine may have gone into a nunnery soon after, and was certainly deceased by the time of Edward's second marriage.¹⁸ Though he continued to acknowledge his sons by Catherine as legitimate, he was determined to keep his hereditary titles from them. His second wife, Anne Stanhope, was more suited to Edward's needs. Both had served at court from a young age and were (as will be shown) politically astute and ambitious. According to Antonia Fraser, "the combination of a calculating husband and a strong-minded wife made the Seymours a team to be reckoned with."¹⁹

Edward Seymour had many siblings, though he was closest with his sisters, Jane and Elizabeth, and his brother, Thomas. Jane Seymour, as mentioned above, caught the eye of Henry VIII in early 1536. Though he was still married to Anne Boleyn at the time, the king began courting Jane and, after a time, decided that he wanted to do so more privately. Edward Seymour, his new wife, and his sister were installed in Thomas Cromwell's rooms at Greenwich, "which the King can go by certain galleries without being perceived." As Jane had "been well taught for the most part by those intimate with the King," she succeeded in marrying Henry VIII a mere eleven days after Anne Boleyn's execution.²⁰ Eustace Chapuys, the imperial ambassador, implied that Jane had been coached by her family in order to attract the king and, consequently, bring about the downfall of the Boleyns and the rise of the Seymours. Anthony Martiensen

¹⁸ Elizabeth Norton, *Jane Seymour: Henry VIII's True Love* (Gloucestershire, UK: Amberly Publishing, 2009), 38-40.

¹⁹ Fraser, *The Wives of Henry VIII*, 235.

²⁰ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII: Volume 10: January-June 1536, April 1536*, 1-10, 601.

takes this even further, claiming that Anne Stanhope's personal ambitions, her determination "to regain the position in society to which she believed she was entitled," pushed her husband and his immediate family forward.²¹ Once again, Anne is accused of urging her inactive and hesitant husband to action. This is an inaccurate portrayal of their relationship. Edward Seymour and his family were every bit as ambitious as Anne Stanhope.

As a result of Jane's royal marriage, the Seymour family did well by their ambitious maneuvering. In July 1536, less than two months after the marriage, Henry VIII made Edward Seymour Viscount Beauchamp of Hache.²² In 1537, when Jane gave birth to the king's longed-for son and heir, Henry made Edward Earl of Hertford.²³ Throughout his rapid rise to power and influence, Anne was at Edward's side. Within two years, she had gone from the wife of a mere knight to a viscountess, then a countess, and aunt to a future king. Her career at court persisted and she continued to serve in the queen's household – under her sister-in-law and all of Henry's remaining wives. As Edward's wife and a lady of the queen's chamber, she became a formidable noblewoman with both royal and factional connections at court.

Others recognized Anne's increased status. Lady Lisle, wife of Arthur Plantagenet Viscount Lisle (an illegitimate son of Edward IV), petitioned Anne and other important ladies throughout the early months of 1537 in order to obtain a place for her two daughters in the royal household. The girls, Anne and Catherine Basset, were from Lady Lisle's first marriage. Well acquainted with the rules of court, their mother knew that "parents who wanted their daughters to become the queen's maids had to cultivate and reward senior members of her entourage," such as Anne Stanhope.²⁴ Lady Lisle was unable to speak with such women in person, as she was in

²¹ Martiensen, *Queen Katherine Parr*, 125.

²² *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*: Volume 11: July-December 1536, July 1536, 6-10, 38.

²³ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*: Volume 12 Part 2: June-December 1537, 16-20, 938.

²⁴ Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 219.

Calais where her husband was Lord Deputy. Consequently, she sent gifts and tokens to various ladies at court through her husband's agent, John Husee. She cultivated, in particular, the services of the Countesses of Sussex and Rutland, the Duchess of Suffolk, and the Viscountess Beauchamp – Anne Stanhope.²⁵ Her suit was successful in July of that year when she decided to send the pregnant Queen Jane a gift of quails. Anne, along with the Countesses of Sussex and Rutland, served them to their mistress at dinner. John Husee wrote to Lady Lisle – “Her Grace chanced, eating of the quails, to comment of your ladyship and of your daughters; so that such communication was uttered by the said ladies that her Grace made grant to have one of your daughters.”²⁶ Jane chose Anne Basset, who from that day launched her own successful career at court. After serving Queen Jane as a maid of honor, she continued to do so in the households of Henry VIII's remaining three queens. Lady Lisle thanked the women responsible for her daughter's court position by sending more gifts.²⁷

It was probably this successful exchange that led Lady Lisle to later request a position for her daughter Catherine (the one Queen Jane did not pick), this time in Anne Stanhope's own household. Edward Seymour, then Earl of Hertford, wrote to Lady Lisle that Catherine “shall be welcome when you please to send for her.”²⁸ Unfortunately, Catherine expressed a desire to remain with the Earl and Countess of Rutland, with whom she was already staying.²⁹ Hertford accepted this, but wrote back with regret, “if she had come she would have been welcome to him and his wife as one of his own daughters.”³⁰ William Seymour writes that Catherine Basset declined a place in the Hertfords' household because “she was certain that Anne Seymour would

²⁵ Muriel St. Clare Byrne, ed. *The Lisle Letters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 4: 874, 875, 880.

²⁶ Byrne, *The Lisle Letters*, 4: 887.

²⁷ Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 220.

²⁸ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII: Volume 14 Part 1: January-July 1539, April 1539*, 11-15, 762.

²⁹ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII: Volume 14 Part 1: January-July 1539, May 1539*, 6-10, 947.

³⁰ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII: Volume 14 Part 1: January-July 1539, May 1539*, 26-31, 1033.

treat her as a servant.”³¹ This is likely an invented explanation, for noblewomen like Anne Stanhope considered it their duty to foster the next generation – to help educate them and launch their own careers. Parents of the nobility often sent their children at a young age to live in other households. This was usually done in order to strengthen personal alliances, to arrange early marriages, and to teach the children how to serve their superiors (in the hopes that one day they would do so at court).

Anne and Edward treated their own children exceptionally well. Both sons and daughters received “identical instruction in the Bible and classics by humanistic tutors.”³² They provided positions in their household to leading intellectual figures of the period such as Thomas Becon, Nicholas Denisot, and William Samuel.³³ These men influenced the children’s upbringing, as they were responsible for their education. Denisot, for example, was the Seymour girls’ French tutor.³⁴ Becon, who believed “that women are the intellectual equals of men,” praised Anne Stanhope and her husband for their progressiveness with regard to education.³⁵ In his work dedicated to their daughter Jane, *The Governance of Virtue*, Becon stated “there are no parents, most godly lady, that deserve better of the Christian public weal, than they which, through God’s gift having children, employ all their endeavours to train them up, even from their very cradles, in good letters and in the knowledge of God’s most blessed will.”³⁶

Anne Stanhope gave Edward Seymour ten children, four boys and six girls. The Seymour girls, particularly the eldest three – Anne, Margaret, and Jane – were lauded by contemporaries

³¹ Seymour, *Ordeal By Ambition*, 125.

³² John N. King, “Patronage and Piety: The Influence of Catherine Parr,” in *Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works*, ed. Margaret Patterson Hannay (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1985), 53.

³³ King, “Patronage and Piety,” 53.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Thomas Becon, *The Early Works of Thomas Becon, S. T. P.*, ed. John Ayre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1843), 396.

for their learning. On the death of Marguerite de Navarre, the three Seymour girls produced a Latin tributary poem in her honor, titled *Annae, Margaritae, Ianae, Sororum Virginum Heroidum Anglarum, In Mortem Divae Margaritae Valesiae Navarrorum Reginae, Hecatodistichon*.³⁷ Marguerite, sister of King Francis I of France, was an author and renowned patron of humanist scholars. The girls' French tutor, Denisot, praised their accomplishment and edited their work.³⁸ Their continental connections also included the reformers Martin Bucer, Paul Fagius, and even John Calvin. Jane wrote to Bucer and Fagius thanking them for their "exceeding praise of the addresses of myself and my sisters."³⁹ Calvin wrote to Jane's sister, Anne, that she was "not less distinguished by... virtue than by... birth."⁴⁰ He had been informed of her "liberal education (which is very unusual in a lady of such birth and station)" and that she was "conversant in the doctrine of Christ." As with Thomas Becon, Calvin recognized the source of this education to be Anne Stanhope, "the most illustrious princess, your mother."⁴¹

Retha Warnicke states that Edward and Anne's decision to provide their daughters with a classical education was probably "politically motivated" in order to associate "their education with that of the king's daughters."⁴² Their decision was certainly in keeping with the trends of the time. According to Susan James, "the precedent-setting educations of the royal Tudor princesses encouraged a century-long trend."⁴³ With mothers such as Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn, and a stepmother in Catherine Parr – all women with renowned intellectual

³⁷ For the full poem and translation, see: Demers, Patricia, "The Seymour Sisters: Elegizing Female Attachment," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* vol. 30, no. 2 (1999), 356-365.

³⁸ King, "Patronage and Piety," 53.

³⁹ Hastings Robinson, ed. *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation, Written During the Reigns of King Henry VIII, King Edward VI, and Queen Mary: Chiefly from the Archives of Zurich*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1846), 1: 2.

⁴⁰ Robinson, *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation*, 2: 703.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Warnicke, *Wicked Women*, 88.

⁴³ James, *Catherine Parr*, 128.

abilities and a devotion to humanist teachings – the Princesses Mary and Elizabeth became educational trendsetters.

Anne Stanhope's decision to educate her daughters was politically astute but it also probably sprang from a sincere appreciation for learning. Many of the other women at court – Catherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk, Joan Champernowne, Lady Denny, and Jane Guildford, Countess of Warwick – set their children on a similar educational path. It is also important to remember that “to the Tudor mind, education and religion were inextricably linked.”⁴⁴ As will be discussed in greater detail later, Anne Stanhope was firmly devoted to religious reform. By giving her children a progressive education, she was contributing to the “new religious order,” in which female learning became a necessity in order to fulfill “spiritual requirements.”⁴⁵ Literacy was essential, for women needed to become familiar with scripture in order to lead a pious life.

As the parents of children celebrated for their intellectual abilities, servants of the crown, and respected members of the nobility, Edward Seymour and Anne Stanhope were firmly established as high-ranking members of the court. They were also brother and sister-in-law to the king himself, as well as aunt and uncle of the infant Prince Edward. A mere twelve days after the prince's birth, however, Queen Jane Seymour died. Henry VIII mourned his third wife and did not remarry for nearly three years. The king remembered her fondly as the mother of his only son. In the 1540s, he had a portrait painted of the royal family. The portrait included the king with his son, Edward, at his side, while the Princesses Mary and Elizabeth (still legally illegitimate from their mother's annulments) stand away at either side. Standing near Henry and

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Edward is Jane Seymour, despite the fact that when the portrait was painted the king was married to his sixth wife, Catherine Parr.⁴⁶

Henry's affection for Jane extended to her Seymour relatives. In 1538, over a year after her death, the king was finally in good spirits and had a lavish banquet. Those present were his closest friends and confidantes –the Duke and Duchess of Suffolk, the Earl and Countess of Sussex, Lady Lisle, and, of course, Edward Seymour and Anne Stanhope. The couple remained permanent fixtures in the royal households. When Henry finally married again in 1540 to Anne of Cleves, they both attended her reception. Less than a year later, Anne Stanhope was serving in the household of the new queen, Catherine Howard.⁴⁷ Henry had the teenage Queen Catherine executed in 1542, after learning of her sexual escapades before and after her royal marriage. Jane Parker, Viscountess Rochford and a lady of the queen's household, was executed alongside her for complicity in the queen's misconduct. Anne Stanhope, however, remained disconnected from such dangerous matters and suffered no loss of status when her mistress fell from power. During the king's progress north – when Catherine Howard had committed adultery with Thomas Culpeper, a member of Henry VIII's Privy Chamber – Anne remained in London with her husband.⁴⁸

As shall be shown in more detail later, Anne was deeply devoted to maintaining her own (as well as her family's) dignity and honor. This was not due to an overabundance of pride or snobbery, but from the practicality and experience of service at the Tudor court. "The court is full of pride, envy, indignation and mocking, scorning and derision," John Husee wrote to Lady

⁴⁶ James, *Catherine Parr*, 132.

⁴⁷ Retha Warnicke, "Inventing the Wicked Women of Tudor England: Alice More, Anne Boleyn, and Anne Stanhope," *Quidditas* 20 (1999), 21.

⁴⁸ Martiensen, *Queen Katherine Parr*, 138.

Lisle when her daughter Anne attained a position in Jane Seymour's household.⁴⁹ It was also a place where a single misstep could result in loss of life. By 1542, Henry VIII had executed two wives, two of his closest advisors, and various members of his extended family.

Anne Stanhope and her husband managed to survive and prosper under the Henrician regime. Edward gained further honors – between 1541 and 1543, he had become a Knight of the Garter, warden of the Scottish marches, Lord High Admiral, and Lord Great Chamberlain.⁵⁰ In 1540, nearly three years after becoming Earl of Hertford, Edward decided to honor Anne Stanhope and their children by giving them precedence with regard to inheritance. By an act of Parliament, Hertford's lands and titles were settled on “the heirs male of himself and lady Anne, his wife.”⁵¹ Though he had already repudiated his first wife, Catherine Fillol, before his second marriage, he had waited five years to confirm Anne in such a position. In the spring of 1540 she had given her husband three sons and two daughters – with only the eldest, Edward, dying in infancy.⁵² She remained with child throughout most of her marriage. As mentioned above, she gave birth to ten children between 1537 and 1550. She maneuvered through court positions with ease, matching her husband's own political ambitions. Anne Stanhope was now the mother of Edward's heirs, and she was certainly worthy of the position.

Aside from her obvious genealogical worth and her political aptitude, Anne also provided Edward Seymour with a harmonious and loving marriage. This fact is almost completely missing from both contemporary and modern historical works. A. Audrey Locke, another biographer of the Seymour family, argues that it was “by the persuasion of Anne Stanhope” that Edward

⁴⁹ Byrne, *The Lisle Letters*, 4: 887.

⁵⁰ Beer, “Seymour, Edward,” in *ODNB*.

⁵¹ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*: Volume 15: 1540, April 1540, 11-20, 498.

⁵² Warnicke, “Inventing the Wicked Women of Tudor England,” 22.

Seymour excluded his sons from his first marriage from their inheritance.⁵³ In her version of the event, Catherine Fillol and her children are wronged through Anne's vicious scheming. Historians generally portray Anne as a manipulative and overbearing wife. Contemporary sources, however, do not support this depiction. A closer look at Edward and Anne's relationship reveals that it was a concordant, loving, and mutually beneficial marriage. They agreed on most matters, shared the same religion, helped one another politically, and showed noticeable affection toward one another. Anne was a fierce supporter of her husband and her children. Edward valued his wife's opinion and she enjoyed considerable influence with him. She did not need to resort to forceful persuasion and she certainly did not rule "over her weaker husband by the lash of her tongue."⁵⁴

In November 1542, Sir Thomas Wriothesley wrote to Edward Seymour, who was then serving as warden of the Scottish marches. As Wriothesley was at court, he sent "letters from 'my lady' [Anne]" along with his correspondence.⁵⁵ The courtier beseeched the Earl of Hertford to make a speedy answer for "she perceives she will not be merry until she hears from him."⁵⁶ Throughout that month, Wriothesley's correspondence with Hertford usually ended with assurances of Anne's health, and he often included letters from her.⁵⁷ In 1544, when Hertford became Lieutenant-General in the north (another post that took him from court), Anne petitioned Henry VIII's wife, Catherine Parr, to use her influence with the king to have the earl recalled home. Queen Catherine wrote back, assuring Anne that the earl would come home soon.⁵⁸

⁵³ A. Audrey Locke, *The Seymour Family: History and Romance* (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1911), 193.

