

# ELIZABETH

The Virgin Queen and  
the Men who Loved Her



# Elizabeth

The Virgin Queen and  
the Men who Loved Her



A Series of Biographical Sketches  
from the Elizabethan Court

ROBERT STEPHEN PARRY

*To Ruby*

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Robert Stephen Parry

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Hark!  
The echoing air a triumph sings,  
And all around,  
Pleased cupids clap their wings.

*'The Fairy Queen' by Henry Purcell*

## Preface

**I**t was as a young man some good few years ago, whilst attending a residential retreat in what was then the remote and peaceful countryside of Northamptonshire, that I experienced, along with a number of other history students of various ages and backgrounds, a set of most unusual lectures. Fortunately, being at the time proficient in Pitman shorthand, I was able to take down much of what was said almost verbatim, and it is from these notes, embellished a little by my own recollections that I have been able to reassemble the narrative that I present to you here.

The location was a fine old Elizabethan building, a combination of half-timbered walls and brickwork, with a gatehouse of octagonal turrets at the top of a long drive - all set in parkland of some 50 acres. We were told that long ago there had been an even more ancient structure in the grounds, and the ruins of what appeared to be an abbey or monastery, its arches and stones fallen and scattered, could be detected whenever one chose to take the air and wander of an evening. I have to say, however, that the house itself with its warren of rooms and narrow passages was not in the greatest state of repair either. And the lectures, presented by a Dr Dejon from the university of Louvain, were obviously intended to contribute to a much-needed fund for restoration.

I arrived on what was a Friday afternoon in a somewhat cynical state of mind because although I had been interested in English history for many years the name of the gentleman I had come to listen to was unknown to me. And yet, as I hope you will agree, the lectures were presented with an air of such charm and authority that none of us present that weekend would surely have ever forgotten the experience.

On the face of it, the subject matter was nothing out of the ordinary. Following an introduction on the first evening,

most of the subsequent lecture over the course of the weekend focused attention on one of Elizabeth I's favoured courtiers, providing a vivid, albeit brief biographical summary - to be followed on each occasion by the awarding of what I can only describe as a kind of Michelin Guide star rating for the gentlemen themselves. And as if that were not already bizarre enough, this in turn would be followed by a short story, a scene from the Elizabethan court - or as Dr Dejon himself described it, a 'vignette.' These stories were so cogent that one might almost have concluded, had one not known better, that the man must surely have been there at the time and witnessed what he described. It was not only amusing, but on more than one occasion, as I recall, a little unsettling as well.

Thus the weekend passed in a haze of half-glimpsed visions of historical and dramatic reconstruction, a strange hybrid between fact and fiction. And with these, and the addition of stories related to us around the evening fireside by the owners of the property, tales of ghostly hauntings and apparitions peculiar to the building such as the figure of a Tudor gentleman who would descend the stairs into the kitchens from time to time, a head tucked under his arm, or of the 'grey lady' who could be seen hastening as if in fear through the gardens after midnight, we would all retire to our beds and barely sleep a wink. The next day the process would be repeated, until the evening of Sunday when we were set free to return to the normal world.

It is only now, looking back at it from a distance in time of some decades that I appreciate how very special an event it was. And thus I would like to invite you to come with me now and experience for yourself what I experienced, back in time to that old manor house with its low timbered ceilings and panelled walls - and which, alas, we can now only visit in our imaginations because the building has sadly long since been demolished and the grounds swallowed up by urban sprawl - while the family who once owned it has, I

## Preface

understand, emigrated overseas. I have chosen, therefore, not to embarrass them any further by naming them in these pages, nor the home they would surely have cherished so dearly. I for one look back on that weekend with much fondness and not a little fascination. Although no major feats of scholarship were accomplished at the time, the words delivered by Dr Dejon and set down here for your entertainment really were quite magical. And if something of that magic can be conveyed to you in these pages ... well, I will consider myself to have been well rewarded for my pains.

## *First Evening*

