

GB – The Tudors and the Stuarts

1: The Tudors, the Reformation, the Renaissance and the Sea Power

The year 1485 is usually considered **the end of the Middle Ages** and the beginning of the English Renaissance, the most lustrous period in the history of the English nation, which coincided with a century of **Tudor rule (1485–1603)**. The three most remarkable monarchs of the House of Tudor were Henry VII, who laid the foundations of a powerful state; Henry VIII, who established the national church and built the Royal Navy; and Elizabeth I, who kept England on the course to becoming a heretical sea power.

Henry VII wanted to make the Crown financially independent and strong. He encouraged business and benefited from taxes; he also built a fleet of merchant ships to help merchants to regain overseas markets which they had lost during the War of Roses. His efforts to bring back prosperity to the country set him in alliance with the middle class whose richest representatives were frequently knighted to become the kings' advisors and statesmen.

The cloth trade further developed in the 16th century and was England's chief source of wealth. The wealth was evenly distributed in both villages and towns where cloth was manufactured. With a few exceptions, the business of weaving still had its domestic character – the weaver worked at home with his whole family. He was supplied by middlemen (called journeymen) who also distributed the finished goods. In those days their work was very strenuous – they used packhorses whose long trains linked distant regions. All classes, high and low, were engaged in the manufacture of cloth, and as merchants, weavers and sheep farmers grew richer and could pay higher taxes their political leverage grew as well. They bought land, intermarried with needy squires and founded new country families. Their sons were trained for public service or the Royal Navy. Gradually they started to oust churchmen and nobles from their public offices. In the course of the 16th century many of them became Protestants and Reformation men.

The Middle Ages have a somewhat unfair opinion as an intellectually barren epoch. Yet it is true that obscurantism in Medieval England reached its apogee when Wycliffe was driven out of Oxford. A hundred years later, in the last two decades of the 15th century, new ideas came to England from Italy, which was the cradle of the **Renaissance**, based on the studies of ancient culture, literature and science. In England, the Renaissance started with the humanist movement – the ‘**New Learning**’ of classical Latin, Greek and Hebrew, but it became more than that. Whereas classical studies in Italy were pagan and artistic in character, in England they were combined with Christian piety and civic virtues. The overall aim of the English humanists was not only to reform education, by grounding it in respect for human reason, but to reform the Church herself. The most important representatives of the movement were **Sir Thomas More** (the author of *Utopia*), the Dutchman **Erasmus of Rotterdam**, and **John Colet**.¹ All of them launched bitter attacks at obscurantism and Church abuses in a manner not heard in public since subduing Wycliffe and his priests.

Henry VIII was a friend of Colet and More. He was as orthodox as his father Henry VII (he had Lollards burnt as heretics) but, on the other hand, like his advanced friends he disliked monks, disapproved of image and relic worship and accepted the possibility of religious speculation if it was based on the careful study of the Bible. He was a generous patron of men of the Renaissance, and it was said that his court had a better store of learned men than any university. Initially Henry was content to rule the country through **Cardinal Wolsey**, so his progressive ideas did not interfere with the running of the state. Wolsey was a very skillful statesman and diplomat in whose hands the foreign policy of **the Balance of Power**² was for the first time clearly defined. But soon it became clear that Cardinal Wolsey was to be the last churchman to rule over England.

Besides the Renaissance, another important development in the reign of the Tudors was the discovery of **the New World** and opening new ocean routes. Within a span of just a few decades England ceased to be a backwater somewhere on the margins of Europe, and as the new map of the world unfolded, she found herself near its strategic center. In the era of ocean discovery and commerce, the English proved themselves to be not only a sea-going population accustomed to sailing the stormy waters of northern seas, but also skillful tradesmen, who had something to offer to the peoples of the newly discovered lands. While Spain had nothing to send except conquistadors, missionaries and colonists, England had cloth, which was creating new markets in different nooks and corners of the world.

Still initially it did not seem that England would be a chief winner at this new game. In the 15th century, Spain and Portugal led the way in **ocean discovery**: the Portuguese founded an Empire on the coast of Africa, and Spain sent soldiers to subjugate and colonize Mexico and Peru. The Pope divided all newly discovered territories between those two European powers by drawing a line from pole to pole, west of the Azores, and stating that all lands to the West of the line belonged to Spain while those to the East belonged

¹ Erasmus and Colet taught in Oxford, thus they were often called **Oxford reformers**.

² The main aim of this policy, which became the cornerstone of the school of English diplomacy in the following centuries, was maintaining a balance between great European powers such as France or Spain because if any of these great continental states defeated others, England’s position would be threatened. Therefore what the policy boiled down to was playing one great monarchy against another, so that none of them could gain complete supremacy.

to Portugal. In this way the Pope barred England's gate to the New World and doomed her to insular second-rate existence.