⁵⁴ Weir, *The Six Wives*, 540.

⁵⁵ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*: Volume 17: 1542, November 1542, 6-10, 1067.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*: Volume 17: 1542, November 1542, 6-10, 1049.; November 1542, 21-25, 1123.

⁵⁸ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*: Volume 19 Part 1: January-July 1544, June 1544, 1-5, 620.

Unfortunately, by the time he returned to court, the king was preparing for war with France. Hertford accompanied Henry to the siege of Boulogne two months later. There he helped secure the city's surrender by supposedly bribing the French commander.⁵⁹

Edward Seymour was not always absent from his wife. In May 1539 he ensured that he was there for the birth of his child, despite the fact that the king had sent him to France in order to oversee the defense of Calais and Guînes.⁶⁰ This was Anne's third pregnancy and she gave birth to a boy. The couple no doubt considered this child a blessing, as their only other son, Edward, had died in infancy. They named their new son Edward, and a year later (when Hertford disinherited his children by Catherine Fillol) the child became his father's heir.

Edward Seymour was attentive to his wife's needs, and he valued her judgment. When she was not serving at court, Anne Stanhope – as a wife and the Countess of Hertford – was mistress of a large household. As mentioned above, Lady Lisle sought to place her daughter, Catherine, in the Hertfords' household in 1539. She asked the earl for this honor while he was in Calais that year, but he deferred from giving a definitive response. When he returned to London, he informed Lady Lisle that he had first spoken with his wife – “I have consulted with my wife about your request to have your daughter here.”⁶¹ At first glance, Hertford's deferment to his wife's will seems like the action of a weak husband. Young Catherine Basset would, however, have been under Anne Stanhope's direct care in their household, and it was therefore only natural and courteous for Hertford to consult his wife first. Lady Lisle had no qualms with how he handled her request and the next month she wrote to thank Hertford and “my Lady” for their

⁵⁹ Beer, “Seymour, Edward,” in *ODNB*.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*; Seymour, *Ordeal By Ambition*, 134.

⁶¹ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*: Volume 14 Part 1: January-July 1539, April 1539, 11-15, 762.

“goodness.”⁶² Edward Seymour and Anne Stanhope were mutually fond and respectful of one another, working as a team in political and administrative matters.

The couple found that they suited one another in their religious beliefs as well. Most scholars argue that “Somerset’s duchess [Anne] can be much more positively linked with reformers” than her husband, and she “was widely recognized as a woman of radical religious views.”⁶³ As with politics, contemporaries and historians assume that Anne influenced her weak husband considerably. Edward Seymour, then, was “a man of some piety but little specialized knowledge, whose inclinations were, perhaps as a result of his wife’s influence, towards the radical rather than the conservative end of the spectrum.”⁶⁴ His religious beliefs, however, cannot be fully attributed to his wife’s radicalism. During Henry VIII’s long reign, the couple had inclined toward more progressive reform. Particularly toward the end of Henry’s reign, when legislation such as “the repressive Act of Six Articles” threatened further reform, “they had welcomed leading evangelicals to their London house.”⁶⁵ As mentioned above, their children’s tutors were often reformers as well, making “the Seymour household... a nursery of Protestantism and a forum for humanist exchange.”⁶⁶ Edward Seymour, ever cautious of his standing during Henry VIII’s capricious reign, endangered his position and his safety by supporting reformers. In 1547, when he became Duke of Somerset and Lord Protector of England, he used his new position to initiate a regime that was responsible for some of the most radical religious reform in England’s history. As will be discussed later, Anne also became a

⁶² *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII: Volume 14 Part 1: January-July 1539, May 1539, 6-10, 947.*

⁶³ Jennifer Loach, *Edward VI*, ed. George Bernard and Penry Williams (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 43.

⁶⁴ Loach, *Edward VI*, 47.

⁶⁵ Susan Brigden, *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors, 1485-1603* (New York: Penguin Group, Inc., 2000), 184.

⁶⁶ Demers, “The Seymour Sisters,” 346.

major patroness of reformed religious works. In these ways, “Somerset and his redoubtable duchess had long sustained the evangelical cause.”⁶⁷

As a reformer, Edward Seymour had rejoiced at the marriage of Henry VIII and Anne of Cleves in 1540.⁶⁸ It signified an alliance between England and the Protestant princes of Germany. The marriage fell apart quickly, however, and Henry divorced Anne within a few months. In the process, Thomas Cromwell – his trusted minister – fell from power and was executed that July. Cromwell had been responsible for much of the administrative religious reform during the 1530s, and reformers at court feared a backlash. The conservatives, led by Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, and Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, rose to prominence briefly when Henry married Catherine Howard, Norfolk’s niece. Catherine’s time as queen proved brief as well – she was dead within two years. By 1543, Henry VIII was becoming reactionary and less inclined to religious innovation. Without the innovative Cromwell, reformers at court – including Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, Anthony Denny (the king’s close friend), and Edward Seymour – felt it was safer to bide their time for now.

On 12 July 1543 Henry VIII married his sixth and final wife, Catherine Parr. The reformers soon realized that they had an advocate in the new queen. Catherine’s tenure as queen proved to be momentous for Edward Seymour and Anne Stanhope. Anne served Queen Catherine as a great lady of her household. There, she became part of a network of aristocratic women – with the queen at their head – that supported religious reform. A number of these women had husbands who served the king. With contacts in both royal households, the reformist faction at court was able to solidify its influence with the dying king in time to take control of his son’s administration.

⁶⁷ Brigden, *New Worlds, Lost Worlds*, 184.

⁶⁸ Beer, “Seymour, Edward,” in *ODNB*.

CHAPTER TWO: “STIRRERS OF HERESY”

A Great Lady of the Queen’s Chamber

Edward Seymour and Anne Stanhope attended Henry VIII and Catherine Parr’s wedding on 12 June 1544 in the Queen’s Closet at Hampton Court.¹ Despite their later disagreements, Catherine and Anne maintained a close relationship throughout the former’s time as queen consort. The two women were close in age and, along with the other ladies in Catherine’s chambers, shared many of the same religious beliefs. By the time Catherine became queen, Anne Stanhope had been at court for at least twenty years. No longer a mere lady in waiting, she became one of the great ladies of the household and part of the queen’s inner circle. Other members of this circle included Catherine Willoughby (Duchess of Suffolk), Joan Champernowne (Lady Denny), Jane Guildford (the new Lady Lisle), Mary Arundell (Countess of Arundel), Anne Calthorpe (Countess of Sussex), and Anne Parr (Lady Herbert and Queen Catherine’s sister). These women shared a bond that was held together by “a combination of blood ties, self-advancement, an interest in scholarly pursuits and a missionary zeal to define and disseminate the tenets of the new religion.”²

The ladies attended Queen Catherine constantly – helping her dress, serving her at dinner, accompanying her throughout the court and on visits elsewhere, as well as keeping her company throughout the day. By now an expert in court service, Anne Stanhope was familiar with “the elaborate rituals which controlled life in the royal household” and “the intricacies of prerogative,

¹ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*: Volume 18 Part 1: January-July 1543, July 1543, 11-15, 873.

² James, *Catherine Parr*, 129.

pedigree and ceremony.”³ It was Catherine Parr who was, in the beginning, unacquainted with life at court. Though her mother, Maud Green, had served Queen Catherine of Aragon, Catherine Parr did not spend much time at court. She spent the majority of her life in the countryside, and was married three times. It was not until 1543, upon the death of her second husband, that she came to court under the service of Lady Mary. Queen Catherine adapted quickly to court life, however, for she was “energetic by character and eager to excel in this, the most important role of her life.”⁴ With her network of ladies beside her, she quickly grew comfortable in her position. In February 1544, she entertained the Spanish Don Manriquez de Lara, Duke of Najera. He was impressed with Queen Catherine and her ladies – Anne Stanhope included – who “were dressed in different silks, with splendid headdresses.”⁵ The queen herself was praised as having “a lively and pleasing appearance,” and for being “a virtuous woman.”⁶ In less than a year, Catherine had become a capable and impressive queen.

At first, the majority of those at court, regardless of religious predilection, accepted Henry’s new queen. Eustace Chapuys approved of her warm relationship with the Princess Mary, whom the ambassador supported passionately. The day of the marriage, the ambassador wrote, “May God be pleased that this marriage turn out well, and that the King’s favor and affection for the princess, his daughter, continue to increase.”⁷ Other conservatives at court – including Thomas Howard, Stephen Gardiner, Thomas Wriothesley, and Richard Rich – also approved of Catherine at first. Though, like Chapuys, they misinterpreted her kindness to Mary “as a

³ Ibid., 101.

⁴ Ibid., 107.

⁵ Ibid., 106.

⁶ Ibid., 107.

⁷ *Calendar of Letters, Despatches, and State Papers, Relating to the Negotiations Between England and Spain*, 6.2: 436.

tendency to sympathize with Mary's religion."⁸ Catherine Parr was, by this time, firmly devoted to religious reform and her household soon became "the royal clubhouse of the new religion."⁹ She held regular sessions in her chambers in order to discuss theological works and listen to sermons by her chaplains which "oftimes touched such abuses as in the Church there were rife."¹⁰ Anne Stanhope and the other ladies of the queen's household attended these sessions. As she already held reformist beliefs before serving Queen Catherine, Anne assimilated well into this group of intellectual and devout women.

Reform and the Queen's Household

In 1534, Henry VIII severed ties with the papacy and declared himself Supreme Head of the Church of England. From that moment, England ceased to be a Catholic kingdom. Yet under Henry it was not a Protestant one either. The king attempted for over a decade to keep his subjects in line with his own unique beliefs regarding religious theology and authority. He disapproved of continental reform and believed those who followed such teachings were heretics. Those who adhered to Catholicism were considered traitors. Henry VIII's own beliefs were theologically conservative, but he disapproved of anything that seemed to threaten his authority – such as the papacy and monasticism. Henry did attempt to reform some aspects of the Anglican Church – he eradicated much of the visible cult of saints and was responsible for the first authorized edition of the Bible in English. His beliefs on transubstantiation, clerical celibacy, and other key theological issues, however, remained the same as they had been when he had been a devoted Roman Catholic. Though his religious beliefs remained relatively stable

⁸ James, *Catherine Parr*, 231.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹⁰ Somerset, *Ladies in Waiting*, 44.

throughout the late 1530s and 1540s, the king was unpredictable in his distribution of favor at court. Both the conservative and reformist factions stood a chance of swinging Henry to their side.¹¹

Catherine Parr and her household played an important role in this factional religious conflict. Her network of women was a dynamic force in politics and ecclesiastical matters. The conservative faction at court feared Catherine's social circles. They believed that women such as "the widowed Duchess of Suffolk, Lady Hertford, and Lady Dudley" had "infected Catherine with their private views."¹² Their greatest fear was that because "the King showed favour to them all" the queen, "urged by the reformists," would be able "to convert the King."¹³ In January 1547, days before Henry VIII's death, the imperial ambassador Eustace Chapuys expressed concerns regarding the "stirrers of heresy" at court and believed Catherine Parr to be "infected" by Anne Stanhope, Catherine Willoughby, and Jane Guildford in particular.¹⁴ Anne's influence with both the first woman at court and her husband put her in a particularly formidable position. She, the other noblewomen in the queen's household, and their husbands made the most of this situation.

It is easy to see why the reformist faction at court made Ambassador Chapuys nervous. Among them were Edward Seymour, Anthony Denny, John Dudley, and Archbishop Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury. The first three held positions in the king's Privy Chamber and had wives who served the queen. Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk and close friend to the king, also had personal ties to Seymour and Dudley. They had served together in both France and Scotland, and

¹¹ For a more comprehensive account of the Henrician Reformation and the king's own beliefs see: Richard Rex, *Henry VIII and the English Reformation*, 2nd Ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

¹² Weir, *The Six Wives*, 515-516.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 515.

¹⁴ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII: Volume 21 Part 2: September 1546-January 1547*, January 1547, 21-29, 756.

Brandon was godfather to Seymour's eldest son.¹⁵ Brandon was somewhat neutral with regard to religion – his loyalties lay with the king – but his wife, Catherine Willoughby, was wholeheartedly committed to religious reform. She was also an heiress and held considerable power in her own right. As mentioned above, the queen herself – the individual closest to the monarch – was also an enthusiastic reformer.

The conservative faction at court was led by Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester and Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk. Two useful supporters, Thomas Wriothesley and Richard Rich, were more concerned with their political careers than with religion. Though they prosecuted heretics with zeal during the last years of Henry VIII's reign, both would prove amenable to the Protestant reign of Edward VI. Princess Mary was a steadfast supporter of Catholicism, but Prince Edward – the heir – and Princess Elizabeth were being brought up with decidedly reformist tutors. The prince, however, was young, and it became apparent that the next reign would begin with a minor as monarch. As Henry VIII grew older and increasingly frail in the mid-1540s, a factional conflict for control over the fate of the kingdom became inevitable.

The reformers at court had a distinct advantage – their intimacy with the king. Edward Seymour and Anne Stanhope had been brother and sister-in-law to Henry and were still uncle and aunt to his only son. John Dudley's stepfather, Arthur Plantagenet, the previous Viscount Lisle, was Henry's uncle. Anthony Denny, along with being a close friend of the king, was in charge of a large portion of the royal finances.¹⁶ Most importantly, these men served in the Privy Chamber and on the king's military campaigns. They were the sort of men Henry VIII had enjoyed surrounding himself with from a young age – interested in active pursuits such as tournaments and war. The king rewarded his jousting companions with political honors. Denny

¹⁵ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII: Volume 14 Part 1: January-July 1539, May 1539, 26-31, 1026.*

¹⁶ Patricia C. Swensen, "Patronage from the Privy Chamber: Sir Anthony Denny and Religious Reform," *Journal of British Studies* vol. 27 no. 1 (1988), 31-32.

became First Chief Gentleman of the Privy Chamber and Groom of the Stool in 1546 – making him the king’s most influential personal servant.¹⁷ After becoming Viscount Lisle in 1542, Dudley also obtained the position of Lord Admiral a year later. As mentioned above, Edward Seymour had become the Earl of Hertford upon the birth of his royal nephew in 1537, and he continued to reap political benefits from his relationship with the king. Dudley and Seymour also served as members of the Privy Council throughout the 1540s.

Like Edward Seymour, many of these reformers had marital counterparts in the queen’s Privy Chamber. Anne Stanhope, as mentioned above, worked well with her husband on both a personal and political level. Joan Champernowne, “known for her looks and learning,” was married to Anthony Denny.¹⁸ Contemporaries considered Champernowne to be “one of the most beautiful women at court as well as one of the most intelligent,” and this blend of positive qualities made her “an indispensable ally for her husband.”¹⁹ Jane Guildford, wife of John Dudley, also worked closely with her husband. Guildford and Dudley had a strong affection for one another. She wrote in 1553 that her husband was “the most best gentleman that ever [a] living woman was matched withal.”²⁰

As wives of leading courtiers and as women of the queen’s Privy Chamber, Anne Stanhope and her fellow ladies had far more access to court patronage than most of their female contemporaries. The ability to distribute and control patronage allowed these women to exercise a large amount of influence independent of their husbands.²¹ A few, however, were also able to work with their husbands as political partners. Their ability to do so was dependent upon the

¹⁷ Swensen, “Patronage from the Privy Chamber,” 33.

