

## Chapter I



England 1533-1633

### Brief Chronology of Events.

The years between 1533, the birth of Elizabeth I, and 1633, the death of George Herbert, were perhaps some of the most eventful as well as the most decisive in English history. By 1533 the schism of the English Church from Rome had been irreversibly determined. On January 25, 1533, Henry VIII secretly married Anne Boleyn. In March, Thomas Cranmer was consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury after which he nullified Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon and pronounced valid the marriage with Ann Boleyn. On September 7, Princess Elizabeth was born to Anne Boleyn.

Independence from the Roman Church was further emphasized in the few following years when a series of acts abolishing papal authority in England was issued and monasteries were slowly pressured till all were dissolved in 1539. Meanwhile, Henry, now Head of the English Church and State executed Anne Boleyn on grounds of adultery, and then married Jane Seymour. Within a single decade, Henry also married Anne of Cleves, Catherine Howard and Catherine Parr. He executed Catherine Howard for immorality.

Henry's relations with foreign countries were no less busy than his personal life. After his successful suppression of the nobles and their retainers, and his subtle government through Council and Parliament, he showed his country's independence from Europe by warring against France. During the years 1543 - 1546, the newly founded Royal Navy defeated the French navy.

Edward VI reigned over England from 1547 - 1553. Regents for this 10 year-old king, were successively his uncle, Edward Seymour, the Protector Somerset, and John Dudley, Earl of Warwick and the Duke of Northumberland. The Privy Council, which originated in the former reign, was in the hands of Dudley. However inglorious this period might have been, religious parties and issues became more clearly defined. The first Book of Common Prayer was issued in 1549, and soon followed by an Act of Uniformity which made its use obligatory as the only admissible form of religious service.

The succession of Henry's Catholic daughter, Mary, (1553-1558) resulted in England's close unity with the Church of Rome again. Her unpopular marriage to Philip II of Spain reinforced the enmity many of her subjects felt toward her. Many prominent Protestant leaders were executed. Cranmer was burned at Oxford in 1556. One year later, England declared war with France. The main cause of all unrest and wars in this reign was rooted in the harsh enforcement of religious doctrines.

In 1558 Elizabeth I was enthroned at a time when England was ill-governed, disgraced, lacking unity, leadership, and spirit. Barely a year after her coronation, in order to pacify and affect a compromise between the interests of different groups the Queen re-established the Church as of the reign of Henry VIII with new Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity. In that same year, she aided the Scottish Protestant rebels to expel the French from Scotland. The European struggles for supremacy over the issues of economy, politics, religion, and colonial and trade expansion further complicated England's domestic rifts between political and religious factions. The royal blood-tie between the English and the Scottish monarchs made England a

place of refuge for Mary Stuart\* whose troops were defeated in 1568 by the Scots who revolted against her. Mary's presence in England caused Elizabeth to balance and control the situation much more cautiously as well as tightly.

In spite of all those threatening dangers, Elizabeth efficiently organized her Privy Council and Parliament. As a result, she was secure enough to be successful in debasing the currency and restoring English finances in 1560; in adopting the Thirty-nine Articles<sup>1</sup> and issuing the Statute of Apprentices and Labourers in 1563; in dispersing the rising of the Northern earls in 1569; in subduing the conspiracy of the Duke of Norfolk

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\* A complexity of connections made Mary Stuart a threat to her cousin, Elizabeth I of England.

Mary, Queen of Scots (1542-1587) was the daughter of James V of Scotland and Mary of Guise, from France. She became queen of Scotland upon the early death of James V, but was educated in France and there became the wife of Francis II, and hence simultaneously Queen of France (1559-1587).

Mary Stuart's grandmother, wife of James IV, was Margaret Tudor (1489-1541), a sister of Henry VIII. This gave her a claim to the throne of England should Elizabeth, daughter of Anne Boleyn, be declared illegitimate, or, since that did not happen, upon the death of Elizabeth without heirs.