In this situation Henry VIII decided to build a **fleet of fighting ships** capable of challenging the mighty Spanish fleet. The Spanish fleet was still made of slave-rowed galleys, similar to those that had sailed the Mediterranean Sea. What is more important, those galleys were not warships, and they were easy prey to pirates. The frequent assaults by pirates intercepting the cargo of gold sailing from America to Spanish ports brought it home to the Spanish that it was imperative to build a fighting fleet. But the English had started to build such a fleet much earlier, and additionally they were pioneers in a new type of sea warfare. The English warships had a completely new purpose and design. They were sailing vessels, not rowed galleys; they were sturdy and agile and had canons. While the Spanish warships were moving platforms on which soldiers were carried to battle, not different from the battles on land, the English warship was a mobile battery of canons ready to give a shattering '**broadside**' (a simultaneous discharge of canons) which, in the words of E. M. Travelyan, was the operation of war to which British maritime and colonial power owed their existence. The Royal Navy not only was the chief instrument in founding and maintaining the Empire, but first and foremost it saved England from the backlash of Catholic European Powers when she embarked on the course to become a Protestant country.

England's way to **Protestantism** was long and rather winding. It started with the popular anti-clerical sentiment already very vivid in the late Middle Ages. The powers and privileges enjoyed by the priesthood gave offence to the laymen; the wealth of the Church induced in many greedy and ambitious young men a desire to rob the Church of her riches. Among them was the young profligate king Henry VIII, who in his first years of reign managed to squander a sizeable fortune amassed by his thrifty father (£ 2,000,000 – fifteen years' worth of income). What is more, the king was inspired by the New Learning of Colet and More, who inculcated in him the idea that the monasteries were redundant, and he was supported by public opinion, very vocal about the corruption of monks. Finally, the king was rather unsuccessful in trying to pursue the principles of the Balance of Power and his position in European politics was rather weak. That increased his dislike for the Church and the Pope whom he had no power to control.

The prelude to Henry's breach with the Pope was the German **Reformation** under **Martin Luther** and **John Calvin**, which practically stripped the Pope of all religious authority. To make matters worse for the Pope, Rome was besieged by Charles V, the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire (Germany) and at the same time the king of Spain. There could have been no better moment for Henry VIII to break with the Papacy.

Luther's and Calvin's doctrines, once they were proclaimed, immediately became popular in England where they absorbed Lollards into the Protestant movement. The men of the New Learning, however, were not unanimous about the new religious dogmas. Oxford held back, but Cambridge joined the movement. The Cambridge students met in a tavern **The White Horse** where they discussed Luther's proposals. These men were nicknamed **Germans**, but they were genuine patriots who later became **the founders of the Anglican Church**.

Initially the king was opposed to Luther's ideas and even wrote a book in the defense of the Catholic faith, for which he was rewarded by the Pope with the title the **Defender of the Faith**, a decision the Pope must have later regretted. However gradually the King

started to regard The Reformation and religious upheaval as a solution to many domestic problems. The immediate cause of the break with Rome was the question of divorce with **Catherine of Aragon**, from whom Henry could not expect any more children. Their only child was princess Mary, and the king wanted a son to secure for England an undisputed succession. There had never been a queen on the throne of England (except Matilda), and he feared a civil war or the rule of a foreign prince consort.

It was Cardinal Wolsey's task to persuade the Pope to give the king the divorce, and the task seemed fairly easy because the Pope had already divorced Henry's sister Margaret Queen of Scotland, thus proving he was not given to scruples. But the Pope was at Charles V's mercy and Charles V was Catherine's nephew and protector. Wolsey's mission to obtain a divorce fell through, and the king started to ask himself pretty obvious questions: why should he look abroad for consent to do what he wanted? Why not ask the English Churchmen and the Parliament? **Thomas Cranmer**, one of the 'Germans' from Cambridge replaced Wolsey as Archbishop of Canterbury, while **Thomas Cromwell** became the head of the anti-clerical revolution. In 1531 Henry persuaded the bishops to make him the head of the Church in England, and Parliament put the Royal Reformation into effect, and in just seven years **the breach with Rome** was complete. Parliament passed the legislation (**The Act of Supremacy – 1534**) that destroyed all monasteries. Thomas Cromwell prepared a survey of Church property which was the first organized survey since the **Doomsday Book**.³ Between 1536 and 1539, five hundred and sixty monasteries were closed and their land was sold among the local gentry. This decision proved to be very judicious because when the Catholic reaction⁴ started on the continent, those who benefited from the dissolution of the monasteries did not want to see abbots, monks or nuns ever again.

In the Universities there was a temporary decline of students (half of them had been monks) but soon the campuses were swelled with gentlemen's sons.

Average people approved of the Revolution even though they sympathized with blameless Catherine and disliked **Ann Boleyn** – a flirt whom the King made his next bride. Those who refused to back up the king and repudiate Papal authority through the **Oath of Supremacy** went to the scaffold, like Sir Thomas More.