¹⁸ James, *Catherine Parr*, 94.

¹⁹ Swensen, “Patronage from the Privy Chamber,” 31.

²⁰ S. J. Gunn, “A Letter of Jane, Duchess of Northumberland,” *The English Historical Review* vol. 114 no. 459 (1999), 1270.

²¹ Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 210-211.

nature of their marriage and whether or not their beliefs coincided with that of their partners'. Anne Stanhope, Joan Champernowne, and Jane Guildford certainly met these criteria. All three had amicable marriages and husbands with a devotion to religious reform. Catherine Willoughby and her husband, Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, also had a harmonious relationship. Though the duke was less interested in reform, his loyalty to the king and desire to remain politically powerful kept him on good terms with the reformers. Other examples of reformist couples with court connections included William Butts and his wife Margaret Bacon, as well as William Herbert and his wife Anne Parr. Butts was Henry VIII's personal physician. Herbert's wife was Catherine Parr's sister and she served as chief lady of the new queen's bedchamber. These married couples made the reformist faction a formidable political entity.

Some reform-minded women associated with Queen Catherine, due to less amicable marriages, were unable to contribute to court politics. Anne Calthorpe, Countess of Sussex, was unlucky in her marriage. Her husband, Henry Radcliffe, Earl of Sussex, differed from his wife in religion and they did not care for one another personally.²² Though Anne Calthorpe had access to patronage through the queen and was a fervent supporter of reform, she was unable to work through her husband. This restricted her political influence immensely. Elizabeth Stafford, Duchess of Norfolk, was also trapped in a disastrous marriage. Though she supported the reformed religion, her husband was Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk – a leader of the conservatives.²³ The duke and duchess became estranged in the 1520s, when Norfolk began an affair with a woman named Bess Holland. The duchess refused to ignore her husband's infidelity and their marriage deteriorated quickly. Though Norfolk continued to serve at court, Elizabeth

²² The Earl and Countess of Sussex divorced in 1555. Calthorpe had fled to the Continent two years earlier to escape Mary I's Catholic reign. Radcliffe stayed and served the new queen, who made him a Knight of the Garter.

²³ James, *Catherine Parr*, 199.

Stafford lived much of the rest of her life in isolation as she became estranged from her family.²⁴ She was naturally incapable of serving at court or contributing to religious reform.

Anne Stanhope, in contrast, was able to exercise a large amount of influence through her husband and in the queen's Privy Chamber. This was in large part due to the personal nature of politics at the Tudor court. While unable to gain a central role in politics themselves, women could still influence policy. Those at court – “where the king interacted with members of the nobility” and “developed the personal relationships that ultimately determined whom he would promote to office” – were in an advantageous position. The Tudor court intermixed the public and private spheres and “distribution of resources and exercise of power took place outside formal institutions.”²⁵ Family groups and informal social alliances allowed women to participate in politics and further their own agenda. For women of particularly high rank, such as Anne Stanhope, patronage was the essential method for political participation. As a great lady in Catherine Parr's Privy Chamber, Anne was able to control access to the queen and petitions often went through those serving in the household. As described above, the ladies of Jane Seymour's chambers combined their efforts to obtain a position for one of Lady Lisle's daughters at court. Anyone hoping to ask a favor of the queen, whether a young girl or an experienced politician, usually had to cultivate the good graces of members of the household. A similar situation existed in the king's Privy Chamber. Thus Anne Stanhope, her fellow ladies in Catherine Parr's household, and their husbands exercised considerable influence.

Though the conservative faction at court had powerful members such as the Bishop of Winchester and the Duke of Norfolk, they were not as well-connected or as well-placed as the

²⁴ Barbara Harris, “Marriage Sixteenth-Century Style: Elizabeth Stafford and the Third Duke of Norfolk,” *Journal of Social History* vol. 15 no. 3 (1982), 373-375.

²⁵ Barbara Harris, “Women in Politics in Early Tudor England,” *The Historical Journal* vol. 33 no. 2 (1990), 259, 281.

reformers. The Act of Six Articles, passed in 1539, probably made the conservatives feel more at ease. It was a “draconian straightening of doctrine” that reaffirmed many Catholic beliefs such as transubstantiation and clerical celibacy.²⁶ Most importantly, for the conservatives, it had Henry VIII’s full support. Megan Hickerson argues that, despite its rigidity with regard to certain theological points, the Act of Six Articles “failed to usher in widespread persecution.”²⁷ For conservatives at court, however, the Act provided them with a way to build a case against the reformers. The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, in particular, was a hotly contested point between conservatives and reformers in England. The theologically traditional Henry VIII never denied the real presence – making it a dangerous principle for reformers to refute. It is clear, however, that the majority of the reformist faction did contest transubstantiation. The issue of clerical celibacy was treacherous as well, for Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, had been secretly married since 1535. The Act of Six Articles destroyed the archbishop’s hopes that clerical marriage would soon be legalized.

Though the conservatives were unaware of Cranmer’s marriage, the Act of Six Articles and the king’s reactionary beliefs gave them the incentive they needed to mount an attack against the Archbishop. In 1543 various canons at Canterbury Cathedral complained to the king about Cranmer’s support of heretics. Henry VIII, who was fond of Cranmer’s “easy-going honesty, otherworldliness, compassion and total lack of personal ambition,” told the archbishop of the accusations. The king then appointed Cranmer as head of the commission charged with investigating the accusations – effectively ending the matter.²⁸ The conservatives did not give up on their attempts to topple the archbishop, who was one of the most important individuals in the

²⁶ Megan Hickerson, “Negotiating Heresy in Tudor England: Anne Askew and the Bishop of London,” *Journal of British Studies* vol. 46, no. 4 (2007), 776-777.

²⁷ Hickerson, “Negotiating Heresy in Tudor England,” 777.

²⁸ Robert Hutchinson, *The Last Days of Henry VIII: Conspiracies, Treason and Heresy at the Court of the Dying Tyrant* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), 98.

reformist faction. They came closer to having Cranmer arrested in 1545 but, once again, Henry stepped in at the last moment to save his archbishop. When Cranmer arrived in the Privy Council chamber, he showed the king's ring (a sign of royal favor) to the accusers. It is clear that during both incidents Henry allowed events to play out long enough to humiliate both sides – with Cranmer as the escaped victim and the conservatives as the failed attackers. This was probably an attempt to balance the two factions at court and to keep them aware of the king's supremacy in politics.²⁹

Unable to bring down Cranmer, the conservatives turned to their next targets – the queen and her ladies. Their plot against Catherine Parr also had the potential to destroy those reformers closest to the king, for they would naturally be implicated in their wives' disgrace. The first piece of evidence illuminating the plot against the queen came in 1546, when a young woman named Anne Askew was arrested for heresy. She came to the authorities' attention for denying transubstantiation, a belief reaffirmed by the Act of Six Articles. This was not the first time she had been arrested – a year earlier the conservative Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London, had interrogated her regarding her beliefs. The bishop was unable to find any incriminating evidence and, after she signed a confession of faith written by Bonner, Askew was released.³⁰

In June 1546, Anne Askew was arrested once again. This time, leading conservatives at court took an interest in her interrogation. Thomas Wriothesley and Richard Rich brought her to the Tower and soon had her tortured, despite the fact that it was illegal to use the rack on women

²⁹ Hutchinson, *The Last Days of Henry VIII*, 99-102.

³⁰ Though Edmund Bonner later became famous for his persecution of heretics under Mary I, earning him the nickname "Bloody Bonner," Megan Hickerson argues persuasively that Bonner did not want to make Anne Askew a martyr. She also asserts that his epithet is unfair, as he was an unenthusiastic persecutor under both Henry VIII and Mary I. The bishop did not take part in Askew's later interrogation, torture, and execution in 1546; See Hickerson, "Negotiating Heresy in Tudor England," 775-776, 781-783.

(especially gentlewomen like Askew).³¹ Throughout her torture, it became apparent that Wriothesley and Rich were less concerned with information about Askew's beliefs than with those of her friends. Her brother, Edward, had been in Archbishop Cranmer's service and her sister, Jane, was married to George St. Poll, a lawyer in the service of Catherine Willoughby and her husband.³² She also had personal connections with most of the women in Catherine Parr's household and with the queen herself. While torturing Askew, the interrogators asked about her relationship with "my lady of Suffolk, my lady of Sussex, my lady of Hertford, my lady Denny and my lady Fitzwilliam."³³ They also informed her that the king knew she "could name... a great number of [her] sect."³⁴ Askew did admit that both Anne Stanhope and Joan Champernowne had given her monetary aid while she was incarcerated in the Tower.³⁵ This revealing confession demonstrates Anne Stanhope's devotion to religious reform and to supporting those in her network. It was certainly dangerous to give Askew any sort of assistance, but both Anne and Lady Denny chose to do so. They perhaps felt that their positions – and that of their husbands – were secure enough to endure association with a heretic.

Anne Askew was burnt at the stake with other convicted heretics on 16 July 1546. She had refused to implicate seriously anyone at court and had suffered for her intransigence – her time on the rack had dislocated her joints and she had to be carried to her execution at Smithfield. Most importantly, Askew had not mentioned the queen during her interrogation. Susan James argues that the conservatives' main target in torturing Askew for information was

³¹ Elaine V. Beilin, "Anne Askew's Self-Portrait in the *Examinations*," in *Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works*, ed. Margaret Patterson Hannay (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1985), 89.

³² Diane Watt, "Askew, Anne," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/101000798/Anne-Askew> (accessed July 28, 2013).

³³ *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII: Volume 21 Part 1: January-August 1546, July 1546, 1-5*, 1181.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Catherine Parr, rather than the husbands of the women brought up during questioning. She asserts that if Wriothesley and Rich were more concerned with the husbands than with the queen, then “the targets were strangely chosen.”³⁶ To support this argument, James states that “neither Sir Anthony Denny nor Sir William Fitzwilliam were of such importance that their fall would be a fatal blow to the reformed religion group.”³⁷ She also points out that Catherine Willoughby’s husband, the Duke of Suffolk, was dead by this point. Willoughby was, however, a dangerous enemy to the conservatives with or without her husband. Though Catherine Parr was undoubtedly a prime target for the conservatives, Stephen Gardiner and the rest of his faction certainly sought to bring about the downfall of their male enemies as well.

The ultimate prize of this factional struggle was political control during the next reign, and the conservatives could not hope for any influence with the young Edward VI unless their opponents were eliminated. As will be explained later, Anthony Denny was of great importance for the Protestant coup in 1547. Denny’s actions, along with many of the other reformers, ensured that Edward VI’s minority regency was firmly in the hands of their faction. Edward Seymour, the new king’s maternal uncle and Anne Stanhope’s husband, emerged as the leader of this coup.

The Protestant Coup

In an attempt to place themselves in a better political position for the next reign, the conservatives decided to launch one last attack against the queen. Catherine Parr had served as regent for the king in 1544 during the latter’s final military campaign in France, demonstrating

³⁶ James, *Catherine Parr*, 243.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

her administrative abilities and Henry's trust in her. She was also close to her royal stepson, Prince Edward, who referred to her as his "dearest Mother."³⁸ There was clearly a possibility that she would have political influence in the next reign, making the queen a force that needed to be dealt with.

By 1546, Catherine Parr probably felt that her relationship with her royal husband was secure. She had been queen for three years, had served as regent, and had successfully healed rifts between the king and his daughters. She had succeeded in all she had sought to do and, naturally, believed that the same would be true of her efforts regarding religious reform. Henry VIII, who was intellectually and theologically astute, enjoyed discussing religion with his wife. At first, this was a pleasant exercise for the king. The queen grew bolder, however, during their discussions and began to "contradict and instruct him."³⁹ Stephen Gardiner, overhearing one of these conversations, realized Henry was growing disenchanted with his wife's enthusiasm and decided to expose the queen as a heretic. After their failure with Anne Askew, the conservatives decided to proceed with an assault on Catherine Parr herself. Henry, wary and mistrustful since Catherine Howard's discovered infidelities, allowed Gardiner and his supporters to investigate his sixth wife's beliefs. After the conservatives presented the king with evidence of the queen's heresy, Henry agreed to draw up a warrant for her arrest.

Catherine Parr escaped the fate of Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard, however, by skillfully arguing her way out of the situation. It is not clear how she became aware of the plot against her. In John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* the warrant for her arrest "was providentially dropped by accident and found its way into her hands."⁴⁰ Once aware that she was in danger, however, Catherine met with Henry privately (something her deceased predecessors had been

³⁸ Hutchinson, *The Last Days of Henry VIII*, 75.

³⁹ James, *Catherine Parr*, 236.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 247.

unable to do). The king “tried to lure Catherine into another compromising religious argument,” but this time she demurred and explained that she was only “a silly poor woman.”⁴¹ Her husband was the true authority on religion – “supreme head and governor here in earth, next unto God.”⁴² This speech greatly appealed to Henry’s sense of supremacy and he immediately forgave her, stating – “Then, perfect friends we are now again, as ever any time heretofore.”⁴³ Gardiner and the conservatives had been outwitted. When Thomas Wriothesley came to arrest the queen as planned later that week, Henry ordered him away after calling him an “arrant knave,” a “beast,” and a “fool.”⁴⁴ The conservatives’ failure to bring down the queen made it impossible for them to regain favor with the king and this gave the reformers the opportunity to take control of the next reign.

Had Catherine Parr been arrested (and executed), Anne Stanhope, her husband, and many other reformers at court would have probably lost their place as royal confidantes. Anne may have also suffered the same fate as her mistress – as Jane Parker had when Catherine Howard was executed. Instead, the failed coup against the queen resulted in the eclipse of the conservative faction at court and, consequently, the ascendancy of the reformers. The tension between the two groups was palpable by the end of 1546, and the reformers did not hesitate to strike against their opponents. During a particularly tense Privy Council meeting, John Dudley, Viscount Lisle expressed his frustration and disgust by striking Stephen Gardiner in the face.⁴⁵ Within less than a year, Gardiner was exiled from court and excluded from any part in the future Edward VI’s government. The once-powerful Howard family suffered its final blow when both the Duke of Norfolk and his son, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, were imprisoned for treason.

⁴¹ Ibid..

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 248.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Hutchinson, *The Last Days of Henry VIII*, 181.

Henry VIII had Surrey executed, but Norfolk escaped with his life when the monarch died the day of the duke's planned execution.

With the leading conservatives effectively silenced, the reformers soon consolidated their power. In December 1546, the new imperial ambassador, Francis van der Delft, wrote to Charles V – “four or five months ago great enquiries and prosecutions were carried out against the heretics and sacramentarians, but they have now ceased since the Earl of Hertford and the Lord Admiral have resided at court.”⁴⁶ The ambassador also observed that the Privy Council was “much inclined to please and entertain the Earl and Admiral” and that “the meetings of the Council are mostly held in the Earl of Hertford's house.”⁴⁷ The reformers, or what Anthony Martiensen refers to as “the Hertford faction,” were now clearly the dominant force at court.

A key moment came when the king finally accepted that his health was deteriorating and death was imminent. He gave Anthony Denny, along with John Gates and William Clerk, control over the royal dry stamp. This dry stamp was to be used as a substitute for the royal signature, effectively making Denny and his supporters “the true authority lurking behind the throne.”⁴⁸ Henry then decided on the makeup of his son's regency government by creating a council of sixteen executors to see that his will was carried out after his death. This group included Edward Seymour, Thomas Cranmer, John Dudley, Anthony Denny, and a number of other reformers. Also among the executors were Lord Chancellor Thomas Wriothesley and Chief Secretary William Paget – previous conservative supporters. Edward Seymour took initiative by making an alliance with Paget, who had not suffered any political repercussions from his association with Thomas Howard and Stephen Gardiner. The Earl of Hertford realized that Secretary Paget was of the utmost importance for interpreting the royal will, for “the distribution of dignities in the new

⁴⁶ *Calendar of State Papers, Relating to England and Spain*, 6: 533-534.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 534.