Thus Mary was a many-sided threat: to Elizabeth's position as sovereign of England, as queen of two nations often at enmity with England, and, in addition, as a devout Catholic.

<sup>1</sup> See chapter II part 2.



against her, and in having him executed in 1572. However, though the Queen tried to compromise with Pope Pius V, she was excommunicated in 1570.

During the period of 1576 to 1580, English seamen enlarged England's international image: Martin Frobisher made three voyages seeking the North-West Passage to America and Sir Francis Drake made his voyage around the world. On the domestic scene, there were many attempts to topple the Queen. Moreover, the Pope, and the Jesuit preachers kept pressing England through Ireland while the Puritans started admonishing the government and the court. Thus, while marine travelling kept expanding the English horizon abroad, internal rebellions kept the Queen alert all the time. In 1586, Anthony Babington's conspiracy to murder the Queen implicated Mary Stuart. This forced the Queen to execute Mary Stuart in the following year.

As the domestic situation was more and more under control, Spanish threats kept England busy with sporadic attacks on merchant ships and small ports. But in 1588, the English navy, aided by a fortuitous storm, defeated the famous Spanish Armada. During this time England also exported 150 colonists to Virginia and encouraged numerous new trade routes to Asia and Persia.

The well-balanced exercise of power subdued all internal uprisings. The same policy suppressed the Irish revolt in 1598 which was handled by the Earl of Essex. But in 1601 when Essex himself staged a rebellion, he was executed. The long reign of Elizabeth I was truly one of evolving institutions. Many political, religious, socioeconomic and literary changes took place. These movements put a lot of stress and strain on England and its people.

Elizabeth's death on March 24, 1603, left her close aide, Robert Cecil, busy negotiating with the Scottish Court for the succession of James VI of Scotland, who became James I of England.

Assured of his success in ruling the northern kingdom, James rode south, too proud to understand the English mind. He believed that he became a king by divine right. This arrogance caused the dissatisfaction of the able Privy Councilors, and of Parliament. No matter how unwise and incompetent James I proved to be, the following record should not be overlooked. In 1604 England made peace with Spain. In 1607 the first successful settlement in Virginia was made. The Authorized, King James Version of the Bible was issued in 1611. The warships of the East India Company, chartered since the earlier reign in 1600, defeated the Portuguese off Surat in 1614. In 1620, The Pilgrim Fathers settled at Plymouth, Massachusetts. 1621 saw Parliament in bitter confrontation with James I over foreign policy and parliamentary privileges.

In 1623, Prince Charles, later Charles I, went to Madrid with the Duke of Buckingham to negotiate a Spanish marriage but was unsuccessful. They returned in October, enraged and resolved on war against Spain. In the following year Parliament voted supplies for war against Spain. In March 1625, James I died.

Charles was 25 when he came to the throne. Obstinate in his narrow principles, he detested compromise. One year after his coronation, he dissolved Parliament. In 1629, Parliament was again dissolved and not summoned again until 1640.



### Political Background.

This period of 100 years marked the transfer of power over the English state from the Crown to Parliament.

Henry VIII succeeded in coercing Parliament into passing the Act of Appeals in 1533, the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Succession in 1534. These three major Acts emphatically declared England to be a sovereign state, free of all foreign jurisdiction, and the King Supreme Head of the Church as well as of the State. From now on the once extremely influential body of the Clergy which had kept England under the control of Rome was shattered. Each nomination and consecration of anyone to any position was done by English authority alone. This independence separated the Church of England from the Church of Rome and also isolated England from other European states which held firm to Catholicism. The English crown had to work hard to gain acceptance from the Nobles, from the people and from other states. In this process, the reigns of Edward VI and Mary were the actual transitional period when England was undergoing the fluctuation of faiths between Protestantism and Catholicism.

Under the banner of the Pope who claimed monopoly of faith and salvation, other countries found more excuse to punish England by invasion. Meanwhile, ideas on religion were not clear even among the English courtiers. To handle the situation effectively, better organization of the royal management was achieved when a formal Privy Council was established and the personal Household administration was made less dependent on the King and more bureaucratic in style. Parliament was also purged in such a way that Henry's ideas would be authorized. This offensive approach was also applied in Henry's foreign policy.