After the attack on the Church propriety and Abbey lands, Henry VIII as the Supreme Head of the Church proceeded to reform the religion of the English. Relic worship, image-worship, giving pardons for money and some popular superstitions were eradicated. What is more important, however, English was introduced as the language of worship. The priests had to recite the mass in English; the Lord's Prayer, the Articles of Faith and the Commandments were taught in English, and common people finally got to know the Bible. These changes gave impetus to the English Reformation, and when Catholic Queen Mary tried to undo the Reformation, ordinary people sacrificed their lives for the New Church and the new positive atmosphere it created among believers.

But the new Anglican Church was still not protestant. The king passed **the Act of Six Articles** decreeing death against anyone who denied **Transubstantiation**,⁵ the necessity

³ Domesday Book – a written record of the ownership and value of land made in 1086 for William the Conqueror in order to assess the size and value of the King's property and tax the property of others.

⁴ The Catholic reaction is most frequently described as Counter – Reformation. The Jesuits, whose order was founded in 1534, were instrumental in the Counter – Reformation.

⁵ The belief that during the mass the wine and bread turn into the blood and body of Christ.

of confession and clerical celibacy. Protestants continued to be burned at the stake. The next to the scaffolds were the enemies of the anti-clerical revolution. The majority of the English were neither Catholic nor Protestant but no one believed in toleration. After Henry VIII's death, it was still not clear whether the country would choose reunion with Rome or further advance to Protestantism.

Queen Mary, who took the throne after Henry VIII's only son died at the age of sixteen, was the daughter of Henry and Catherine of Aragon. Like her mother, she was Catholic, and like her, she preferred Spain to the country she came to rule. Things went from bad to worse when she fell in love with **Philip II of Spain** and insisted on marrying him in blatant disregard of her subjects' wishes. To please him she wanted Papal jurisdiction restored. And when finally she burned three hundred Protestants in just one year, the hatred of the Church of Rome among the English became rampant.⁶

Philip of Spain treated England as a mere extension of his Spanish Empire and continued to deny the English access to America. He was accepted as king of England only for Mary's lifetime, and when she died childless and slighted by her husband in 1558, the whole country was relieved. **Elizabeth**, the daughter of Ann Boleyn and Mary's half sister, was the last of Henry VIII's children. She survived the reign of Mary only because she was very cautious and did not give Mary an excuse to kill her, and because Philip had taken a liking to her even before his wife died. With the help of the House of Commons, she reestablished the supremacy of state over the national church, and for the rest of her life she made sure that the Church remained under royal authority as the honorable servant of the state.

When she became Queen, she was only twenty five years old. She considered herself 'mere English' because her mother Ann Boleyn was not a foreign princess. Yet she spoke Greek, Latin and Italian. In the age of religious wars, she was exceptionally tolerant and eager to strike a balance between the wishes of her Catholic and Protestant subjects. During her childhood she had been imprisoned and in constant danger; as Queen she was threatened by internal agitators and external aggressors.

To avoid the immediate invasion of the island, Elizabeth promised to marry Philip or a person of his choice even though she had no such intention. Then she tried to buy some time by sending some money to the enemies of Spain, to prolong a religious war in France in which Spain was engaged. The danger was temporarily averted, but fiercely Catholic Spain continued to pose a threat to Elizabeth's throne. The struggle between Catholics and Protestants at home was still severe, and plot after plot was laid to put the Scottish Queen Mary (Elizabeth's Catholic cousin) on the English throne.

Mary 'Queen of Scots' was Elizabeth's closest relative; therefore, when she found herself in trouble with her own Scottish people, she fled to England to Elizabeth whose throne she endangered. For Catholics she was a godsend. The Pope and Spain in league with Catholic extremists in England started scheming to kill Elizabeth and to put Mary on the throne. For twenty years Mary was Elizabeth's prisoner, and every time a new plot was discovered, the Commoners of England petitioned for Mary's execution. But that would mean a war with powerful Spain, a scenario that Elizabeth wanted at all costs to avoid. When finally Mary promised Philip of Spain that he would be the heir to the throne of England and, thus encouraged him to invade the country, Elizabeth yielded to her Ministers and Parliament

⁶ Mary's cruelty earned her the nickname **Bloody Mary**.

and in 1587 agreed to Mary's execution. The nation rejoiced and welcomed her decision. Mary was associated with Catholic plots and a constant threat of Catholic invasion, and therefore was very unpopular among the majority of English people. The hostility against the Pope and Spain intensified patriotic feelings that were focused on the queen and bred active hatred of everything Catholic. The Queen became the embodiment of the complete independence of the nation and the omnipotence of the state, and the Queen's worship reached a culmination in those years. When, after Mary's execution, Philip claimed the throne for himself, even those who were in two minds about the righteousness of Mary's execution rallied with Elizabeth's supporters against one common enemy.