⁴⁸ Hutchinson, *The Last Days of Henry VIII*, 152.

reign was determined solely by what he [Paget] declared had been Henry's intentions."⁴⁹ While waiting for Henry VIII to take his last breath, the two courtiers hastily agreed to thwart the dying king's wishes. In exchange for creating a Protectorate under his control, Hertford promised "to be guided by his [Paget's] advice in preference to any other."⁵⁰ By the time Henry had passed away on 28 January 1547, his carefully constructed plan for his son's minority had already been destroyed.

Edward Seymour quickly emerged as the natural leader of the Protestant coup, and the creation of a Protectorate was a masterful achievement on his part. As A. F. Pollard explains, "his long and faithful services, his relationship to [Prince] Edward, the success which had attended his military enterprises, and his popularity with the masses, constituted in his own eyes an indefeasible claim to a position at least equal to that enjoyed by John, Duke of Bedford, or Richard, Duke of Gloucester, during the minorities of Henry VI and Edward V."⁵¹ The majority of those at court agreed and, without struggle, Edward Seymour became Duke of Somerset and Lord Protector of England. Henry had instructed that the "said executors, or the most part of them, may lawfully do what they shall think convenient for the execution of this our will."⁵² Since a majority of the executors appointed by Henry approved of the Protectorate, the change was technically in accordance with the royal will.

Edward VI's accession was only the second peaceful transfer of power since the Wars of the Roses, a conflict ever-present in the minds of the Tudors and their subjects.⁵³ With this in mind, the new Lord Protector of England decided to halt the execution of his old enemy, the

⁴⁹ Pollard, *England Under Protector Somerset*, 17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵³ Henry VII won the throne of England by defeating Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485. His son, Henry VIII, had succeeded peacefully in 1509.

Duke of Norfolk, so that his nephew's reign did not begin with bloodshed. Thomas Wriothesley, the most powerful executor who objected to Edward Seymour's coup, paid the price by losing his place in the new government. Edward VI's regime dismissed him from the Privy Council and placed him under house arrest. Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, soon ended up in the Tower for openly disagreeing with the Protestant religious policies of the new king's reign.

Within a matter of months, Anne Stanhope's husband had gone from a courtier fighting a factional battle for his life to the most powerful peer in the kingdom. Anne was now the Duchess of Somerset and, unquestionably, had more political influence than any other woman in England. This role suited her, as she had been working quietly to further her husband's religious and political agenda. Now that the couple had achieved their aims, however, difficulties emerged that they had probably not foreseen. Queen Catherine had been, up until this point, Anne's mistress. The queen had guided the women of her household on matters of reform and politics, but now the balance of power had been upset. The ladies' husbands, Edward Seymour in particular, were in charge of the government, and Catherine Parr was now a queen dowager. As such, she was still a member of the royal family and technically ranked higher than the Duchess of Somerset.⁵⁴ Her political influence, however, was vastly diminished and she had no real role in her stepson's regime. Having expected to take on the role of royal regent herself, she resented the Duke of Somerset's position as Lord Protector.⁵⁵ Friction between Anne and Catherine, two powerful and headstrong women, was inevitable. Without a queen consort at the side of Edward VI, both women attempted to assert themselves as the first lady at court. Matters became worse when Catherine decided to marry Thomas Seymour with indecent haste, for the younger Seymour

⁵⁴ Warnicke, *Wicked Women*, 89.

⁵⁵ James, *Catherine Parr*, 270.

brother resented Somerset's authority. The consequences of this tense situation would have a significant impact on the Protectorate and on Anne Stanhope's historical image.

CHAPTER THREE: “A WOMAN FOR MANY IMPERFECTIONS INTOLERABLE”

A Family Squabble

In the spring of 1547, Queen Dowager Catherine Parr married Thomas Seymour in a secret ceremony mere months after the death of Henry VIII.¹ Seymour, now Baron Sudeley, delayed making his new marriage public, knowing that both Edward VI and the Duke of Somerset would disapprove. The couple decided to petition the Duke and Duchess of Somerset for approval first, as if their marriage had not yet transpired. Sudeley spoke with Anne Stanhope in March, probably asking her to intercede with her husband on his behalf. He wrote to Catherine Parr – “My lady of Somerset told me on Friday night that she would to Sheen at the next day, and at her return on Tuesday... she would see your highness.... I pray, if ye see yourself in good credit with her, to desire her grace to be my good lady. And if I see myself in more favor than you, I shall make the like request for you.”² By May of that year, however, the duchess and queen dowager still had not spoken. It is clear that Anne Stanhope was hesitant to help the couple, for she disapproved of the match.³ Sudeley was reluctant to speak to his elder brother directly, knowing that Somerset also objected to the marriage. Queen Catherine wrote to her new husband – “I gather by your letter... ye are in some fear how to frame my lord your brother to speak in your favor.”⁴ Sudeley also enlisted the help of the queen’s stepdaughter, Princess Mary. The princess, however, was quick to make her displeasure known – “I perceive strange news concerning a suit you have in hand to the Queen for marriage. For the sooner obtaining whereof,

¹ James, *Catherine Parr*, 269.

² Katherine Parr, *Katherine Parr: Complete Works and Correspondence*, ed. Janel Mueller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 133.

³ Parr, *Complete Works*, 138.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

you seem to think that my letters might do you pleasure.”⁵ Mary refused to speak with the Duke of Somerset or Edward VI, for she did not want “to be a meddler in this matter, considering whose wife her grace was of late.”⁶ She ended her letter to Sudeley by subtly chastising her stepmother – “If the remembrance of the King’s majesty, my father... will not suffer her to grant your suit, I am nothing able to persuade her to forget the loss of him, who is as yet very ripe in mine own remembrance.”⁷ Thomas Seymour and Catherine Parr realized quickly that their marriage was unpopular with nearly everyone at court.

This tension surrounding the newly married couple coincided with the growing hostility between Edward and Thomas Seymour over politics at court. As his older brother rose to the highest position in the kingdom, Thomas Seymour expected to rise accordingly. The younger Seymour did gain titles – he became a Knight of the Garter, Baron Sudeley, and Lord Admiral of England. He also obtained membership in the new king’s Privy Council. Sudeley maintained feelings of resentment toward his brother, however, who had always eclipsed him in politics.⁸ His marriage to the queen dowager later that year offered him a chance to bolster his own position at court and to assert more control over his nephew’s government. Both Edward Seymour and Anne Stanhope had every reason to feel threatened by this marriage.

For Catherine Parr, who likely possessed genuine feelings of affection for her new husband, the duke and duchess’s disapproval merely angered her personally. Her indignation increased when Somerset failed to hand over some of the dower lands from her royal marriage. He also refused to give her the majority of the queen’s royal jewels, arguing that they belonged

⁵ Ibid., 146.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ James, *Catherine Parr*, 269-270.

to the state and were not her personal possessions.⁹ Queen Catherine's disillusionment with the duke and duchess is evident as early as February 1547, when she wrote to Sudeley about her petition to the duke regarding her dower lands – "My lord your brother hath deferred answer concerning such requests as I made to him till his coming hither... This is not his first promise I have received of his coming, and yet unperformed. I think my lady [Anne Stanhope] hath taught him that lesson, for it is her custom to promise many comings to her friends, and to perform none."¹⁰ Catherine Parr clearly expected Anne Stanhope, who had been a lady of her household only a month earlier, to intercede with Edward Seymour on her behalf. She did not anticipate that Anne, now the Lord Protector's wife, would support her husband instead. Though Catherine Parr, Anne Stanhope, and Edward Seymour had worked together to further reform at court and to take charge of the new reign, their alliance shattered almost immediately. Queen Catherine's failure to assume any real political responsibility over her nephew's government, Somerset's mishandling of her dower lands, and the duke and duchess's refusal to accept her new marriage caused the queen dowager to act recklessly.

By May 1547, Queen Catherine was able to speak with the Duke of Somerset. The conversation probably concerned her property suits as well as her new marriage. Somerset stood his ground concerning her land and jewels and probably told her of his displeasure with regard to her marriage. She wrote to Sudeley soon after – "My lord, this shall be to advertise to you that my lord your brother hath this afternoon a little made me warm. It was fortunate we were so much distant, for I suppose else I should have bitten him. What cause have they to fear [you] having such a wife? ... Tomorrow, or else upon Saturday afternoon about three o'clock, I will see the King: where I intend to utter my choler to my lord your brother, if you shall not give me

⁹ Ibid., 270-271.

¹⁰ Parr, *Complete Works*, 130-131.

advice to the contrary.”¹¹ By the end of June, Edward VI had finally granted his permission for his stepmother’s new marriage, though he was unaware that it had already taken place months before.¹² Catherine Parr had succeeded in marrying her husband of choice, but she still nursed resentment toward the Duke and Duchess of Somerset. She considered their elevation above her to be a personal insult and begrudged the fact that they had disapproved of her actions.

On 30 August 1548, Catherine Parr gave birth to her only child, a girl named Mary Seymour. Probably in an attempt to ease the tension between he and his brother, Somerset wrote to Sudeley congratulating him “on the safe delivery of the Queen of so pretty a daughter.”¹³ Less than a month earlier, Anne Stanhope gave birth to yet another son and expressed her hope that Queen Catherine would soon have a boy as well.¹⁴ It seems as though the Duke and Duchess of Somerset hoped that the family quarrel was over. A few days after Mary Seymour’s birth, however, Catherine Parr died from childbed fever. The queen dowager’s absence did not ease the tension between the Seymour brothers.

Sudeley continued to plot the subversion of his brother’s position. He disobeyed orders from the king and council repeatedly, neglected his duties, and opposed government measures on every occasion.”¹⁵ He attempted to foment revolt among the nobles and began assembling men and weapons.¹⁶ His ruthless ambition became apparent even before Catherine Parr’s death, when Princess Elizabeth came under the care of her stepmother and Baron Sudeley in their household at Chelsea. The lively and charming teenager attracted the inappropriate attentions of her stepmother’s husband. Sudeley acted in an indecent manner toward “the next-but-one heiress” by

¹¹ Ibid., 140-141.

¹² James, *Catherine Parr*, 275.

¹³ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reigns of Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547-1580*, 11.

¹⁴ *State Papers, Domestic, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547-1580*, 9.

¹⁵ Pollard, *England Under Protector Somerset*, 190.

¹⁶ Loach, *Edward VI*, 56.

appearing before her “bare-legged and clad only in a short night-gown,” by “flinging back Elizabeth’s bed curtains,” and by “entering the girl’s room before she was fully dressed, patting her ‘upon the back or the buttocks familiarly’.”¹⁷ After his wife’s death, he even entertained the idea of marrying Elizabeth.¹⁸

Anne Stanhope took a particular interest in the matter between Thomas Seymour and Princess Elizabeth. She personally rebuked Katherine Ashley, Elizabeth’s governess, for allowing the princess to go “in a night barge upon the Thames [with Thomas Seymour], and for other light parts.”¹⁹ The Duchess of Somerset told Kat Ashley “she was not worthy to have the governance of a King’s daughter” and accused her of bearing “too much affection to my Lord Admiral.”²⁰ Anne realized quickly that her brother-in-law was a liability for the Seymour family, and she believed that it was her responsibility to chastise those involved with the scandal at Chelsea. Elizabeth’s honor was at stake and the duchess stepped in to regulate the situation. Within a matter of weeks, she sent the princess away to Hatfield House.

It is not difficult to assess the objective behind Sudeley’s actions – unable to obtain any political power over his royal nephew, he attempted to bring Elizabeth under his influence. He sought to place himself above his brother through both marriage and subversion. Particularly after Catherine Parr’s death, Edward VI’s council viewed Sudeley’s actions as devious and questioned those involved, including Princess Elizabeth.²¹ The possibility of a marriage between Thomas Seymour and Elizabeth was offensive to the Duke of Somerset and Edward VI’s

¹⁷ Fraser, *The Wives of Henry VIII*, 404.

¹⁸ Loach, *Edward VI*, 56.

¹⁹ Samuel Haynes, ed., *A Collection of State Papers, Relating to Affairs in the Reigns of King Henry VIII, King Edward VI, Queen Mary, and Queen Elizabeth from the Year 1542 to 1570. Left By William Cecill Lord Burghley* (London: William Bowyer, 1740), 96.

²⁰ Haynes, *Collection of State Papers*, 96, 100.

²¹ David Starkey, *Elizabeth: The Struggle for the Throne* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), 72-73.

government. When rumors and suspicions arose that Sudeley planned to kidnap his royal nephew in his desperate bid for power, Somerset and the Privy Council were forced to react. By January 1549, they had imprisoned Sudeley in the Tower and that March he met his end on the executioner's block. It was no small thing for Edward Seymour to participate in, and give final approval for, his brother's death and "the attainder of his brother lies heavy on the Protector's memory."²² At the time, however, many contemporaries believed that Somerset's wife was responsible for Sudeley's unfortunate demise.

Anne Stanhope was associated with the fratricide almost immediately. On 19 April 1549, Hugh Latimer included a vilification of Sudeley in his sermon before Edward VI. Latimer made no secret of his hatred for the king's deceased uncle – "He was a covetous man, an horrible covetous man. I would there were no more in England! He was an ambitious man. I would there were no more in England! He was a seditious man, a contemner of common prayer. I would there were no more in England! He is gone. I would he had left none behind him!"²³ In his 1550 Lenten sermon before the king, Latimer found it necessary to address the rumor and suspicion surrounding his slander of Sudeley the previous year – "Oh, what a great matter is made of it and what ado, and what great fault is found with me for speaking that I did of the Lord Admiral."²⁴ Latimer's subsequent words give evidence to Anne's alleged association with the fratricide – "There be some that think and say that I was hired to it and that my Lady of Somerset's Grace hired me to it and that I was her feed man and had money of her to speak it."²⁵ Rumor had spread charging Anne with an obstinate and fierce hatred of her brother-in-law. This animosity, a result of her precedence quarrel with Catherine Parr, caused her to force her husband's hand in the trial

²² Pollard, *England Under Protector Somerset*, 194.

²³ Hugh Latimer, *Selected Sermons of Hugh Latimer*, ed. Allan G. Chester (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 1968), 128.

²⁴ Latimer, *Selected Sermons*, 143.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

against his own brother. Now, in a sermon before Edward VI and the court, she was using her reformist client, Hugh Latimer (whom she had probably met during the theological sessions in Queen Catherine Parr's chambers years ago), to further deprecate Thomas Seymour's reputation. Latimer firmly and emphatically denied such an insinuation – "Well, so God help me, and as I shall answer in my conscience, in my remembrance I never talked with Her Grace touching that man in my life, nor never gave she me anything in her life for any such purpose. And therefore they are to blame that speak so of me."²⁶ Unfortunately, the damage to Anne Stanhope's reputation was done.

Anne Stanhope's Historical Image

In her work, *Wicked Women of Tudor England: Queens, Aristocrats, Commoners*, Retha Warnicke examines fully the sources and validity of Anne Stanhope's notorious historical reputation.²⁷ This study, rather than recounting Warnicke's exhaustive analysis, will focus on the major historical works that perpetuate Anne's negative image. It will also provide a more complete consideration of her image in modern scholarship. Contemporaries took up the rumors of Anne's alleged culpability with regard to Thomas Seymour's demise, and this stigma has persisted (with few exceptions) into the twenty-first century. By revealing the inaccuracy of these portrayals and looking beyond this constructed conception of the Duchess of Somerset, this study will offer a more accurate appraisal of her significance as a wife, mother, noblewoman, and politician.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Warnicke, *Wicked Women*, 77-87.