However, financial limitations restricted Henry more than he intended. English influence in Scotland and Ireland did not survive for long and the hollow triumph over a small section of France actually cost England too much. By the time he died, England was openly at war with Scotland, which was militarily supported by France.

The political situation of the two following reigns, though different in approach, brought about the growth of Protestantism and capitalism. Such growth further caused stronger hostility to Spain. During these years, the English became more friendly towards France.

Too young to manage state affairs, Edward was overshadowed by his uncle, the Duke of Somerset, who was an idealist in politics but tactless in human relations. Under the Duke's hand, England won the war against Scotland, but England could not afford to occupy it. Domestically, troubles were mainly concerned with religion. Protestantism found wider expression and acceptance. Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer was such a masterpiece of compromise that even many Catholic bishops accepted it. There was serious trouble with the uprising of tenants over the enclosure of the commons for pasture. The Earl of Warwick, John Dudley, took this opportunity to eliminate Somerset. Dudley widened the gap between religions by turning toward extreme Protestantism which put down deep roots which Queen Mary found impossible to uproot. The ambitious Dudley was successful in retaining all powers until the death of Edward. But in spite of many plots, he failed to eliminate the Princess Mary.



Mary's intention of bringing her subjects back to Rome was so strong that she dissolved Parliament. This made it impossible for the people to oppose her marriage to Philip of Spain, except by rebellion. The unrest which took place immediately after her coronation created patriotism in the minds of the English people. Thus the Queen began her reign by having the majority of the people as her enemies. People appeared to be Catholic out of fear. Burnings pushed the wealthier Protestants to the continent, and leading Protestant members, including Cranmer, were burnt as martyrs.

Mary continued to cut a poor image of her reign when she sent the English troops to assist Spain when war broke out between Spain and France in 1557. The unsuccessful war brought disaster to the economy of England as well as utter humiliation to the English people. Bitterest of all, she was forced by her Council to acknowledge Elizabeth as her successor.

Politically, Elizabeth began her reign at the most difficult time. England was at war, the Exchequer had no resources, the coinage was debased, trade was depressed and the nation was deeply divided by religion. Through the genius of the English people under the able Queen, England preserved peace at home and safe-guarded itself against foreign invasion. Fully understanding the mind of her people, the Queen wisely exploited the policy of moderation and compromise. She re-organized her Privy Councillors and tried to settle religious questions by not committing herself to any creed.

Throughout her reign, she used all diplomatic approaches to prevent any clash domestically as well as internationally. Her subtle arrangements in the French - Scottish crisis, her duel with Mary Queen of Scots, and the way she later house-arrested



Mary were clear signs of her wisdom of compromise as well as of shrewdness. The way she handled attempts of religious groups to destroy her was another remarkable feature of the wily Queen, though she executed 250 persons for their Catholic faith. She worked for the establishment of the Church of England while wrestling with the Puritan threat from within the English Church itself.

Economic recovery and the voyages of discovery promoted the stability of trade and government. Though sporadic rebellions and plots caused some delay, it helped the Queen and her administration to be prudent and be in touch with the reality of the people. During this time England invested substantial sums in efforts to establish colonies abroad. Meanwhile, the Queen tried to maintain peaceful relations with Spain, the Netherlands, and France. However, the war against Spain was inevitable and the English navy proved superior to the then most famous Spanish Armada.

Internally, Elizabeth kept various influential factions under firm control, using the one to check the other. She kept no court favourites, but she supported each one of her suitors as the balance of factions dictated, though the Privy Council especially Cecil played a central role in the government. Her clear purpose of preserving order and justice, protecting property, and defending the realm was known throughout the kingdom, and her centralized style of governing was well accepted. Parliaments were convened only thirteen times in her forty-four years reign.