The antagonism between Spain and England by then had had a very long history. Elizabeth helped the Protestant Netherlands to get rid of Catholic Spanish rule. The Dutch, with the Queen's assent, used British harbors to attack Spanish ships that were taking Spanish soldiers to suppress rebellions of the Dutch Protestants. Elizabeth also sent the rebels some money and soldiers. Moreover she supported pirates who attacked and looted Spanish ships coming from America and shared in their spoils; American gold and silver fed the Queen's treasury. Even though officially the Queen disowned the pirates, it was a well-known fact, even to Philip of Spain, that the plundered treasure was a considerable part of England's revenue. Some of the clashes with the Spanish were over the right to trade in the territories assigned to the Spanish by the Pope. The Spanish and also the Portuguese did everything they could to exclude foreigners from trading with the regions under their control. The Elizabethan merchants established trade with Russia, Constantinople and India⁷ and took a leading part in the slave trade. Negroes were kidnapped in Africa and sold in American ports, officially closed to English trade. The maritime conflict with Spain reached its climax when **Francis Drake**, the most famous of Elizabeth's buccaneers, sailed around the world, robbing on his way the Spanish colony on the coast of Chile famous for its fabulous wealth, whereby he was knighted by the Queen upon his return.

In 1587 Philip made up his mind to launch an invasion of the island. He started to consider the conquest of England as necessary in dispatching his enemies in the Netherlands. He built a great fleet of ships, the **Armada**, to carry his soldiers from the Netherlands to England. The invasion took place on **29 July 1588**, and it was a total disaster. Adverse weather conditions combined with English sea power obliterated the magnificent Spanish fleet. The failure of the Armada did not finish the war with Spain which continued until 1609 as a joint effort of the English and the Dutch, but it clearly showed that mighty Spain could not conquer England even while putting out her full power. This victory saved the Protestant Dutch Republic and Germany and diminished Spanish influence in France.

Generally the year 1588 is considered to be one of the turning points in the history of the world – a point at which the English started to take over the lead in the overseas discoveries and commerce. Naturally the whole process was very gradual – it took the 17th and 18th centuries to found the British Empire. Elizabethan England was not populous and strong enough to oust the Spanish from their American colonies, but still a few important steps were made on the route to England's own colonial empire. In **1607 Sir Walter Raleigh** started in North America **the colony of Virginia** named after the Virgin (unmar-

⁷ **East India Company** was founded in 1599 to trade with India. Gradually it brought under its control the empty territories and in the Stuart times it became monopolist, controlling almost the entire Indian subcontinent.

ried) Queen Elizabeth. The **East India Company** started to fight for trade with India. Voyages of discovery resulted in establishing colonies in various parts of the world.

Thus Elizabeth, continuing her father and grandfather's policy, gave a new direction to the expansive energy of the English people. The Tudors not only laid the foundations for the Empire but also mapped out Great Britain. Under Henry VIII, **Wales** was annexed to England on terms of absolute equality – local Welshmen became JPs (Justices of Peace) and Welsh gentry sent their representatives to parliament. Gradually the Welsh upper classes were becoming English in speech and custom, while the peasants living in mountainous regions still spoke the Celtic language, discouraged in the administration and worship (Henry nonetheless allowed the printing of the Bible in Celtic which is why the language managed to survive).

However, Henry VIII was not so successful in **Ireland** where he tried to implement the same policy. Henry first got rid of some powerful Anglo-Irish families that ruled the country and forced the Irish parliament to take him as king. Had he been content with such a status quo, he might have been victorious, but Henry doggedly insisted on subjugating Ireland to the religious revolution. Ireland in Tudor times was a Catholic stronghold; her insular position made her oblivious of the Renaissance or the New Learning, thus Henry's attempts to take monastic lands gave bitter offence to Irish nationalists. The Jesuits and Spanish started to interfere, seeing in Ireland a foothold from which they could attack England. Thus Elizabeth was forced to re-conquer Ireland, and she did that with extreme cruelty since her army was not big enough to occupy the island and keep it under control. It slaughtered the Irish tribes and killed the survivors with famine. Protestant colonists were ushered into Ulster, the Northeastern part of the island where the Irish held out the longest. Edmund Spenser, an English poet who took part in suppressing the Irish rebellion so described those who did not perish in massacres: 'Out of every corner of the woods ...[The Irish] came creeping forth upon their hands, for their legs would not bear them. They looked like...death. They spoke like ghosts crying out of their graves. They did eat the dead...happy where they could find them'. This did not, however, make any impression on most of the conquerors, who saw in Ireland a prospective English colony, where cheap land could be acquired and fortunes could be made. Many of them were not that mercenary, seeing the conquest of Ireland as a holy task, whereby the only true religion could be upheld and their patriotism and adoration for the Queen displayed. The overall corollary of the conquest was the Irish identification of the Catholic religion with Irish nationalism and genuine hatred of the English and Protestantism. Since the Irish upper class was abolished, Irish priests became the leaders.

While Irish nationalism was closely connected with Catholicism, **English nationalism** was increasingly associated with the new Protestant faith. When Elizabeth ascended the throne, the majority of the nation were anti-clericals, some of whom were Catholics while others were Protestants. The Catholic reaction, which culminated in the invasion of the Spanish Armada, did a lot to convert some of the anti-clericals to the Protestant religion. When the Queen died in 1603 the majority of English considered themselves ardent Protestants, and they led highly religious lives based on the study of the Bible.

