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THE HISTORY OF ENGLAND

Volume III

CIVIL WAR

MACMILLAN

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1
A new Solomon

Sir Robert Carey rode furiously from London to Edinburgh along the Great North Road, spending one night in Yorkshire and another in Northumberland; he arrived at Holyrood Palace, 'be-bloodied with great falls and bruises' after a journey of more than 330 miles. It was late at night on Saturday 26 March 1603. He was ushered into the presence of King James VI of Scotland and, falling to his knees, proclaimed him to be 'King of England, France and Ireland'. He gave him as testimony a sapphire ring that his sister, Lady Scrope, had thrown to him from a window at Richmond Palace immediately after the death of Elizabeth I. 'I have', he told his new sovereign, 'a blue ring from a fair lady.'

'It is enough,' James said. 'I know by this you are a true messenger.' The king had previously entrusted this ring to Lady Scrope in the event of the queen's death.

A body of prelates and peers had already met Sir Robert Cecil, the principal councillor of the old queen, at Whitehall Gate before they proceeded with him to the cross at Cheapside where Cecil proclaimed James as king; bonfires and bells greeted the news of the swift and easy succession. Cecil himself declared that he had 'steered King James's ship into the right harbour, without cross of wave or tide that could have overturned a cock-boat'. The councillor had entered a secret correspondence with James before Elizabeth's

death; he had urged the Scottish king to nourish 'a heart of adamant in a world of feathers'.

On 5 April James left Edinburgh to travel to his new realm. He had been the king of Scotland for thirty-six years, ever since he had assumed the throne at the age of thirteen months after the forced abdication of his mother Mary Queen of Scots. He had been a successful if not a glorious monarch, managing to curb the pretensions of an argumentative clergy and of a fractious nobility. From his earliest years the restive and combative spirit of the Scottish lords ensured that, in the words of the French ambassador, he had been nourished in fear. Yet he had by guile and compromise held on to his crown. Now, as he told his followers, he was about to enter the Land of Promise. He had already written to the council at Westminster, asking for money; he did not have the funds to finance his journey south.

The king did not perhaps expect so effusive and jubilant a welcome from his new subjects. He recalled later how 'the people of all sorts rid and ran, nay rather flew to meet me'. They came to gaze at him, since none of them had experienced the rule of a male monarch. He himself was impressed by the prosperity of the land and by the evident wealth of its rulers. He said later that the first three years of his reign were 'as a Christmas'. It took him a month to reach London, largely because he wished to avoid the funeral of his predecessor. He had no great fondness for Elizabeth; she had prevaricated over his right to the succession and, perhaps more significantly, had ordered the execution of his mother.

He reached York by the middle of April, where Cecil came to greet him. 'Though you be but a little man,' the king told him, 'we shall surely load your shoulders with business.' At Newark-on-Trent he gave orders that a cutpurse, preying upon his retinue, should summarily be hanged; he had not properly been informed on the provisions of English common law. It is an indication that he was still, in many important respects, a foreigner. At Burghley-by-Stamford he fell from his horse and broke his collar bone. Slowly he made his way to London. For three or four days he rested in Hertfordshire at Robert Cecil's country home, Theobalds House, at which seat he took pleasure in creating many knights.

He was so generous with titles that he was accused of improvi-

dence. The reign of Elizabeth witnessed the creation of 878 knights; in the first four months of the king's rule, some 906 new men were awarded that honour. The queen had knighted those whom she considered to be of genuine merit or importance; James merely considered knighthood to be a mark of status. He was said to have knighted a piece of beef with the words 'Arise, Sir Loin'. On another occasion he did not catch the name of the recipient and said, 'Prithee, rise up, and call thyself Sir What Thou Wilt.' Other titles could be purchased with cash. The diminution in the importance of honour marks one of the first changes to the old Tudor system.

Those who were permitted into the king's presence may not have been entirely impressed. He was awkward and hesitant in manner; his legs were slightly bowed and his gait erratic, perhaps the consequence of rickets acquired in childhood. One admittedly hostile witness, Sir Anthony Weldon, also described him as forever 'fiddling about his codpiece'.

He was a robust and fluent conversationalist, who rather liked to hear the sound of his own voice, but the effect upon his English audience was perhaps impaired by the fact that he retained a broad Scots accent. If he was eager to talk, he was also quick to laugh. He could be witty, but delivered his droll remarks in a grave and serious voice. His manners were not impeccable, and he was said to have slobbered over his food and drink. He paid little attention to his dress, but favoured thickly padded doublets that might impede an assassin's dagger; ever since his childhood he had lived in fear of assault or murder. He was said to have a horror of naked steel. He had a restless, roving eye; he paid particular notice to those at court who were not known to him.

On 7 May he rode towards London, but was greeted 4 miles outside the city by the lord mayor and innumerable citizens. He lodged at the Charterhouse for four nights, and then made his way to the Tower, where he remained for a few days. While staying in the royal apartments he began an excited tour of his capital, 'secretly in his coach and by water', as one contemporary put it; he was particularly struck by the sight of the crown jewels, held at the palace in Whitehall. Here was the glittering and unmistakable evidence of his new-found wealth.