Under the Stuarts, James I and Charles I, the House of Lords and the House of Commons represented the wealthy people of the country. As for the House of Lords, though still regarded as more

important than the House of Commons, it commanded less respect since titles into this House could be bought. The House of Commons was also for the propertied classes. In order to be elected, ruling classes competed among themselves. Christopher Hill says:

Disputed elections were usually not concerned with political issues, but with rivalries for power between local families, though these rivalries might acquire a political flavour as one family attached itself to a court favourite and its rival therefore adopted an opposition standpoint.<sup>2</sup>

The House of Commons, therefore, did not represent the people of England at all but rather certain groups of affluent gentry and merchants.

The Kings claimed to rule by Divine Right while the governing classes thought otherwise and the majority of the population had no share in such rule. Since no authority could dictate where the king's or his subjects' rights and privileges began or ended, there were constant abuses of power. With such a system, the population which had neither money nor influence could never voice their opinion but only be ruled. At the same time, the richer ruling classes strove not for the good of the crown or for the common good, but for their increasing wealth and interest. The crown and the people grew poorer while the members of both Houses and ruling positions grew richer.

There were factors for a series of clashes between the two unwise and incompetent kings and their aggressive subjects.

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<sup>2</sup> Hill, Christopher, The Century of Revolution 1603-1714

(London: Norton, 1966) 44.

Some of those factors were economic stress; the rise of the gentry in numbers, wealth, education, experience, and power; the growth of influence of the Parliament and the Puritans; and the increasing numbers of learned lawyers.

Neither king had able Privy Councillors. They squeezed money from their subjects in order to compensate for their lavish spending and to pay for the wars with Germany, France, and Spain. Cases of justice and patents of monopoly were grave matters differently interpreted by the kings, the Houses and learned individuals. The kings's reliance on court favourites further created inconsistency in the kings' rulings and worsened the overall administration. James I dissolved Parliament thrice in his reign once in 1610, again in 1614 and finally in 1621. Charles dissolved Parliament twice, first in 1626 and later in 1629, after which he governed without Parliament for 11 years.

However confused the situation was, as Claton Roberts sums up the political development of that time, "there was no clear idea of the fundamental law; it was a confusion of the Common law, moral law, and the immemorial laws of England." By the end of this period "there were only two certain truths: Parliament became the highest court in the land" and "had the authority to declare what the law was, and the king was beneath the law."<sup>3</sup>

#### Socioeconomic Background.

Tudor England was a span of time when the lives and

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<sup>3</sup> Claton Roberts and David Roberts, A History of England: Prehistory to 1714 (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1980) 340.



thoughts of all Englishmen began to be loosened from the close control of the Roman Catholic Church. The earlier local governing by domestic laws of estates and corporations of clergy, nobles, villeins, and burghers in convents, castles, manors and walled cities was absorbed into the centralized power of the national State. As the national State became more powerful, despotism of the State itself gave room for the era of private enterprise and expanding genius in the individual mind and conscience which was still subjected to and merged with the national will embodied in the Crown and the Parliament.

The growth of the population and capital city:

the rise of an educated and active-minded middle class; the spread of cloth manufacture and other trading activities; the unifying effect of the Common Law, the royal administration and the national Parliament; the national pride engendered by the democratic triumphs of the English archer over the mounted aristocrat; the adoption of the English language by the educated classes; the invention of the printing-press to undermine the churchman's monopoly of learning; the studies of religion in the light of a scholarly examination of the Scriptures; the discovery of the ocean trade routes and of the New World; the resulting intellectual outlook and commercial habits of the people - all these changes, spiritual and material,

G.M. Trevelyan says, "combined to create a new fabric of society in England."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> G.M. Trevelyan, A Shortened History of England (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965) 202.