The Bible together with the study of classics made England an important center of the Renaissance, famous for Shakespeare, Sidney, Spenser and Milton. The **English Renaissance** flourished beyond the Tudor epoch, through Stuart times and Cromwell's republic until the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, that is much longer than in Europe where it withered quickly under the Jesuits and Spaniards.

2: The Stuart Era

In the course of the 16th century the medieval system passed away. Cosmopolitan feudalism and Christian idealism⁸ gave way to the new idea of a national state. The royal administration, Common Law, and the national parliament had a unifying effect on the country. The power in the parliament moved from the House of Lords to the House of Commons, representing the richer and more influential middle class. Cloth manufacture spread to all parts of the country and made many towns, especially those with harbors, very important for the economy of the country. Regulation of the trade was no longer an affair of a chartered town or a guild but of the Crown and Parliament. The transition from the medieval to the modern world was completed by the feeling of common patriotism and national pride that cut across social classes and was always associated with the monarch. The Tudors, especially Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, had a metaphysical power over their subjects. They trusted their subjects and were worshipped by them. And they had every reason to do so. The ordinary people were sheltered by the State against all malpractices of clergy and aristocracy. The state provided for the poor. In 1601 Parliament passed the **First Poor Law** making people in each shire responsible for the poor. The JPs had to raise money for the poor and organize housing and work for them. This law was in operation until 1834.

Under Elizabeth the future **union of Scotland and England** was prepared. In the 16th century Scotland officially became a protestant country. The Protestant Church in Scotland was called '**Kirk**', and it was far more democratic than the Anglican Church because it was ruled not by monarchs and bishops but a General Assembly. Such was the situation when **Mary 'Queen of Scots'** returned as a widow from France to rule Scotland. Mary probably would have become the next queen of England if she had not antagonized her Scottish subjects. She married Lord Darnley, then had him murdered and, to everybody's chagrin, married her husband's murderer, Bothwell, whereby she was driven out of the country by her Scottish enemies. Elizabeth, who killed Mary, secured before her own death that the crown of England would go to Mary's son from her second marriage (with Lord Darnley), James VI who in **1603** became **James I** of England.

James I was accepted by the English without much ado. Everybody was happy that the death of the Virgin Queen did not lead to a Civil war or an invasion. Public opinion was unanimous that the union with Scotland was a good thing. Both countries had been Protestant for some time, which made them natural allies. But the Scots, especially those in James's court, were disliked, and it soon became clear that the king himself was not to the English liking.

When James became king of England at the age of seventy, he had been the king of Scotland for thirty-six years, and he was successful. He had the Kirk under his control as well as the Catholic nobles. But his experience as ruler of Scotland was of no use in deciphering the political map of England. His mind boggled at the House of Commons – the lawyers and squires perpetually imposing their advice on him and lecturing him on

⁸ The idea of Christendom as one Common European Civilization.

the realm's laws, while flatly refusing to pay more taxes. In Scotland the only people to oppose the king were the nobles or the preachers who acted through the Kirk, not the middle classes. Soon it became clear that the relationship between the monarchy and Parliament would have to be reconsidered. In the 16th century the powers of Parliament were not clearly defined, but owing to the political and diplomatic talents of the Tudor monarchs there had been no overt conflicts. But James I had neither their knowledge nor their diplomatic skills and he was bound to make a mistake.

James I was a good-natured but conceited man, who never allowed himself to be convinced that he knew too little of England and her laws to be a successful ruler. The first serious blunder was his reinforcement of the fines for 'recusancy' (for refusal to obey official religious dogmas). This unfortunate decision inspired some extreme Catholics to form the so-called **Gunpowder plot** whose aim was to blow up the buildings of Parliament with the king and MPs in it. At the last moment the plot was revealed and the government was not toppled, but since that day (**November 5, 1605**⁹) Roman Catholics were forbidden to enter public services and were pushed to the margins of political life.

Moreover James I, who was a pacifist, utterly neglected the Navy. The peace that ended the war with Spain was obtained at a very low price. The English merchants still could not officially trade with Spanish or Portuguese colonies, and in the absence of any royal support they started to wage private wars. Such illegal wars were nothing new in English history; a scuffle with foreign merchants or pirates was an incident that happened in the life of every honest tradesman. But in Stuart times the royal control over such enterprises was nonexistent, and therefore the English seamen quickly degenerated from the tradition of Drake and Raleigh and became black-flag pirates. To make matters worse for the English merchants, the Dutch started to compete with them with success, reducing considerably the volume of English trade. Pirates raided the English Channel, and the king held Sir Walter Raleigh accountable for the situation and had him beheaded. All that led to a deep resentment against all Stuart monarchs, cherished by mariners and merchants alike.

When the second wave of Catholic reaction started with the onset of **The Thirty Years' War (1618)** James's peaceful instincts led him to propose to marry his son Charles to the Spanish infanta, and that idea unnerved nine Englishmen out of ten. Fortunately this Spanish match did not go off, but a marriage a degree less fatal was carried out – Charles was married to **Henrietta Maria of France**, a zealous Catholic, who became an active agent in converting the English court into her religion and who had disastrous influence on her husband's policies.