In 1550, an anonymous Spanish chronicler was the first to take up the rumors about Anne Stanhope and her role in Thomas Seymour's downfall. According to the chronicler, the root of the Seymour brothers' discord was the precedence quarrel between Queen Catherine and the Duchess of Somerset – a conflict that he exaggerates. Since Anne's "husband ruled the kingdom," she believed that "she ought to be more considered than the Queen, and claimed to take precedence of her."²⁸ The chronicler even provides an example of this quarrel – "when they usually went to the chapel of the palace to hear matins, the Protector's wife came and thrust herself forward, and sat in the Queen's place."²⁹ Anne Stanhope's boldness brought about the death of the queen dowager, who, when she "saw the small consideration in which she was held," so "great was her chagrin that she fell ill, and in a short time died."³⁰ No mention is made of Catherine's daughter or of her complicated delivery. The chronicler also argues that the women's precedence quarrel initiated the Seymour brothers' dispute – "from that hour the Protector bore great animosity towards his brother, and resolved to ruin him."³¹ When the Duke of Somerset finally had his brother arrested, "he certainly would have been spared if it had not been for the wife of the Protector, who pressed the matter forward."³² The villain of the chronicler's story is obvious – Anne Stanhope's pride, envy, and ambition directly caused the death of both Queen Catherine and Baron Sudeley. The chronicler's desire to tell a compelling story based on court rumors, as well as his inclination to associate women with sin (a tendency shared by many of his contemporaries) created the root of Anne's negative image.

²⁸ Martin A. Sharp Hume, trans. *Chronicle of Henry VIII of England. Being a Contemporary Record of Some of the Principal Events of the Reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI. Written in Spanish By an Unknown Hand* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1889), 156.

²⁹ Hume, *Chronicle of Henry VIII*, 160-161.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 164.

Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism, written by Nicholas Sander in 1585, was the first major contemporary work to pick up on the Spanish chronicler's fabricated tale. Sander asserts that the squabble between Catherine Parr and Anne Stanhope provides the basis for the enmity between the Seymour brothers:

Between her [Catherine Parr] and the wife of the protector there sprung a quarrel about precedence, and this quarrel was not confined to the wives, it passed on to the husbands. And as the rivalry grew from day to day, and as the protector's wife gave her husband no rest, matters came at last to this: the protector, who, though he ruled the king, was yet ruled by his wife, must put his brother to death, that he might satisfy his ambition without let or hindrance.³³

Sander claims that, though the Duke of Somerset might have been inclined to mercy, his nagging wife urged him repeatedly to have his brother executed. Sander's account presents a negative view of Edward Seymour as well as his wife. While Anne is a pestering and arrogant wife, the Duke of Somerset is a spineless, cowardly husband. As a Catholic polemicist, Sander sought to slander the duke and duchess, as both were known supporters of religious reform throughout their lives. He had every reason to characterize them harshly.

For John Foxe, Edward Seymour is "the worthy Lord Edward."³⁴ His work *The Acts and Monuments*, first published in 1563, is more commonly referred to as *The Book of Martyrs*. It seeks to provide a sympathetic history of Protestantism in England. As the Duke of Somerset headed his royal nephew's government, which was responsible for some of the most radical religious reform in English history, Foxe required a way to exculpate the duke. His work is full of biblical imagery, claiming "the subtle old serpent, always envying man's felicity, through slanderous tongues sought to sow matter, first of discord between them [the Seymour brothers];

³³ Nicolas Sander, *Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism*, trans. David Lewis (London: Burnes and Oates, 1877), 184.

³⁴ John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe*, ed. Stephen Reed Cattley (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1837), 282.

then of suspicion; and last of all, extreme hatred.”³⁵ The inherent sin and weakness of women serves as the serpent’s instrument for the destruction of the brother’s goodwill, and Stanhope is clearly the cause of the brother’s misfortune:

Now it happened... that there fell a displeasure betwixt the said queen [Catherine Parr] and the duchess of Somerset, and thereupon also, in the behalf of their wives, displeasure and grudge began between the brethren... First, to the lord admiral’s charge it was laid, that he purposed to destroy the young king, and translate the crown unto himself; and for the same being attainted and condemned, he did suffer at Tower-hill the twentieth of March, 1549. As many there were, who reported that the duchess of Somerset had wrought his death; so many more there were, who misdoubting the long standing of the lord protector in his state and dignity, thought and affirmed no less, but that the fall of the one brother, would be the ruin of the other.³⁶

In his desire to excuse Somerset from the crime of fratricide, Foxe characterizes Anne Stanhope as the architect of Sudeley’s demise. Though Anne was just as committed to reform as her husband, Foxe’s desire to portray Somerset as innocent causes him to portray Anne as both culpable and malicious.

John Hayward’s work, *The Life and Raigne of King Edward the Sixth*, published in 1630, provides the most insulting estimation of Anne Stanhope’s role in Sudeley’s demise. Hayward is, overall, an unreliable source. His account simply builds on Sander and Foxe’s stories and his writing exhibits unreasonably misogynistic tendencies:

The Duke had taken to wife Anne Stanhope a woman for many imperfections intolerable, but for pride monstrous, [a vice since her time familiar to some others of her family and name] she was exceeding both subtle and violent in accomplishing her ends, for which she spurned over all respects both of conscience and of shame. This woman did bear such invincible hate, first against the Queen Dowager for light causes and woman’s quarrels, especially for that she had precedency of place before her, being wife to the greatest Peer in the land, then to the Lord Sudeley for her sake. That albeit the Queen Dowager died by childbirth, yet would not her malice either die or decrease.³⁷

³⁵ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, 283.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ John Hayward, *The Life and Raigne of King Edward the Sixth*, ed. Barrett L. Beer (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1993), 98.

After Catherine Parr's death, Anne persisted in her malevolence and spurred her husband to accept the demise of his own brother:

Her persuasions she cunningly intermixed with tears, affirming that she would depart from him, as willingly rather to hear both of his disgraces and dangers, than either to see the one or participate of the other. The Duke embracing this woman's counsel (a woman's counsel indeed and nothing the better) yielded both to the advise and devise for the destruction of his brother.³⁸

Thus Somerset, permitting himself to be persuaded by such a thing as a woman's counsel, submitted to his wife's urging. Hayward's account solidified Anne's image as an imperious, intolerable, and malicious woman. J. G. Nichols attests, "no one, certainly, was ever more grossly slandered than was Anne Duchess of Somerset by Hayward."³⁹ Barrett L. Beer, the modern editor of Hayward's work, explains that "Hayward's condemnation of women goes far beyond his profound dislike of the duchess."⁴⁰ Prone to misogynistic judgments, Hayward clearly disapproved of Anne Stanhope.

The nineteenth-century historian Agnes Strickland discusses the dispute between Anne Stanhope and Catherine Parr in her work, *Lives of the Queens of England*. Strickland's account draws directly from previous versions – "Somerset is supposed to have been excited to this injurious treatment of the widow of his royal master, and benefactor, Henry VIII, by the malice of his duchess, who had always borne envious ill-will against Katharine Parr."⁴¹ In addition to forcing her husband to kill his own brother, Anne is responsible for the duke's mishandling of the dowager queen's property. Anne had borne a hatred for Queen Catherine from her days as a lady in waiting. Using the anonymous Spanish chronicler, as well as Sander, Foxe, and Hayward,

³⁸ Hayward, *The Life and Raigne of King Edward the Sixth*, 98-99.

³⁹ J. G. Nichols, "Anne Duchess of Somerset," *The Gentleman's Magazine* 23 (1845), 372.

⁴⁰ Hayward, *The Life and Raigne of King Edward the Sixth*, 19.

⁴¹ Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England. From the Norman Conquest; With Anecdotes of their Courts*. (Philadelphia: Blanchard and Lea, 1852), 5: 73.

as her guides, Strickland thoroughly disapproves of Anne Stanhope. The idea of a willful and malicious wife seems to have appalled Strickland, who viewed Anne from a Victorian mindset.

These negative stereotypes of Anne Stanhope dominate modern historians' assessments of her life and character. They draw directly, and often literally, from the hostile contemporary sources discussed above. Alison Weir characterizes Stanhope as "an intolerable woman whose pride was monstrous, a termagant who exercised much influence over her weaker husband by the lash of her tongue."⁴² This characterization is an unmistakable paraphrase of Hayward's words. Weir also states that "Somerset himself was a mild and rational man and, although he would be much displeased to learn of his brother's marriage, he would in time have come to accept it with good grace had it not been for his wife, who never ceased urging him to punish the couple for their temerity."⁴³ Susan James describes Anne as an "arrogant and unreasonable" woman whose "sudden elevation as wife of the lord protector seems to have gone to her head."⁴⁴ William Seymour dismisses her as "proud, haughty, interfering, jealous and ambitious" – all of the qualities which contemporaries considered deplorable in a sixteenth-century woman.⁴⁵ Seymour also argues that Anne's "evil influence can be traced in many of [Thomas Seymour's] subsequent misfortunes."⁴⁶ Samuel Rhea Gammon, a biographer of William Paget, concludes in his estimation of Anne that "every indication of her disposition is unfavourable."⁴⁷

The difficulty with these accounts is that they prevent any true assessment of Anne's character, life, and influence. Anne Stanhope clearly had a forceful personality and much sway over her husband. Antonia Fraser argues correctly that the negative characterization of Anne as

⁴² Weir, *The Six Wives*, 540.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ James, *Catherine Parr*, 272-273.

⁴⁵ Seymour, *Ordeal By Ambition*, 318.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁴⁷ Samuel Rhea Gammon, *Statesman and Schemer: William, First Lord Paget, Tudor Minister* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1973), 149.

haughty and overbearing “was the kind of misogynistic comment apt to be made about any vigorous woman.”⁴⁸ The victim of various agendas throughout centuries of scholarship, Anne’s historical image has suffered consistent defamation.

As discussed above, the Duke and Duchess of Somerset had a harmonious marriage that suited both of them personally and politically. Other contemporary sources do not support the stories put forth by John Hayward, Nicolas Sander, John Foxe, and others. By keeping in mind a more balanced portrayal of Anne’s relationship with her husband, the circumstances surrounding Thomas Seymour’s execution can be better understood. The dispute between Anne and Queen Catherine, which probably began with a disagreement over the queen’s jewels, “was more significant than a mere contest between the two ladies for their control... it was a dispute about whether these valuable gems belonged to the crown, and therefore, should be worn by the duchess as wife of the lord protector.”⁴⁹ The Duke of Somerset confiscated Catherine Parr’s jewels upon Henry VIII’s death, as the king had left his last wife out of his will. Whatever claim Queen Catherine may have had to the jewels she forfeited with her hasty marriage to Thomas Seymour. Her decision to marry below her station complicated the dilemma of court precedence. For, had the jewels been Catherine’s private property, they would have become Sudeley’s personal possessions as well. The grasping Sudeley was aware of this, and he “continued to campaign for them after his wife’s death.”⁵⁰ As Somerset spent the majority of his time as Lord Protector struggling against his brother’s deceit and cupidity, his desire to establish his wife’s position over that of Catherine Parr is understandable. Anne also had more tangible political power after Henry VIII’s death than her former mistress. Though she may not have been above Catherine Parr with regard to court protocol, her influence far surpassed that of the queen

⁴⁸ Fraser, *The Wives of Henry VIII*, 235.

⁴⁹ Warnicke, “Inventing the Wicked Women of Tudor England,” 26.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

dowager. Both couples were essentially able to function as political partnerships. Edward Seymour realized that his wife's position enhanced his own. As Lord Protector, his control required assertion.

There is also much evidence which reveals the exaggerated nature of Anne Stanhope and Catherine Parr's dispute. Since Queen Catherine remained in mourning up until her final marriage to Sudeley and she was "not expected to participate in public events while she remained at court during the first few weeks after Henry's death, a struggle for precedence between the two ladies could not easily have taken place."⁵¹ Henry VIII's funeral and Edward VI's coronation were the two greatest public events between Henry's death in 1547 and Catherine's own death in 1548. Neither the queen dowager nor the Duchess of Somerset attended either event. The dispute over the possession of the queen's jewels has also been exaggerated. It was not until 1549 that Anne and her brother, Sir Michael Stanhope, pilfered the royal stores and jewel house at Westminster Palace.⁵² As this was after Catherine Parr's death, the only other person with any claim to them was Thomas Seymour – who had a dubious claim at best.

If the dispute between Anne Stanhope and Catherine Parr was both exaggerated and misinterpreted, then it could not have had a great impact on the Seymour brothers' conflict and Sudeley's eventual downfall. Somerset's decision to allow the execution of his brother was almost certainly his own – and that of the council's. Sudeley acted brazenly by organizing a coup against the Lord Protector and plotting to kidnap his royal nephew. Sudeley's jealousy of his elder brother's position caused him to act rashly and, unfortunately, he paid the ultimate price. Somerset did not need excessive persuasion from his wife to order the execution – they both

⁵¹ Ibid., 29.

⁵² *State Papers, Domestic, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547-1580*, 14.

believed that Sudeley's removal was necessary for their survival. In this, as in most else, Edward Seymour and Anne Stanhope were in agreement.

Edward VI's government also felt threatened by Sudeley's behavior toward Princess Elizabeth, an heir to the throne. As mentioned above, Anne Stanhope stepped in personally to deal with this debacle. The "blistering lecture" that she gave Kat Ashley, at first glance, seems to reinforce Anne's imperious image put forth by scholars.⁵³ On closer inspection, however, Anne emerges as the voice of reason. Not only did Sudeley's actions threaten the honor of Princess Elizabeth, they threatened the position and dignity of the Seymour family. Anne's "suspicions that Elizabeth was being given too much freedom were soon confirmed," as rumors abounded that Catherine Parr "seemed to condone Seymour's behavior toward" her stepdaughter.⁵⁴

Catherine, as queen consort, had been a defender of Protestantism in England and a model of reform. After 1547, however, her personal life overtook her commitment to religion and tarnished her reputation – particularly since the gossip surrounding her marriage made its way to court. Anne Stanhope's anger at Elizabeth's treatment while under the care of her brother and sister-in-law is understandable, since they threatened the stability of both her family and religion. Despite her various disputes with Thomas Seymour and Catherine Parr, Anne "briefly sheltered [Catherine's] infant" when her sister-in-law died in childbirth.⁵⁵ She also assumed the dowager queen's sponsorship of John Olde's translation of Erasmus's *Paraphrases*.⁵⁶ Anne Stanhope's devotion to her family and religious reform, as well as to her own political career, persisted throughout her entire life.

⁵³ James, *Catherine Parr*, 281.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁵⁵ Warnicke, "Inventing the Wicked Women of Tudor England," 22.

⁵⁶ John Olde, *The Second Tome or Volume of the Paraphrases of Erasmus Upon the New Testament, Containing the Epistles of St. Paul and Other Apostles* (London: Edward Whitechurch, 1549), 264.