Power was increasingly concentrated in the King's hand. English monarchy slowly allied its power with the developing Parliament. In this process of development the old roles of universities, nobles, lawyers, bishops, secular clergy, and town corporations were gradually reformed. Some institutions, like the cosmopolitan orders of monks and friars were destroyed by the State. Clerical rights of sanctuary and benefit were reduced or abolished. The King, no longer the Pope, exercised powers over the ecclesiastical courts. The new form of National Church was attached to the national State. Through the exercise of power by the Crown in Parliament, the State attained unlimited authority as vividly expressed in a series of revolutions in ecclesiastical and religious affairs.

National authority controlled national economy by regulating trade, wages, and prices. Provision for the poor became the duty of society at large. The Crown appointed members of the unpaid Justices of the Peace\* who enforced certain laws and functioned as the link between the central authority and the local administration.

The most sensitive issue which caused so much violence and unrest was religion. Politics and religion intertwined so closely that a strong sense of nationalism arose in the English mind. The Spaniard, the Jesuits and Catholicism were confusingly identified. The Pope, the Heads of States and Parliaments were directly involved in the struggles of

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\* A magistrate with jurisdiction over a small district, authorized to decide minor cases, commit persons to trial in a higher court etc.

commercial and naval superiority. Religious toleration did not exist, and persecution, burnings, and suppression were implemented according to the policy of each reign. Foreign invasions were often carried out under the pretext of serving God.

While social and economic changes in England inspired free individuals of all classes to venture into explorations of new fields of knowledge and new lands with imagination, the cloth trade made weaving colonies spring up everywhere. The whole cycle employed domestic cloth manufacturers, workers, transporters, and traders inland and across the sea. Trade and the discovery of the ocean routes increased the wealth and political power of London and other towns, especially the sea ports.

The centralized bureaucracy of the Tudors and early Stuarts had to give way to a decentralization of power with a more democratic system of parliamentary government and local administration. People gradually gained freedom of speech and action. The merchants and the common lawyers led the House of Commons gradually to develop an elaborate system of committee procedure and to curtail the king's power, and, in a series of quarrels, to govern the modern nation. These confrontations had religion as the chief motive and had politics as the chief result. The slow pace of working out this complex domestic problem was possible because England had earlier isolated itself from European influences and dangers in the earlier reigns.

Though Scotland and England were unified in the person of James I, English society deeply resented the House of Stuart for many reasons. The Stuart mismanagement disgraced England with economic distress, diplomatic failure, poor show of forces, and fluctuating religious policy. Moreover people suffered the results of the quarrels of the Parliaments and Churches, the



wavering policy between concession and severity, and the inconsistent laws.

Fiercer conflicts occurred in the reign of Charles I. People were alienated from the crown by the long absence of Parliament. Through the genius and perseverance of a few leaders, Parliament slowly fought power groups and diminished the royal power. Around 1633, confusing issues like Puritanism, Catholicism, the Church of England, the Parliamentary system, and roles of justice remained.

Economically speaking, the 1620s and 1630s were a period of chronic depression. Poor management caused 500 cases of bankruptcy. Exports and the King's Adventurers failed. The wool and cloth industries and trade were doomed. People were unemployed while the price of grain was high. Only the coal industry advanced. Yet, labourers were badly exploited with hard work and poor pay. The rich grew richer and the poor grew poorer. Poor children had to be sent to work. "The purchasing power of building craftsmen and agricultural workers reached the lowest point in the whole of recorded history since 1300."<sup>5</sup> The government was unable to solve the problems.

#### Cultural and Literary Background.

The Renaissance, which had its original and varied expression in Italy, was a movement that spread throughout Europe. In the North, especially in the rich cities of the Netherlands wealthy patrons provided a home for humanism and

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<sup>5</sup> Roberts 345.

the arts. Perhaps the most outstanding figure of this Northern Renaissance was Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1534), humanist, scholar and theologian. Erasmus visited England in 1499, when he became friendly with England's two great humanists, John Colet (1467-1519) and Sir Thomas More (1478-1535), whose writings express so well the English literary and artistic Renaissance which flowered in Elizabethan times.