When **Charles** came to the throne in 1625 he had yet another terrible advisor, George Villiers, **Duke of Buckingham**, who had been the architect of English foreign policy already during the reign of Charles's father.

James' death liberated Buckingham from the previous king's peaceful policies, and he started to envisage himself as a great protestant leader. He induced Charles to launch several disastrous war expeditions against France and Spain, which infuriated the House of Commons. The House of Commons had no influence on the king's foreign policy but indirectly it could be a very effective cog in the conduct of the war because it could refuse to pay higher taxes. The king's bankruptcy was the reason why the war in France did not

⁹ Today the day is celebrated as **Guy Fawkes Day**. Guy Fawkes was the man who was found in the cellars with the gunpowder.

go well, but on the other hand, the recalcitrance of Parliament saved the prosperity of the country.

When the unpopular Buckingham was assassinated by a Puritan¹⁰ fanatic, the country and Parliament welcomed the news with shameless joy. The King estranged and offended by the public reaction decided not to summon again any Parliament. Charles, like his father, thought that kings should be autocrats, free from any constitutional check upon their actions. Both James I and Charles I believed in the doctrine of the **divine hereditary right**, according to which monarchs derived their authority from God and only God could hold them accountable. Therefore neither James nor Charles could suffer any limitations on their authority, but whereas James I was more flexible, Charles I considered himself God in his own right who was completely above the law. The King's opponents, on the other hand, believed that the king was not above the law and, what was even more important, that the king and his council could not make any new laws, because law making was the prerogative of Parliament. Therefore the king's attempt to rule without Parliament was considered a violation of English Common Law, established in medieval times and modernized in the times of the Tudors. It was clear that England must become an absolute monarchy or a constitutional monarchy because she could not be both at the same time.

The conflict between the king and the middle classes became more acute when, following his wife's advice, Charles put Catholics in high government places and appointed **William Laud** as Archbishop of Canterbury. Laud was known for his Catholic sympathies and, moreover, he was an avowed enemy of Puritans. His frantic efforts to root out Puritanism from English soil finally incited a civil war in which he perished.

As Archbishop he introduced serious devotional changes in **the Church of England**: the ritual side of worship, typical of the Roman Catholic Church, was increased while evangelical practice – preaching and lecturing on the basis of the Bible, a distinctive feature of Protestant worship – were prohibited within the Church. Puritans as non-conformists were severely persecuted, which induced many of them to immigrate to America. This was happening at a time when English Puritanism was producing statesmen of a great caliber, many of whom were MPs and very affluent and powerful people. Laud's ill judgment eventually prompted him to summon some of the important laymen to answer before him in public about their presumed sins. That happened when everybody, even the humblest citizens, believed that the Reformation once and for all freed them from clerical control. Laud's imagination was dazzled by his desire to restore the medieval power of the Church, but the English had him quickly undeceived. Puritans and Protestants made a natural alliance and bid their time.

Finally one of the mistakes that Laud made turned out to be fraught with serious consequences. Laud wanted **the Scottish Kirk** to accept the same organization as the Church of England. After the Reformation, the Church of England kept the outline of its medieval organization with bishops who had taken the King instead of Pope as their master. In Scotland, however, the Reformation took a different course – it was a popular movement of active-minded laity who played an important role in the Church government. In England the Crown and Parliament controlled the Church; the Scottish Church, which

¹⁰ **Puritans** were the most radical Protestants who believed in simple forms of church ceremony and strict moral behavior. They were also against church hierarchy and were naturally the staunchest opponents of Roman Catholic Church.

represented the Scottish people, aspired to control the Crown. Charles, who spent only a few years of his childhood in Scotland and who was therefore ignorant of her social system, supported Laud in his endeavors to bring the Kirk under his royal command. In this way he antagonized both nations and each at the point where they were most susceptible. The English, attached to their Parliament, and the Scots attached to their novel Church, wished to reestablish their previous relation to the Crown.

The Scots, still organized in feudal fighting clans, quickly united their private armies against the Crown. The Covenant¹¹ with God was renewed in every parish and Scottish sons who served in the armies of Protestant champions on the continent came swarming home. In the spring of 1638 this highly spirited Scottish army crossed the border with England. The King, still trying to suppress rebellion without summoning Parliament, raised some regiments of Catholic Irish to subdue Scotland. When this did not work, in 1640 the King finally summoned the so called **Long Parliament** which quickly asserted its independence that culminated in the passing of the **Great Remonstrance (1641)**, a fierce denunciation of the King's authoritarian practices and the undue influence of the bishops. Charles rejected this denunciation and Parliament flatly refused to help. In 1642 the King resorted to violence trying to arrest the most bellicose Parliament leaders. This move frightened Parliament and its supporters to such an extent that they decided to take up arms in their own defense. London locked its gates against the King and a four-year **Civil War (1642–1651)** ensued, whereby the House of Commons successfully organized military operations against the king. This was a development unprecedented in English history because the rebellion had broken out on the initiative of the plebeian Lower House whose leaders were not afraid to seize and wield the power of the state.