CHAPTER FOUR: PATRONAGE AND POWER

The Duchess's Religious Patronage

In February 1547 Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford became the Duke of Somerset and Lord Protector of England.¹ His wife became the Duchess of Somerset and one of the most influential women in the kingdom. This new power, along with her known fondness for reform, made her an ideal patroness of religious publications. It is her position as a distributor of religious patronage which truly set Anne Stanhope apart from her contemporaries. Between 1548 and 1551 she sponsored (either directly or indirectly) nine religious publications – more than any other woman of the early Tudor period.²

It was not uncommon for women of Anne's rank and religious inclinations to participate in this form of patronage. Reformers celebrated Queen Catherine Parr, Anne's former mistress, and Catherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk for their financial and political support. Catherine Parr was particularly renowned for her support of learning, and she produced her own theological writings – the first queen consort to do so.³ Her first work, *Prayers or Meditations*, was published in 1545 while she was still queen consort. She wrote the second, *The Lamentation of a Sinner*, in late 1546 but waited until nearly a year later, after the theologically conservative Henry had died, to have it published. *Lamentation* supported the view of justification by faith alone, a decidedly Protestant belief.⁴ Catherine, Duchess of Suffolk was another renowned patroness of reformers and religious literature. Her support of reformist politicians, in particular,

¹ *State Papers, Domestic, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547-1580*, 2.

² Warnicke, "Inventing the Wicked Women of Tudor England," 23.

³ Katherine Parr, *Complete Works*, 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 369, 427-428.

had a large impact on the English Reformation under Elizabeth I. Thomas Wilson, a tutor of the duchess's sons, became Secretary of State under Elizabeth. Catherine Willoughby's most illustrious political connection was William Cecil, who went on to become Elizabeth's chief advisor.⁵

During Edward VI's reign, however, Anne Stanhope's religious patronage was more prolific than either Queen Catherine's or the Duchess of Suffolk's. Though Edward Seymour's downfall in 1551 and Anne's subsequent imprisonment in the Tower halted her political and religious career, there is every indication that the Duchess of Somerset would have continued patronizing reformers. Her support extended to reformers and famous intellectuals of the Edwardian period, and a number of leading theologians recognized her status as a major patroness. Walter Lynne, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's printer, dedicated two of his works to Anne – *A Briefe Collection* in 1549 and *A Briefe Concordance* in 1550.⁶ Lynne referred to himself as the “most bounden and daily orator” of “the right noble and virtuous lady, Lady Anne, duchess of Somerset.”⁷ He also lauded Anne as “the most gracious patroness and supporter both of good learning and also of godly men learned.”⁸ Lynne published *A Work of the Predestination of Saints*, written by Nicholas Lesse in 1550. Lesse dedicated the work to “the

⁵ King, “Patronage and Piety,” 55-56.

⁶ Walter Lynne, *A Briefe Collection of All Such Texts of the Scripture... Whereupon Are Added Two Sermons by Martin Luther* (London: S. Mierdman for G. Walter Lynne, dwelling on Somers haye, by Byllyngs gate, 1549), 2; Walter Lynne, trans. *A Briefe and Compendiouse Table in a Manner of a Concordance Opening the Way to the Principal Histories of the Whole Bible*. Gathered by Henry Bullinger (London: S. Mierdman for G. Walter Lynne, dwelling on Somers haye, by Byllyngs gate, 1550), 2; King, “Patronage and Piety,” 52.

⁷ Lynne, *A Briefe Concordance*, 2.

⁸ King, “Patronage and Piety,” 52.

right virtuous Lady Anne, duchess of Somerset.”⁹ Two years earlier, Lesse had dedicated his translation of *The Wyll of Man* to Anne.¹⁰

Anne Stanhope provided positions in her household to Thomas Becon, Nicholas Denisot, and William Samuel. Becon and Denisot, as tutors, developed strong relationships with the Seymour children. As mentioned above, Denisot helped the three eldest Seymour girls compose their tributary poem to Marguerite de Navarre.¹¹ Becon, in addition to dedicating a work to Anne’s daughter Jane Seymour, wrote *The Flower of Godly Prayers* “to the most honourable and virtuous lady Anne, Duchess of Somerset her Grace.”¹² He wished “her the favour of God, increase of honour, long life, and prosperous health, both of body and soul.”¹³ William Samuel, another member of the Somerset household, dedicated *The Abridgement of Goddes Statutes in Myter* to Anne in 1551. He described himself as the duchess’s “most true and faithful servant.”¹⁴ Like many women of her position during Edward VI’s reign, Anne Stanhope surrounded herself and her family with reformist scholars. As her husband was the most powerful individual in the kingdom, next to the king, Anne was able to use her influence to help her intellectual friends. They, in turn, publicly recognized her interest in reform and education. Each adulatory dedication increased her position and renown as a patroness of reform.

Mildred Cooke, William Cecil’s wife, also dedicated a work to Anne Stanhope. In 1550 she translated St. Basil the Great’s sermon on the book of Deuteronomy and wrote that the

⁹ Nicholas Lesse, trans. *A Work of the Predestination of Saints Written by the Famous Doctor St. Augustine* (London: Aldersgate Street by the wydowe of John Herforde for G. Walter Lynne, 1550), 2.

¹⁰ Nicholas Lesse, trans. *The Mind and Judgment of Master Frauncis Lambert of the Wyll of Man* (London: John Day and William Seres, 1548), 2.

¹¹ See page 17.

¹² Thomas Becon, *Prayers and Other Pieces of Thomas Becon, S. T. P.*, ed. John Ayre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1844), 3.

¹³ Becon, *Prayers and Other Pieces*, 3.

¹⁴ William Samuel, *The Abridgement of Goddes Statutes in Myter* (London: Robert Crowley for Robert Soughton, 1551), 2.

Duchess of Somerset was her “right good lady and mistress.”¹⁵ Anne had an amicable relationship with Mildred Cooke and her sister, Anne, both of whom were praised by their contemporaries for their devotion to reform and education. Mildred also served in the duchess’s household during Edward VI’s reign.¹⁶

Anne was also close to Mary Hill and Elizabeth Carkeke – the wives of John Cheke and Thomas Smith, respectively.¹⁷ Cheke and Smith were both scholars and politicians who came to prominence under Edward VI. John Cheke had also been one of Edward’s tutors during Henry VIII’s reign. In 1549, he thanked Anne for her “favourable goodness and good mind towards him” and for “her protection and patronage.”¹⁸ He professed that “her Grace’s singular favour towards him” was “one of his chief comforts in his diligent service of the King’s Majesty.”¹⁹ In 1547, Sir Thomas Smith found it necessary to vindicate himself “against many slanders which were told the Duchess” with regard to his religious fervor.²⁰ John Strype, who recorded the account, referred to Anne as an “imperious and ill-natured woman.”²¹ It may be that his assessment of the duchess came from his aversion of the situation – in which a man such as Thomas Smith had to explain himself to a woman. The incident does, however, show the power and influence that Anne possessed as a patroness of reform.

Continental reformers also recognized Anne Stanhope’s position as a reformer. In 1549 Anne sent John Calvin a ring as a token of her esteem. When Calvin wrote to the duchess’s

¹⁵ Stephen Alford, *Burghley: William Cecil at the Court of Elizabeth I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 36.

¹⁶ Alford, *Burghley*, 36, 144.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁸ John Strype, *The Life of the Learned Sir John Cheke* (1821; repr., New York: Burt Franklin Reprints, 1974), 46.

¹⁹ Strype, *Sir John Cheke*, 46.

²⁰ John Strype, *The Life of the Learned Sir Thomas Smith* (1820; repr., New York: Burt Franklin Reprints, 1974), 32.

²¹ Strype, *Sir Thomas Smith*, 33.

eldest daughter, Anne Seymour, he asked her to convey his gratitude. He also asked the younger Anne to salute her brother, Edward, and her sisters.²² Calvin evidently had an amicable relationship with the entire Seymour family. That same year another of Anne's daughters, Jane Seymour, wrote to Martin Bucer and Paul Fagius – "My mother, thank God, is in good health: she desires her best respects to you both, and also thanks you for your salutations to her grace."²³ Anne's contact with Calvin and other continental reformers shows just how far her religious views had come. She was now firmly Protestant and clearly supportive of Edward VI's intensive reforms. Under Elizabeth I, the Anglican Church would take a more conservative approach to Protestantism. It is clear that Anne Stanhope would later be amongst those Elizabethans who, because they had experienced Edwardian Protestantism, hoped for further religious reform.

Jennifer Loach, a biographer of Edward VI, argues that "any person in a position of power in the sixteenth century was likely to receive dedications from authors anxious to find patronage, for dedications were both a form of courtesy and a request for patronage."²⁴ According to Loach, it was "their position rather than their [the Duke and Duchess of Somerset's] beliefs that had brought them so many dedications."²⁵ The number of dedications that Anne Stanhope received and the fact that every author was a reformer suggests that Loach's assertion is faulty. Anne's connection to reformers also extended beyond patronage of literature. She surrounded herself with intellectual men of similar convictions and actively worked to instill the same beliefs in her children.

Despite Anne Stanhope's prolific patronage of reformist literature and intellectuals, modern scholars tend to allow other women of the English Reformation, such as Catherine Parr

²² Robinson, *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation*, 2: 702-703.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1: 2.

²⁴ Loach, *Edward VI*, 45.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

and Catherine Willoughby, to eclipse the duchess. Contemporaries clearly recognized, however, Anne's ability and desire to support reform. She belonged to the same reformist circles as Parr and Willoughby. She also devoted much of her life and career to promoting her religious beliefs. Unfortunately, Anne's notorious image – constructed by historians and scholars through the centuries – overshadows her contributions to the English Reformation.

Political Prestige

Anne Stanhope's influence extended beyond religious patronage. Her relationship with her husband and her access to court patronage made her a politician in her own right. As with any figure of authority at the Tudor court, Anne's actions gained her both friends and enemies. Her friendship with Princess Mary endured into Edward VI's reign, despite the fact that Mary remained a devout Catholic and disapproved of the government's religious policies. At the end of January 1547, Mary sent Anne a "ring of gold with a diamond in it."²⁶ This gesture was probably in recognition of Anne's new position as wife of the Lord Protector, for that April Mary wrote to Anne asking for assistance. Princess Mary asked Anne to speak with her husband about a "suit concerning Richard Wood, who was my mother's servant when you were one of her Grace's maids."²⁷ Mary also asked that "George Brickhouse, who was an officer of my mother's wardrobe" be made a Knight of Windsor.²⁸ It is clear that the princess had looked to Anne for political assistance previously, for she thanked the duchess "with all my heart for your earnest gentleness towards me in all my suits hitherto, reckoning myself out of doubt of the continuance

²⁶ Madden, *Privy Purse Expenses*, 200.

²⁷ Tytler, *England Under the Reigns of Edward VI and Mary*, 51.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

of the same.”²⁹ Anne did not disappoint Mary, for in December the princess wrote to the Duke of Somerset, thanking him for “his attention to her requests.”³⁰

Dorothy Wingfield, a member of Anne of Cleves’s household, wrote to Anne in 1547 asking the duchess to speak with her husband so that “no sale or grant be made... of the lands of the late Priory of Woodbridge, Suffolk.”³¹ Both Dorothy Wingfield and Mary Tudor realized that Anne Stanhope had considerable influence with her husband. This influence fed the rumors that Anne’s sway over Edward Seymour was often malicious. The Duke and Duchess of Somerset’s marriage was, however, amicable and politically effective. Anne did not have to resort to nagging or bullying for her husband to respect her input. The duchess did not always successfully satisfy requests, and this made many petitioners angry. Some even suggested that she was responsible for failed appeals. In 1550, Catherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk wrote to William Cecil of her annoyance that the Duke of Somerset had dealt unfairly with her cousin, William Naunton. Willoughby explained that she “blames his Grace’s Lady for it.”³² A mere month later, however, the Duchess of Suffolk was appeased, for her cousin had resolved his issue with Somerset. Had Anne Stanhope’s influence been exercised in favor of Naunton’s request, Catherine Willoughby would likely have abstained from criticizing her old friend – as they had served together in Queen Catherine Parr’s household and both were enthusiastic supporters of reform. Willoughby’s closeness with the Duke and Duchess of Somerset is evident, for that same year she wrote to Cecil that she “much desires a match between Somerset’s daughter and her

²⁹ Ibid., 51.

³⁰ *State Papers, Domestic, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547-1580*, 5.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 30.

son.”³³ Willoughby’s comment to Cecil about Anne was almost certainly the result of temporary frustration, rather than indicative of any enmity between the two duchesses.

By the end of 1549, Edward Seymour began to feel the strain of power. Among his critics was Francis van der Delft, the imperial ambassador to Edward VI’s court. Van der Delft wrote to Emperor Charles V of a conversation with William Paget – “I considered him [Paget] personally to blame for all the evil that had befallen this kingdom, since he had been the principal instrument in setting us up a Protector who would certainly never do any good.”³⁴ Paget responded to the ambassador’s accusations by explaining that Somerset “has a bad wife.”³⁵ He hoped that this excuse would take some of the pressure off of himself and the Lord Protector. The ambassador responded “that that amounted to a confession of his [Somerset’s] unworthiness, since he allowed himself to be ruled by his wife.”³⁶ It is clear that Paget’s statement about Anne Stanhope was merely a hasty excuse for the mistakes of Somerset’s regime. Less than a year earlier, Paget had written an unpublished critique of the Lord Protector. In this letter, he did not mention the Duchess of Somerset.³⁷ Paget hoped to keep the internal tensions of the Somerset regime from the imperial ambassador and he allowed Anne Stanhope to take the blame.

Francis van der Delft also complained in 1549 of the Duke of Somerset’s “fancy in innovating in religious matters at his wife’s instigation.”³⁸ Since the ambassador believed Anne Stanhope ruled her husband and was responsible for the duke’s poor decisions, he assumed that the duchess was also behind the regime’s Protestant policies (of which van der Delft disapproved). There is no doubt that, by the 1540s, Anne had become a firm adherent of

³³ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁴ *Calendar of State Papers, Relating to England and Spain*, 9: 429.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Barrett L. Beer, “A Critique of the Protectorate: An Unpublished Letter of Sir William Paget to the Duke of Somerset,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* vol. 34, no. 3 (1971), 279-283.

³⁸ *Calendar of State Papers, Relating to England and Spain*, 9: 447.

Protestantism. Edward Seymour, though, was also an ardent supporter of reform. One instance in particular demonstrates that the Duke of Somerset's devotion to reform occasionally even surpassed that of the duchess. In late 1548, Somerset explained to the court that the extravagant custom of giving New Year's gifts was to be abandoned. The duke had a difficult time enforcing the change, for many of the women at court ignored the prohibition. Anne Stanhope and her ladies, in particular, gave Edward VI gifts that year, probably "out of kindness for the lonely little boy who was their king."³⁹

Despite the fact that for two years Anne Stanhope and Edward Seymour enjoyed more power and influence than ever before, they began to suffer repeated misfortune from 1549 until the Duke of Somerset's death in 1552. By the end of 1549, political factions at court threatened Somerset's position as Lord Protector. Somerset had military troubles in both Scotland and France, and he faced multiple popular rebellions in England as a result of his religious and economic policies. He also alienated many at court by refusing to follow the advice of his fellow counselors. Somerset even began using the royal "we" after becoming Lord Protector, a habit that irritated his former friends.⁴⁰ John Dudley, Earl of Warwick – previously Somerset's closest political partner – engineered the duke's arrest in October 1549. As a result, Edward Seymour gave up the position of Lord Protector, and Dudley became the leader of Edward VI's government.

Anne Stanhope realized the danger threatening her husband and showed noticeable concern and anxiety before his arrest. Francis van der Delft reported on 8 October that the Duke of Somerset "sent his wife off to her house, and she went out weeping." The ambassador explained that the duchess was sorrowful because she had been "very badly handled in words by

³⁹ Starkey, *Elizabeth*, 85.