After the mediaeval time of constant wars between feudal barons, the relatively peaceful time of the Tudors gave England the chance for cultural and literary development in the mood of the Renaissance. The effect of changes from feudalism to capitalism and the immediate effect of Henry VIII's debasement of the coinage caused sharp shifts of fortunes in wealth and property among the people. Such shifts resulted in steep inflation. This explains why the standard and the cost of living were rising quite fast. People paid more attention to their houses and dress. To appear fashionable they ate new foods like potatoes, and began to smoke tobacco. The nouveaus riches' quick fortunes brought England to the first great age of country houses. "Gentlemen now built mansions for the entertainment of the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth, instead of building churches dedicated to the Virgin Mary."<sup>6</sup> Grandeur of manors, castles, palaces was successfully carried out by the grafting of classical and Italian styles onto the English Gothic tradition - expressing the Renaissance in a very English way. As in the

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<sup>6</sup> David Mountfield, History of England (Middlesex: The Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited, 1978) 60.

Netherlands and in Italy, there were wealthy persons who could indulge in or patronize the new arts.

Not only did the Elizabethans enjoy national strength and pride, a variety of religious beliefs, and an abundance of wealth, they also gained the new concept of Renaissance about man. Like his continental contemporaries, the Renaissance Englishman was overwhelmed by the wonder of himself, by the beauty of the world around him, and by the concept that his life in this world was to display his amazing creative faculties.

The spirit of the Renaissance envisioned a universal man who developed his potential in many areas. The Renaissance Englishman brought about changes and had deep yearnings for intellectual exploration and discovery. Foreign scholars were imported and new ideas brought to England. The role of the Church in society was greatly lessened. Private citizens refounded the grammar schools. Some religious devotions were suppressed and the secularization of society was hastened. The importance of scientific experiment was emphasized. People knew for certain that education from university or from an Inn of Court would put a man in power. Thus, sons of the higher classes poured into the universities where the study of logic was replaced by rhetoric and attendance at lectures was replaced by reading of printed books like Cicero, Virgil, and Erasmus. In fact, the universities helped transform the military aristocracy into one based on political ability.

Poetry and music were closely associated in Elizabethan England. At this time, dualism between the spiritual and material worlds was much felt. The result of such dualism can be seen in that, during the last few decades of Elizabeth's reign,



a popular domestic pastime was the masque in which themes were changed from religious purpose to a popular form.

In terms of literature, amidst tight control of the printing of religious works, English printers, between 1525 and 1547, published not only Bibles but 800 other editions of religious works. In 1537, the Bishop of Hereford admitted that the clergy knew the scriptures less well than many lay people. However, the greatest glory of literature was in the time of the Elizabethan Renaissance when Shakespeare and his contemporary writers helped enliven the young and growing English as a literary language. The full flowering of English prose found its finest ornament in the translation of the King James Authorized Version of the Bible which was published in 1611, only eight years after the Queen's death.

The death of Elizabeth created a vacuum of authority. The stability which had kept people secure was replaced by the political conflict of succession as well as by the inner conflict of the English people. This conflict sharply contrasted the realization of man's great potential and his unlimited desires and ambitions on the one side and the existing uncertain reality of the times on the other. Moreover, the reigns of James I and Charles I were a time of tensions; tensions between contending faiths, between the old and the new thinking, between the scholars and the court, between the suppressing force of the Crown and the near-explosion of the decade-long suppressed expression of the individuals. From this whole atmosphere, there originated a form of metaphysical poetry which characterized itself by:

its paradox, its sharp antitheses, its clutch at connections between objects apparently the most incongruous, its agonising soul-questionings and search for salvation, its sense of the contrast between subjective and objective, desire and possibility.<sup>7</sup>

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the literary figures who lived during the latter years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth and the early years of the Stuarts found themselves in an era when nothing was really stable. They could never be sure if their ideas would be the cause of their own elimination, neither could they be certain if their expression would be categorized as good by any standard. Actually, they could hold on to nothing except their personal conviction and their interpretation of the faith they held. Such was part of the setting George Herbert lived in.

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<sup>7</sup> Hill 97.