At first the Parliament was unanimous. All members agreed to dispatch the King's most hated advisors such as Laud. At the same time, however, religious matters started to overshadow political issues. The Puritans and Anglicans started to look at each other with a growing mutual suspicion, each party thinking about using the conflict to impose their religion in the whole country.

Most of the ordinary people wanted to keep out of the war as much as possible. The Navy, merchant seamen, and the richest part of the county, Southeast England and London, supported the Parliament, and they were called **Roundheads** (because their hair was short). The Royalists '**Cavaliers**' controlled the Northwest of the country; the king's headquarters were in Oxford. In 1648 the Cavaliers were defeated and the king fled to the Scottish highlands where he made his last unsuccessful attempt to launch an offensive against the rebels. He was defeated, captured and put before an illegal tribunal that had him executed on **31 January 1649**. Paradoxically, the execution made the king popular again; he acted with bravery and dignity and it dawned on the English that they really did not bargain for an experiment in republicanism.

The king lost the war for several reasons, the main of which was the lack of money. Whereas he could depend only on gifts from his supporters, Parliament reformed the tax system to raise the money it needed (that system is still in operation today). Parliament controlled the sea and the harbors and also could depend on loans from the City's bankers. Secondly, Parliament quite unexpectedly found a military genius in the person of **Oliver Cromwell**, a Puritan farmer from East England, who built a **new model army**

¹¹ The term **covenant** designates a contract or an agreement between God and individual Puritan churches.

highly disciplined and devoted to their commander, who was at the same time their spiritual leader.

Cromwell turned out to be not only a military genius but also a brilliant politician. When the King was taken prisoner, the MPs began to quarrel bitterly with one another. Cromwell's army marched to London and took control over the Parliament. The army removed by force from the Parliament those MPs who did not wish to have the king beheaded while the remaining Puritan MPs unscrupulously sentenced him to death.

In 1649 Britain became a republic called a **Commonwealth**, and in 1653 it was transformed into a **Protectorate** with Oliver Cromwell as its **Lord Protector**. His army first subdued the Scots who stood up for the king after his execution. Then Cromwell marched against the Irish to punish them for the support they gave to the king in 1641. It is estimated that the English killed about 6,000 Irish people¹² and these events became an heirloom of hatred for the Irish nation. Europe and English colonies as well as Cavaliers and Presbyterians (the Anglican Church) would not accept Cromwell's authority. But in just four years the English Navy under **Admiral Blake** defeated the French, the Spaniards and the Dutch and forced the colonies to give in to Cromwell. Scotland and Ireland were joined to England in legislative and economic union. These successes made England feared and respected abroad.

Yet Cromwell's republic was not entirely successful. Cromwell's military and imperial achievements simply cost too much. People were fed up with heavy taxes, and in spite of the sale of Crown and Episcopal lands, of the confiscation of half the land of Ireland and high fines put on his opponents, Cromwell was hopelessly indebted. **The Protectorate** was very unpopular and Cromwell feared to disband his costly army. Cromwellian rule of the sword incensed the country, and in truth it was an impossible situation. Cromwell, contrary to what might be expected of him, wholeheartedly believed in constitutional monarchy. He gave ample evidence of that, trying, soon before his death, to come to terms with Parliament that had never been able to agree with him earlier. He also managed to weed out the most radical elements in his army that had continually been working for another revolution.¹³ Gradually he started to give in to those of his advisors who wanted to revive the monarchy, and who saw in Cromwell the progenitor of a new dynasty. But Cromwell died and his son Richard turned out to be a failure as a leader. After 18 months following Cromwell's death in 1658 one of the moderate army commanders **General Monk** took initiative into his hands and called **Charles II** from exile. The acts and laws of Cromwell's government were repealed; the monarchy and the House of Stuart were restored.

Even though the Republic was abolished, Cromwell left an indelible mark on English religion and culture. Religious persecution was put down and different religious sects multiplied. Puritan work ethics and their all-out war on sin captured the imagination of the English people. But still Puritan rigor and strictness, which entailed closing of theaters, inns or putting an end to the celebration of Easter and Christmas, made the Puritans hated not less than the Laudian clergy that had oppressed the people two decades earlier.

In spite of all that political turmoil, **the Stuart era** was an important phase in England's progress towards the modern system of Parliamentary government, freedom of person

¹² The worst civilian massacres took place at Drogheda and Wexford.

¹³ The radicals in the army were called „Levellers’; they held very advanced opinions – they wanted the Parliament to be elective body with all men aged over twenty eligible for vote and they demanded religious freedom.

and speech, and good local administration. The House of Commons, bolstered by squires, lawyers and merchants, and presided over by eminent statesmen grew into the major governing body of a modern nation. Whereas the majority of the peoples on the continent were subjected to regal absolutism, the English were already free of feudalism. Contemporary French or German peasants were still serfs owing service to their lord and dues to their priest. Many of their contemporaries in England were freeholders who enjoyed parliamentary franchise in shire elections.

