The Tudor Era: England Comes of Age

Under the leadership of the Tudor kings and queens, England changed rapidly. The discovery of new trade routes and of the New World made people think differently. The invention of printing (1456) made it easier to spread new ideas. Henry VIII (1491-1547), Henry VII's only surviving son, used the power and the treasure his father had gathered to create a new kind of monarchy.

Henry VIII Breaks with the Roman Catholic Church

The most important thing that Henry VIII did was to break away from the Roman Catholic Church. One reason for this break was the refusal of Pope Clement VII (1478-1534) to annul Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Henry knew how important it was to have a male heir. However, he had only one daughter, Mary (later Mary I), by Catherine. Catherine was his elder brother's widow, and it was not customary for Catholics to wed relatives by marriage. Henry decided to ask the pope to declare his marriage to Catherine invalid so that he could marry Anne Boleyn, a lady of the court. Henry loved Anne and hoped she could give him a son. When the pope refused, Henry persuaded Parliament to pass a series of acts between 1529 and 1536 to take away the pope's authority in England. He married Anne, dissolved the monasteries, seized their property, and declared that the king of England was head of both church and state.

But Henry still had no male heir, for Anne's child was a girl, the future Elizabeth I. Suspecting that Anne was interested in men other than himself, Henry had Anne beheaded. His next wife, Jane Seymour, had a son, later Edward VI (1537-53). Jane died in childbirth. After that, Henry VIII had three more wives. One he divorced, one he beheaded, and one outlived him.

Henry's quarrel with the pope was not the only reason for the break with Rome. The people, and even many of the clergy, disliked the way that the popes interfered with the Church of England and collected money from it. Some of the clergy and monks in England had lost the respect of ordinary people. The people hoped that if the king were head of the church he would reform it.

However, because there was no pope to tell people what they must believe, they disagreed as to the kind of church they wanted. After Henry VIII died in 1547 and Edward VI became king, the religious disagreements became much worse. Some people wanted services very much like the old Roman Catholic ones; others hoped for a simpler, or, as they said, purer, service. For this reason these people later became known as Puritans. Their numbers included Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury (1489-1556). In 1549 and 1552, Archbishop Cranmer issued new prayer books, which are still the basis of the
services in the churches of the Anglican Communion (including the Episcopal Church in the United States). English, not Latin, was to be the language of the English Church.

**Catholicism Returns Briefly Under Mary I**

In 1553, England returned to the Roman Catholic Church. Edward VI died too young to marry. The Duke of Northumberland failed to get the Protestant Lady Jane Grey made queen instead of Mary Tudor (1516-58), Henry VIII's eldest daughter, who was still a Roman Catholic. Both Northumberland and the unfortunate Lady Jane were beheaded, and Mary became queen.

At first Mary I was popular because many people had disliked the new Protestant prayer books. But people came to hate her when she married Philip II of Spain (1527-98), persuaded Parliament to restore the pope's authority, and began to have men and women, including Archbishop Cranmer, burned at the stake for continuing to be Protestants. For this, they called her **Bloody Mary**. The English people blamed Mary for joining Philip II in his war against France and losing the port of Calais, England's last possession on the European continent. Therefore, many people rejoiced when Mary's half sister, Elizabeth, came to the throne on her death in 1558.

**Elizabeth I Brings Back Protestantism**

Elizabeth I (1533-1603) was a great queen who had to face enormous problems. She was only 25 when she came to the throne, and in those days nobody thought a woman could rule alone. Yet to marry a foreigner would be unpopular. If she married an English nobleman, she would make the rest of the nobles jealous. So she never married at all.

Philip II of Spain hoped that England would remain Roman Catholic and his ally. However, the English people disliked Spain and had been sickened by Mary's executions. Parliament, and especially the House of Commons, put pressure on Elizabeth to officially reject the pope. Because she depended on Parliament to raise money, Elizabeth agreed. In 1559 a new prayer book was issued, and the English Church has since been Protestant.

**England Versus Spain**

Philip II of Spain and Elizabeth were becoming enemies. Philip had not wanted the English Church to become Protestant, and he was annoyed at the voyages of English explorers to the New World. Philip felt that the New World belonged to Spain and Portugal. As far as he was concerned, English sailors, like Sir Francis
Drake, who had sailed as far as the California coast in his voyage of 1577-80, had no right to trespass in the New World.

Philip began to plot against Elizabeth and tried to make Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots (1542-87), queen in her place. Mary, descended from a daughter of Henry VII, was a Roman Catholic. Luckily for Elizabeth the Protestant Scots rose against Mary, and she was forced to flee to England. She remained there as a kind of guest-prisoner from 1568 to 1587. But when Mary became the center of plots against Elizabeth, the queen's ministers finally persuaded her that Mary must be executed for the sake of England's safety. She was beheaded in 1587.

Meanwhile Elizabeth had also been helping the Protestant Dutch, who were rebelling against Spanish rule in the Netherlands. Philip now decided to conquer England. In 1588 he sent a great fleet called the Spanish Armada to defeat England. Everybody thought that such a little country had no chance against mighty Spain. But the English ships and seamen were very good, and some of the Spanish ships were wrecked by storms while fleeing from them. England was saved.

The End of the Elizabethan Age

In 1603, Elizabeth died. During her reign, she had kept her country independent. With the help of her wise minister William Cecil (Lord Burghley) and his son Robert Cecil, she had ruled it well. England was growing richer. It had a great cloth-making industry and was developing its sea power, looking for markets in the New World as well as in Europe. More people had more time and money to take an interest in music, literature, and the theater. Men like William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Christopher Marlowe were writing plays. Architecture flourished too because the nobles were building fine mansions rather than fortified castles.

Elizabethan England was an exciting place in which to live. However, many feared the day when Elizabeth would die, for the old queen had no heir. When Queen Elizabeth finally lay dying, she surprised many of her people by ordering that Mary of Scotland's son, James VI of Scotland (1566-1625), should become king of England. James, who had been brought up a Protestant, became James I of England. Scotland and England now had the same king.

During Elizabeth I's reign, Ireland, which had been semi-independent since Henry II's reign, had also been brought under English control. At last England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland had the same ruler. But they did not have the same religion. Ireland remained Roman Catholic, and this was the cause of future trouble.
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