⁴⁰ Warnicke, "Inventing the Wicked Women of Tudor England," 22.

the courtiers and peasants, who put all this trouble down to her.”⁴¹ Once again, because of Paget’s comment earlier that year, van der Delft blamed Somerset’s faults on his wife. John Dudley did not believe that Anne was to blame. While he had Edward Seymour sent to the Tower, the Duchess of Somerset was allowed to remain at her brother’s house.⁴² Though she still had her freedom, Anne had every reason to feel disheartened, for the political troubles of the Seymour family were just beginning.

The Downfall of the Duke of Somerset

Anne Stanhope remained a loyal and devoted wife throughout her husband’s imprisonment. On Christmas Day 1549, while Somerset sat in the Tower, she was given leave to visit him. This privilege gave the duke “no little comfort.”⁴³ Anne petitioned vigorously for her husband’s release from the Tower by writing to William Paget, asking him to favor her husband in such a “miserable unnatural time” since she believed him to be “sore grieved at the heart.”⁴⁴ Anne also used her relationship with the Dudley family to campaign for her husband’s freedom. Her acquaintance with Jane Guildford, Dudley’s wife, originated from their days as ladies in Queen Catherine Parr’s household. Anne used this connection to obtain audiences with Dudley in order to plead for her husband’s release. In December 1549 Francis van der Delft wrote to Charles V that the Duchess of Somerset was “always in his [Dudley’s] house” and, before long, Dudley had been “won over by the Protector’s wife.”⁴⁵ Jane Guildford faced a similar situation

⁴¹ *Calendar of State Papers, Relating to England and Spain*, 9: 457.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 462.

⁴³ Chris Skidmore, *Edward VI: The Lost King of England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2007), 153.

⁴⁴ Skidmore, *Edward VI*, 144.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 489.

nearly four years later, when her own husband was imprisoned for opposing the accession of Mary Tudor after Edward VI's death. Guildford, then the Duchess of Northumberland, wrote to a number of ladies at court asking them to intercede with Queen Mary.⁴⁶ Her efforts were unsuccessful, however, for Mary had John Dudley executed soon after.

In February 1550, thanks in large part to Anne's efforts, John Dudley and Edward VI's council had Edward Seymour released from the Tower. Despite losing his position as Lord Protector, Somerset retained his dukedom and his original place on the council. Dudley became Lord President of the Privy Council, preferring to decline the more controversial position of Lord Protector. The Duchess of Somerset immediately worked to strengthen her family's connection to the Dudley family. Anne and Jane Guildford organized the marriage of Anne Seymour and John Dudley – the eldest daughter and eldest son of the two families. The wedding took place in June 1550, four months after the Duke of Somerset's release from the Tower. Jehan Scheyfve, the new imperial ambassador to England, wrote to Charles V – “It is said that the two mothers have made the match.”⁴⁷ Once again, Anne Stanhope utilized the relationships she had made at court by working with Jane Guildford to heal the estrangement of the two families. Their efforts were not completely successful, however, for “the Earl of Warwick was not present.”⁴⁸ Though the families were bound together by matrimony, John Dudley still mistrusted Edward Seymour. The Duke of Somerset also resented Dudley's new position.

Tensions increased in the spring of 1551, when Jehan Scheyfve reported that “the Duke and my Lord of Warwick fell into a dispute in open Council, but the matter was soon calmed down.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, “a certain gentleman of the Duke's household said to someone else at

⁴⁶ S. J. Gunn, “A Letter of Jane, Duchess of Northumberland,” 1270-1271.

⁴⁷ *Calendar of State Papers, Relating to England and Spain*, 10: 98.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 262.

Court that his master was better qualified to govern than Warwick and, besides, ought to be preferred to him because he was the King's uncle."⁵⁰ At a ceremony of the Order of the Garter that year, John Dudley attempted to diminish Edward Seymour's claim of kinship to the king. To Somerset's title of "uncle to the King of England," Dudley inserted the phrase, "on his mother's side."⁵¹

Unhappy with the political situation, Somerset began to plan Dudley's overthrow. By October 1551 Dudley – now the Duke of Northumberland – was aware of the plot and had Somerset arrested again. Anne participated actively in her husband's attempted coup against Dudley's administration. Dudley realized this, and this time the Duchess of Somerset followed her husband to the Tower – where she remained for two years. Once Somerset's conspiracy was uncovered, he commanded his wife and her brother, Michael Stanhope, "to meddle no more in talk" with Henry Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel, a fellow conspirator.⁵² Anne's enthusiasm for her husband's cause, however well-intentioned, failed to restore Somerset to his former position. That Edward Seymour could command his wife also helps to dispel his characterization as a weak husband.

Thomas Norton, a secretary to Somerset, wrote to John Calvin about the coup against his employer. Calvin, an associate and supporter of the Seymours, was concerned about the family's fate – particularly that of the children. Norton assured Calvin that the Seymour children were safe. Anne Seymour remained married to John Dudley's heir. The other daughters – Margaret, Jane, Mary, and Catherine – were committed "to the care of their aunt," Elizabeth Seymour, the widow of Gregory Cromwell. The youngest daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Somerset, also named Elizabeth Seymour, went to stay with another aunt, Dorothy Seymour. Edward VI

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 291.

⁵² Skidmore, *Edward VI*, 214.

provided for his cousins by allotting them each one hundred marks a year for their livelihood. The three boys – Edward, Henry, and another Edward – came under the care of William Paulet, the Lord High Treasurer. The elder Edward, the duke’s heir, was aged thirteen and Norton reported that he was “the living image of his father.”⁵³ All of the Seymour children were now wards of the king.⁵⁴ Norton also wrote to Calvin of Anne Stanhope’s captivity – “some parties are of opinion that she was not imprisoned for having committed a crime, but to prevent her from committing one.”⁵⁵ Norton’s comments illuminate Anne’s political influence. John Dudley, fearing the Duchess of Somerset as a potential threat, had her imprisoned. In this way, she could not work for her husband’s cause as she had three years previously.

Though the Duke and Duchess of Somerset were prisoners in the Tower, Edward VI’s administration provided the king’s uncle and aunt with a comfortable confinement. Each had three attendants to care for their needs.⁵⁶ They were also given fine clothing, furniture, dishes, and food. Among the items requested were a pair of velvet shoes and a velvet cap for the duke, and for the duchess a gown of black velvet edged with garnets, as well as silver dishes and silver spoons.⁵⁷ Henry Ellis criticizes the duke and duchess by stating that “grandeur in a dungeon is not often desired by a captive.”⁵⁸ Lavish confinement for illustrious prisoners was not, however, unheard of. In May 1536, when Henry VIII sent Anne Boleyn to the Tower, he allowed his wife to reside in the lodgings she had used for her coronation.⁵⁹ Jane Grey’s time in the Tower during Queen Mary’s reign was similarly comfortable. Jane lived in the gentleman-gaoler’s house and

⁵³ Robinson, *Original Letters Relative to the English Reformation*, 1: 341.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 339-342.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 342.

⁵⁶ *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, 3: 391.

⁵⁷ Nichols, “Anne Duchess of Somerset,” 373-374; Henry Ellis, ed. *Original Letters, Illustrative of English History* (London: Harding and Lepard, Pall-Mall East, 1826), 2: 215.

⁵⁸ Ellis, *Original Letters*, 215.

⁵⁹ Ives, *Anne Boleyn*, 334.

had three gentlewomen as well as a manservant to serve her.⁶⁰ Despite their lavish imprisonment, however, both queens met their untimely end in the Tower.

A jury of his peers tried the former Lord Protector, and he pleaded not guilty to a charge of treason. Despite the Duke of Somerset's declaration of innocence, his own nephew ordered his execution in January 1552. With characteristic indifference, Edward VI recorded his uncle's death in his chronicle – "The Duke of Somerset had his head cut off upon Tower Hill between eight and nine o'clock in the morning."⁶¹ With the death of Edward Seymour, her husband and confidante for nearly two decades, Anne probably believed that her death was inevitable as well. Days after Somerset's execution, she requested that John Hooper, Bishop of Gloucester and the duke's former chaplain, be given permission to speak with her "for the settling of her conscience."⁶² Around this time Jehan Scheyfve reported "that the Duchess, Somerset's spouse, will soon go the same way [as her husband]."⁶³ Anne Stanhope escaped execution, however, and remained in the Tower for the rest of her nephew's reign.

After the Duke of Somerset's death, John Dudley and his administration believed that Anne Stanhope was no longer a threat. Though still a prisoner, the duchess's life remained relatively comfortable and she began to receive visitors. In June 1552 Elizabeth Bouchier, now the widowed Lady Page, was able to visit her daughter in the Tower.⁶⁴ During Easter of 1553, Bishop Hooper called on Anne once again.⁶⁵ That same year Dudley took £100 "out of the

⁶⁰ Eric Ives, *Lady Jane Grey: A Tudor Mystery* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 249.

⁶¹ Jordan, *Chronicle*, 107.

⁶² *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, 3: 465-466.

⁶³ *Calendar of State Papers, Relating to England and Spain*, 10: 453.

⁶⁴ *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, 4: 90.

⁶⁵ John Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials, Relating Chiefly to Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1822), 2.2: 255.

profits arising of the lands of the late Duke of Somerset” and sent it to the Tower for Anne’s use.⁶⁶

Though Anne remained a prisoner for nearly two years, she survived and managed to maintain her dignity. When Edward VI died in July 1553 at the age of fifteen, John Dudley made a fatal mistake by attempting to keep the Catholic Mary Tudor from the throne. His attempt to replace her with Jane Grey, his daughter-in-law, cost him his life. Mary I became the first queen consort of England on 19 July and Dudley met his end on the executioner’s block a month later. One of Mary’s first actions as queen was to release many of her Catholic supporters from the Tower, including the disgraced Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester. That same day Mary released Anne Stanhope – her friend of over three decades.

⁶⁶ Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, 2.2: 254-255.

CHAPTER FIVE: MATRIARCH

A Convenient Marriage

In August 1553 Anne Stanhope emerged from her confinement in the Tower. Queen Mary's decision to release Anne reveals the strength of their personal relationship. Their friendship, which began in Catherine of Aragon's household, overrode any religious differences between the two women. Anne was well known for her Protestant beliefs and her late husband, as Lord Protector, instituted radical religious reforms. Mary, on the other hand, was a stringent Catholic and became known as "Bloody Mary" because of the Protestant martyrs she sent to the stake. Anne and Mary's affiliation is evidence of the strength of social and political connections. Mary restored Anne's title as Duchess of Somerset, despite the disgrace of the duke's execution, and in 1558 granted her Hanworth Palace in Middlesex for life. Anne's eldest son, Edward Seymour, also became Earl of Hertford (one of his father's old titles). After nearly two years in disgrace, Anne Stanhope's family became, yet again, one of the most powerful families in England.

Anne maintained an amicable relationship with Queen Mary and her Catholic regime. She retained the use of Syon House in London, which had belonged to her late husband, in order to remain close to the court. In May 1554 the queen asked Anne to give the imperial ambassador use of Syon for the summer.¹ The next year Reginald Pole, the new Archbishop of Canterbury, gave Anne a license to eat meat during Lent.² In 1556 the queen gave Anne funds to repair Wulfhall, the old seat of the Seymour family, for her eldest son. Edward Seymour, who turned

¹ *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, 5: 29.

² The National Archives. Longleat Manuscripts. SE/VOL. IV/32. 7 March 1555. Accessed at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=2238-se&cid=7-3-7#7-3-7>

seventeen that year, was just coming into his majority and, consequently, was still in his mother's custody.³

The duchess's ability to tolerate England's return to Catholicism may seem to diminish her reputation as a reformer. Anne was, however, a politician. She had survived decades at Henry VIII's court and, using her own abilities and personal connections, escaped the Seymours' downfall under Edward VI. Having witnessed her husband's death and endured years in the Tower, Anne knew that loyalty to the crown was vital. Without the Duke of Somerset, the duchess was now the matriarch and head of the Seymour family. Her family's survival and success were her priority. Anne's contemporary and fellow reformer, Catherine Willoughby, fled to the Continent in 1555. As a result, she cultivated the friendship and respect of the more radical English Protestants. Catherine had no family to care for, however, as her two sons had died of the sweating sickness four years earlier. Anne Stanhope's relationship with Queen Mary and her duty to her children kept her in England.

In 1558 Anne married for a second and final time. Her choice fell on Francis Newdegate, who was nine years her junior. Her second marriage was every bit as amicable and mutually beneficial as her first, but the dynamic was quite different. Francis, her late husband's steward, was a man well below Anne's own social standing. He did have much to offer the duchess, however, as a husband. He had been imprisoned with the Somersets in 1551, but was released not long after the Duke of Somerset's execution. While the duchess continued her confinement in the Tower, Francis salvaged and supervised her family's estates.⁴ His steadfast devotion to the Seymour family "was presumably a principal reason for the duchess's acceptance of him as her

³ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth, Addenda, 1566-1579*, 448.

⁴ Warnicke, "Inventing the Wicked Women of Tudor England," 24.

second husband in a marriage which could have appeared a disparagement.”⁵ In choosing Francis as her second husband, Anne “adopted the course which was almost universal in former days with the most illustrious widows: she chose a protector not so much of her person as her property.”⁶ As a matriarch, she realized that marriage to someone below her position was the only manner in which she could remain solely devoted to the Seymour family. Another marriage to a nobleman could have resulted in a wavering of loyalties, for she would have been expected to defer to his interests rather than her own. Additionally, at the age of fifty, Anne was well beyond her child-bearing years. Marriages between noble families were usually arranged with the intent of producing an heir. Anne’s union with Francis, then, was ideal. His loyalty to the Seymour family was unquestioned, and her inability to produce more children was not an issue.

Francis Newdegate’s marriage to Anne Stanhope proved to be “the turning point in [his] life” and his almost immediate rise in political standing attests the duchess’s influence and power.⁷ Through her sponsorship, he served as Justice of the Peace for Middlesex from 1573 and sat in the House of Commons three separate times – in 1559 for Great Bedwyn, in 1563 for Chippenham, and in 1571 for Middlesex.⁸ By serving in the Commons, Francis bolstered the Seymour family’s political power. His stepson, the Earl of Hertford, sat in the House of Lords. Great Bedwyn, in particular, was “a Seymour preserve” – it was not far from Wulfhall.⁹ Though court affairs were important to elite families, their positions as great landowners encouraged participation in local politics as well. As the instigator of Francis’s political career, Anne remained loyal to her husband and his interests. In 1574 she complained to William Cecil, now

⁵ Marjorie Blatcher, “Newdigate, Francis,” in *The House of Commons, 1558-1603*, ed. P. W. Hasler (London: History of Parliament Trust, 1981), 126.

⁶ Nichols, “Anne Duchess of Somerset,” 374.

⁷ Blatcher, “Newdigate, Francis,” 126.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 125-126.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

chief minister to Elizabeth I, “of an affront given to him [Francis], apparently by the lord chamberlain, the 3rd Earl of Sussex.”¹⁰ Though the dynamic within her new marriage was different than in her first, Anne remained her husband’s devoted supporter.