The social system that evolved in the 17th century laid the foundations for the institutions of the **British Empire** and the polity of the USA. The first English who immigrated to America came from the richest parts of England in the southeast, where the spirit of Common Law and the principle of self-government had been shaping the social reality for centuries. It is not surprising then, that upon arriving in the New World they wanted to transplant on the new soil those institutions and customs that had served them so well. They usually settled in compact communities called townships, which were self-governing and almost entirely self-sufficient.

The first waves of immigrants (under James I and Charles I) went to the Bermudas, the Caribbean (called West India) and to the colony of Virginia where the climate offered better conditions for agriculture. In 1620 the first group of Puritans who were later nicknamed **Pilgrim Fathers** established the **Plymouth Colony** on the north-eastern coast of America. They were small gentry and yeomen farmers driven away from their homes by the Laudian persecution. Their colony was destined to become the germ of **New England**, as all Puritan colonies were later collectively called. New England imposed in the course of time the law and language on the whole north-American continent.

In the North the climate was severe and the soil was thin and stony. Moreover it was covered with dense forests in which dangerous Indians prowled. Every acre of land to plough had to be wrested from nature and guarded against the Redskins. Half of the Pilgrim Fathers died during the first harsh winter; those who survived learnt how to build better houses and how to grow corn (they were aided by friendly Indians). Although they received help from wealthy Puritan lords, squires and London merchants, their life was extremely difficult, full of hardship and danger. But they were very sturdy and brave people whose perseverance was strengthened by their firm religious devotion and belief that their errand to the New World was a God-appointed mission.

Puritan colonies were large homogeneous communities thoroughly dedicated to a zealous religious life. There was no pretence at toleration and those who did not agree with Puritan ideas had to leave. Still Puritan colonies were far more democratic than those in the south, where the old aristocratic system compounded by slavery prevailed. Northern communities were free of slavery and consisted of free landowners most of whom – the **full church members** – had full political rights. In order to become a full member of the church, which was a prerequisite to receiving franchise, a person had to undergo the so-called **conversion**, that is a public confession of faith. It was believed that a false confession would lead to damnation, therefore few people found the courage to do it. Still the fully enfranchised members made a considerable part of New England's population, especially in comparison with other non-Puritan colonies.

When another host of Puritans, much more affluent, established another colony in **Massachusetts (1630)** the pace of colonization was significantly hastened. Massachusetts eventually became so big and strong that it swallowed the colony of Plymouth. **Boston**

was the capital of Massachusetts; it was a seaport with fine inlets and fishing areas. In a span of a century it became one of the most important centers of shipbuilding, thanks to the wood found in plenty in New England.

American colonies were dependent on their motherland because of some goods that the colonists could not produce themselves. But in political terms the colonies were self-reliant and the possibility that they would break away from England was strong from the start. The English colonies, contrary to similar enterprises by other nations, did not originate in acts of state, but of wealthy individuals or companies that wanted to make a profit by trading with far away lands. The relation of the colonies to the Crown was very tenuous, to English Parliament non-existent. The political unrest in 17th century England – the Civil War and the Cromwellian republic – annihilated for some years the authority of the Crown and gave the colonists time to nurse their independence. Cromwell, who was Puritan himself, established a good rapport with the colonies and respected their autonomy. Charles II brought the colonies under his control, but since the restoration entailed subjugation of Puritanism to the Anglican Church, naturally the intercourse between England and New England took a turn for the worse.

Charles II continued Cromwell's imperialist policy. In 1664 England captured from the Dutch **New Amsterdam**, which became **New York** and annexed the so-called **Middle Colonies** (to the south of New England) where a very miscellaneous population lived: the English, Dutch, Swedish, French and Scottish. All these nationalities, representing different brands of Christian religion (Anglican, Puritan, Calvinist, Roman Catholic, Quaker, Presbyterian), were united under the British flag on terms of absolute equality and with due respect for their customs and beliefs. Thus the incorporation of the Middle Colonies resulted in greater tolerance and religious freedom for all and Puritanism lost a lot of its early militancy.

The spirit of self-independence, the Puritan legacy, was fostered by the existence of **the frontier**, the part of the wilderness where pioneers had just penetrated. The frontiersmen were a hardy and robust population – resourceful, self-reliant and fiercely untrammelled. They were distrustful of any forms of training and authority, and totally ignorant of the manners of Europe. For them aristocratic Europe was just a remote abstraction.

The frontiersmen as well as Puritans were natural enemies of England, whereas the more civilized and conservative population living on the coast was more likely to identify with their European ancestors. But most of them also gradually came in line with the Puritans and frontiersmen as it was becoming perfectly clear that England considered the colonies' interests as secondary to her own. The colonies were valued as markets where raw materials could be obtained and finished goods sold. The colonies were expected to remain subservient and not to compete with the mother country in industry or trade. Such mercantile considerations impinged on the liberties of American colonists, who were very unpatriotic and did not want to pay to England either duties or taxes.