Francis Newdegate was worthy of his wife’s encouragement, for he returned the favor by looking after her own interests. Upon her release from the Tower in 1553, Anne Stanhope began to petition the crown for the return of her first husband’s estates. As a widow, she was particularly concerned with her dower and jointure. The legal dispute over the assets owed to the Duchess of Somerset lasted until 1568, when the crown agreed to pay her £10,000 in £700 yearly installments. Both Francis Newdegate and her son, Edward, were involved in the suit.¹¹ A commission had also been set up in 1555 to “trace the disposal of the dead Duke’s property,” and Francis (as the duke’s steward) provided valuable information.¹² In 1564 Francis wrote to William Cecil, responding to Thomas Smith’s allegations that Anne Stanhope planned to marry one of her daughters into the Swedish royal family.¹³ Elizabeth I, ever wary of her noble subjects’ marriages, disapproved of the match. Francis denied that such a marriage had ever been intended, making it clear that the Seymours were still her dutiful and obedient servants. In 1571 Francis wrote to Cecil again, this time asking him to intercede on the duchess’s behalf in the matter of “her interest” in Combe Nevell Manor.¹⁴ He asked that “my Lady’s grace’s yearly rent be not diminished” and explained that his wife “hath... referred the matter over unto me.”¹⁵ Anne trusted her husband with financial matters, and she knew that he was a capable manager of her estates.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹¹ *State Papers, Domestic, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547-1580*, 291; *Ibid.*, 310.

¹² Blatcher, “Newdigate, Francis,” 126.

¹³ *State Papers, Domestic, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547-1580*, 241.

¹⁴ Nichols, “Anne Duchess of Somerset,” 374.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

“The Willfulness of Her Unruly Child”

Anne needed Francis’s loyalty and support, for shortly after their marriage the Seymour family was once again swept up in court intrigue. In 1561 Elizabeth I had Anne’s eldest son, Edward Earl of Hertford, and his pregnant wife, Catherine Grey, imprisoned.¹⁶ The young couple had been secretly married for over a year. Catherine, as a great-granddaughter of Henry VII, was potentially a claimant to the throne. Many Englishmen believed her to be the preferable candidate, for the alternative was the Catholic Mary of Scots. Elizabeth I, childless and cautious of rivals and clandestine marriages, viewed her cousin’s secret marriage to Hertford as a threat to her security. Anne Stanhope immediately wrote to William Cecil, denying all knowledge of the marriage and expressed her hope that “the willfulness of her unruly child will not diminish the Queen’s favour.”¹⁷

Agnes Strickland argues that Anne’s words were “hard” and “unfeeling.”¹⁸ It seems, however, that the duchess’s eldest son was much like his uncle, Thomas Seymour, in his temperament and political acumen. A few months earlier, Hertford had accompanied William Cecil’s eldest son, Thomas, to Paris in order to serve with the English ambassador and to further their studies. Anne wrote to William Cecil with trepidation about her son. She wrote that she was “sorry for his willfulness, and begs Cecil not to spare, but to over-rule him.”¹⁹ At this point, Hertford was already secretly married to Catherine Grey and his mother probably realized that he was both reckless and ambitious. Sir Thomas Windebank, the boys’ chaperone in Paris, wrote to William Cecil before long and expressed his concern, thinking “it better Mr. [Thomas] Cecil

¹⁶ *State Papers, Domestic, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547-1580*, 184.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England*, 5: 131.

¹⁹ *State Papers, Domestic, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547-1580*, 174.

should not travel in company with Lord Hertford.”²⁰ He believed that Hertford was a distraction and an impediment to Thomas’s studies, particularly to his progress in learning the French language.²¹ Elizabeth I had the Earl of Hertford recalled to England when his clandestine marriage became known to her. Anne Stanhope’s letter to William Cecil was an attempt at damage control, not an abandonment of her son. Despite her son’s poor choices, Anne remained devoted to his cause.

Hertford and Catherine Grey were immediately confined in the Tower together, where she gave birth to a son named Edward. The birth of a boy made their situation more precarious, for the infant was now a potential male heir to the throne of England. Catherine gave birth to another son, Thomas, in 1562. That same year Elizabeth’s government proclaimed their marriage to be invalid, and the children were declared illegitimate. Still wary of her cousin’s claim, however, Elizabeth kept Catherine and her sons in the Tower. She did allow Hertford some liberty by placing him in the care of his mother at Hanworth – probably in the hope that the couple’s separation would keep them from producing more heirs. The earl wrote to Robert Dudley from Hanworth in 1563, asking him to speak with the queen on his behalf and to present her with a gift of gloves.²² In 1564 Elizabeth allowed Catherine and her children to leave the Tower, for plague threatened London. Catherine went to stay with her uncle, John Grey, and the boys were placed in the care of Anne Stanhope, their grandmother, for a time.²³

Elizabeth I’s decision to place two potential male claimants to throne in Anne’s care demonstrates the persistence of the duchess’s status and the crown’s faith in her. The same year that the boys were placed in their grandmother’s care, the queen gave the Duchess of Somerset

²⁰ Ibid., 182.

²¹ Ibid., 183, 185.

²² Ibid., 221.

²³ Ibid., 230.

an “honourable reception” at court. The Earl of Hertford thanked Elizabeth I for the respect given to his mother, though he was clearly still in disgrace and prayed “for restoration to the Queen’s favour.”²⁴ Anne went to court again in May 1565 and, two years later, the suit regarding her dower and jointure was settled in her favor.²⁵ Though her son had made a disastrous decision that temporarily halted his political career, the queen did not punish Anne Stanhope or the rest of the Seymour family. This was likely a result of Anne’s ability to cultivate a strong and lasting relationship with the crown.

Anne did not abandon her son. Throughout their disgrace and imprisonment, Anne wrote to William Cecil and Robert Dudley petitioning for their release – “her highness’ displeasure is too long lasting... how unmeet it is this young couple should thus wax old in prison.”²⁶ A year after the couple’s release from the Tower, Anne wrote to Cecil once again. She wrote at the beginning of Passion Week, hoping that “the occasion of this Holy Week and charitable time of forgiveness... will bring forth some comfortable fruit of relief to the long afflicted parties.”²⁷ The duchess believed that her son had been duly punished and now deserved mercy from Elizabeth. On 22 March 1564 Robert Dudley wrote to Hertford, promising his support. Dudley, who had already spoken to the queen on the earl’s behalf, asked Hertford to “wait the event with patience.”²⁸ He also told him that his “mother also has done her part.”²⁹

Through the intervention of William Cecil, Robert Dudley, and Anne Stanhope, Hertford seemed poised to regain royal favor. A few months after Dudley had given Hertford such encouragement, however, John Hales wrote *A Declaration of the Succession of the Crowne*

²⁴ *State Papers, Domestic, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547-1580*, 236.

²⁵ *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth, 1564-5*, 372.

²⁶ Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England*, 5: 152.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

²⁸ *State Papers, Domestic, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547-1580*, 236.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Imperiall of Inglande. Hales argued that the royal succession should favor Catherine Grey – Henry VII’s great-granddaughter through his younger daughter, Mary – rather than the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots, Henry’s great-granddaughter through his older daughter, Margaret. This argument appealed to many English Protestants, who feared the reign of another Catholic monarch. Hales defended the secret marriage between Catherine and Edward Seymour and argued that their sons were legitimate. The *Declaration* merely infuriated Elizabeth and ruined any chances of reconciliation between the queen and Hertford.³⁰

Catherine Grey died in captivity on 27 January 1568.³¹ Elizabeth I paid for her cousin’s funeral expenses, but Catherine’s death did not ease the queen’s displeasure toward the Earl of Hertford.³² In 1571 he was still writing to William Cecil, now Baron Burghley, of “his continued sorrow for want of the Queen’s favour.”³³ Hertford did eventually regain royal favor but lost it soon after with another clandestine marriage. In 1585 he married Frances Howard, a lady in waiting to the queen. Hertford’s second marriage and repeated attempts to legitimize his sons brought him to the Tower briefly once again. After his second wife’s death he married for a third and final time in 1601. His new bride was also named Frances Howard. Impulsive and ambitious, Anne Stanhope’s eldest son managed to survive the reign of Elizabeth I. He remained an important political figure during the reign of the first Stuart monarch, James I, before dying in 1621. Had he served under a less cautious and forgiving monarch than Elizabeth I, however, Hertford could easily have followed his father and uncle to the executioner’s block.

Anne Stanhope continued to be a force in political and religious matters under Elizabeth I. The queen continued to show the duchess favor. In 1575 Elizabeth gave her Somerset House in

³⁰ Alford, *Burghley*, 127-128.

³¹ *State Papers, Domestic, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, 1547-1580*, 305.

³² *Ibid.*, 306.

³³ *Ibid.*, 414.

London – another manor that had previously belonged to the Duke of Somerset.³⁴ On 24 August 1580 Francis Walsingham wrote to William Cecil that the queen was to dine with the duchess that night.³⁵ Anne used her friendship with the crown to patronize her family and friends. In 1576 she wrote to Cecil recommending a “Mr. Druse for preferment.”³⁶ In 1581 she wrote to Cecil again, requesting that her nephew, Edward Stanhope, become the new Master of Requests.³⁷ Edward was the son of Michael Stanhope, Anne’s brother who had died in the Duke of Somerset’s service. It is also likely that Anne’s influence was behind her grandson’s ennoblement as Viscount Beauchamp – his deceased grandfather’s first title. The youngest Edward Seymour never regained his legitimacy, but since Hertford never produced any other legitimate children Beauchamp remained his heir. Though her first husband and son had incurred royal displeasure, Anne’s efforts kept the Seymour family’s status and influence intact.

As Duchess of Somerset under a Protestant queen, Anne Stanhope continued her religious patronage. In 1570 Edward Crane dedicated his translation of *The Fortress of Faith* to Anne.³⁸ Crane’s dedication followed the same pattern as those given to Anne during the reign of Edward VI – at the height of her influence. He presented his work to “the right honourable and my singular good Lady and mistress, Lady Anne Duchess of Somerset her grace.”³⁹ In 1586, a year before Anne’s death, Ephraim Pagitt dedicated his translation of *The Book of Ruth* to the duchess.⁴⁰ Pagitt was only eleven years old at this time, but he went on to become a clergyman and a supporter of Presbyterianism. In his dedication of *The Book of Ruth*, Pagitt thanked Anne

³⁴ Ibid., 498.

³⁵ Ibid., 672.

³⁶ Nichols, “Anne Duchess of Somerset,” 380.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Stephanus Bodonius, *The Fortresse of Fayth Defended Both by the Scripture and Doctors*, trans. Edward Crane (London: William Griffith, 1570), 2.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ludvig Lavater, *The Book of Ruth Expounded in Twenty-Eight Sermons, Published in Latin*, trans. Ephraim Pagitt (London: Robert Waldegrave, 1586), 2.

Stanhope and a number of other noblewomen for their support. This was Anne's last act as a patroness of religious reform. It is clear that such patronage was important to her and she remained a consistent sponsor of Protestantism and religious reform throughout her entire life.

EPILOGUE

Anne Stanhope drew up her will on 14 July 1586 at the age of seventy-six. Francis Newdegate had died four years earlier. In his will, he had left his entire estate to his wife – “as I have received all my preferment by the Duchess’s marriage, so do I, in few words, will and bequeath to her all that I am able any way to give her.”¹ Without her husband there to support her, Anne appointed her son, the Earl of Hertford, as the sole executor of her estate. Her generous bequests to both friends and family, along with the extensive inventory of her estate drawn up that same year, attest to her immense wealth.² The long list of bequests also indicates that Anne was the matriarch of a large, influential family. In her will the duchess left bequests to her eldest son, the Earl of Hertford; his wife, the first Frances Howard; her second son, Henry Seymour; her daughters Mary and Elizabeth, as well as their husbands; and her grandson, Viscount Beauchamp, and his wife. Of her three elder daughters – Anne, Jane, and Margaret – only Anne had not predeceased the duchess. Anne, who was still the Countess of Warwick from her marriage to John Dudley’s son, had suffered a mental breakdown at the beginning of Elizabeth I’s reign. She was not mentioned in her mother’s will. In addition to her immediate family, Anne Stanhope remembered her godchildren, nieces, nephews, friends, and servants. She also left funds to “godly and poor” university students and prisoners in London.³ The inventory of the duchess’s property included lands, money, jewels, plate, clothing, and many other luxurious goods.⁴ It was a vast estate and, like most wealthy noblewomen, Anne rewarded those who had been loyal to her.

¹ Nichols, “Anne Duchess of Somerset,” 374-375.

² *Ibid.*, 375-377.

³ *Ibid.*, 375.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 376-377.

Anne Stanhope's will also offers insight into her religious views, which had remained unwaveringly Protestant throughout most of her life – “First, I thank God in Christ Jesus that he hath long ago called me to the knowledge and love of the Gospel, and ever since kept me therein to an assured hope of life everlasting, through faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone.”⁵ An emphasis on the attainment of salvation through faith alone was a mainstay of Protestantism. Anne Stanhope, like so many of her contemporaries, had begun life as a Catholic and was prepared to die a fervent Protestant. The Duchess of Somerset died on Easter, 16 April 1587, at the advanced age of seventy-seven years. Most of her children and grandchildren were with her at Hanworth when she passed away. Anne had lived through – and survived – the reigns of four Tudor monarchs.

Anne Stanhope's tomb lies in Westminster Abbey – another sign of Elizabeth I's favor. It is a “tall” and “gaudy” memorial,” more like the magnificent monuments of previous centuries rather than those of the more austere Elizabethan period.⁶ It is a testament to her immense wealth and political influence that she is buried in such a lavish manner and in such an important location. Anne followed a pattern in which “scores of wives and widows of knights and noblemen commissioned tombs and stained glass whose location, effigies and painted images, epitaphs, and heraldry recorded their chosen identities.”⁷ Her monument projects the exact image she spent her entire life trying to build. Her epitaph declares her illustrious descent as “a Princess descended of noble lineage.”⁸ As a member of the Bouchier family, she was a distant descendant of Edward III and, therefore, of noble blood in her own right. The Westminster monument describes, along with her own virtuous characteristics, the dignity of her marital

⁵ Ibid., 375.

⁶ Richard Jenkyns, *Westminster Abbey* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 57.

⁷ Barbara Harris, “Defining Themselves: English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550,” *Journal of British Studies* vol. 49 (2010), 737.

⁸ Nichols, “Anne Duchess of Somerset,” 372.

family. She identified herself as the Duchess of Somerset and wife of Edward Seymour – Francis Newdegate is not mentioned. She also distinguished herself as mother of the Earl of Hertford and grandmother of Viscount Beauchamp – the matriarch of a powerful, persistent line of Seymours. Anne used her monument, which she almost certainly commissioned and designed herself, as a means of “self-discovery, self-presentation,” and “some personal autonomy and self-expression.”⁹ While the comments and writings of contemporaries and scholars slandered her image, this final testament comes much closer to reality.

Anne Stanhope was a devoted and loyal wife and mother. She was also a politician, a committed religious reformer, and a survivor of Tudor intrigue. It was her actions and her connections at court that saved the Seymour family from ruin throughout the reigns of Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I. Her activities as a patroness of religious literature distinguished her from many of her contemporaries. Anne also worked with both of her husbands – but with Edward Seymour in particular – to form influential political partnerships. Like many of her female contemporaries, she was a major force in politics and religion. The Duke and Duchess of Somerset’s struggle with Thomas Seymour in the late 1540s, however, set the groundwork for Anne’s unfortunate historical image. Almost immediately, writers and historians slandered her reputation. She became a stereotypical “bad wife” – proud, nagging, vengeful. By looking beyond this image, however, scholars may now view Anne Stanhope’s story in a more balanced light. By doing so, they may also find a more nuanced way to view important aspects – marriage and family, religion and the court, politics, and gender – in history of the Tudor period.

⁹ Harris, *Defining Themselves*, 738.

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