Yet London was not a pleasure-dome. Even as he approached it, the plague began its secret ministry in the streets and alleys; by the end of the summer it had claimed the lives of 30,000 citizens. A grand state entry had been planned for 25 July, the day of the coronation, but the fear of infected crowds curtailed the ceremony; there would be a crowning, but no state procession.

Even in these early months of the reign conspiracies began to mount against his throne. A group of gentlemen, among them Sir Walter Raleigh and Henry Brooke, Lord Cobham, were suspected of a scheme to depose James and to replace him with his cousin Arabella Stuart; like most conspiracies it was plagued by rumour, indecision and premature disclosure. Raleigh was arrested and consigned to the Tower, where two weeks later he attempted suicide; at his subsequent trial he was denounced by the attorney general, Sir Edward Coke, as 'a spider of hell'.

Raleigh: You speak indiscreetly, barbarously and uncivilly.
Coke: I want words sufficient to express thy viperous treasons.
Raleigh: You want words, indeed, for you have spoken the one thing half a dozen times.

This was the end of what was called 'the Main Plot'. A 'Bye Plot' was also discovered, whereby the king was to be kidnapped by priests and forced to suspend the laws against Roman Catholics. It came to nothing, of course, except for the deaths of the principals engaged in it.

The time had come for the formal, if subdued, coronation of the king; the archbishop of Canterbury performed the ceremony expeditiously in the sight of an invited audience. James's consort, Anne of Denmark, agreed to receive her crown from the archbishop; as a Catholic, however, she refused to partake of Protestant communion. Being of a complaisant and gregarious disposition she caused very little trouble for the rest of her husband's reign. Her chaplain once remarked that 'the king himself was a very chaste man, and there was little in the queen to make him uxorious; yet they did love as well as man and wife could do, not conversing together'. After the ceremony the royal family left pestilential London for the healthier air of the country. James and Anne made

their first 'progress' in the August of the year, making their way to Winchester and Southampton before turning north into Oxfordshire; in this, they were following the fashion of the king's illustrious predecessor.

James had already established, however, the foundations of his court and council. In particular he took care to reward his Scottish nobles with the most prominent positions in his personal retinue. The centre of his rule lay in the royal bedchamber, which was almost wholly staffed by the entourage that had followed him from his native land. This was a source of much discontent and disquiet among the English courtiers; it was said that the Scottish lords stood like mountains between the beams of the king's grace and themselves. Yet a new privy chamber was also established, half of Scots and half of English; the king revelled in his role as 'the pacifier', and this equal pairing evinced his moderation.

Among the English councillors the palm was awarded to Sir Robert Cecil and to the Howards. Henry Howard, earl of Northampton, was appointed as lord warden of the cinque ports at the beginning of 1604 and, a year later, lord privy seal; in the previous reign he had sent what James called 'Asiatic and endless volumes' of advice to Edinburgh. Thomas Howard, earl of Suffolk, was lord chamberlain. Cecil, soon to become Viscount Cranborne and then earl of Salisbury, was in fact pre-eminent; he was very small, with a hunched back, but he stood above the others. The king had told him that 'before God I count you the best servant that ever I had, albeit you be but a beagle'. He often addressed him as 'my little beagle'. Cecil managed parliament, and the revenues; he supervised Ireland and all foreign affairs. He was forever industrious, highly efficient and always courteous; he had borne with patience all the humiliating remarks about his appearance and physique. He was the ultimate civil servant and his cousin, Francis Bacon, once said of him that he might prevent public affairs getting worse but could not make them any better. That is perhaps too harsh; Cecil had so great a political intelligence that he may qualify as a statesman. Snapping at his heels, however, was Henry Howard.

Elizabeth's council had comprised some thirteen members; James soon doubled its size, but took great pleasure in avoiding its meetings. He favoured private deliberations, in the seclusion of his

bedchamber, where he could then delegate responsibility. He preferred intimate meetings where his wit and common sense could compensate for his lack of dignity. He did not particularly like London in any case, and always preferred to go hunting in the countryside beyond; from this vantage James once wrote a complacent letter to his councillors, imagining them to be 'frying in the pains of purgatory' upon royal business. Yet he made quick and sudden visits to the capital, when his presence was deemed to be indispensable; he said that he came 'like a flash of lightning, both in going, staying there, and returning'.

The palace of Whitehall was a straggling complex of some 1,400 rooms, closets and galleries and chambers huddled together. It was a place of secrets and of clandestine meetings, of staged encounters and sudden quarrels. This is the proper setting for John Donne's satires as well as for Ben Jonson's two Roman plays on the nature of ambition and corruption. It is also the setting for the great age of the masque. A ball, or a comedy, was staged every other day.

Yet the court is also the most significant context for the collection of Thomas Howard, earl of Arundel, which came to include the architectural drawings of Palladio as well as the work of Holbein, Raphael and Dürer. The great lords and courtiers also built elaborate houses at Audley End, Hatfield and elsewhere. The earl of Northampton furnished his house in the Strand with Turkish carpets, Brussels tapestries and Chinese porcelain; he also owned globes, and maps of all the principal nations. This is the burgeoning world of Jacobeanism.

On his progress to London from Edinburgh, at the beginning of his reign, the king was given a petition; it was an appeal from his puritan subjects that became known as the 'millenary petition', bearing the signatures of 1,000 ministers of religion. In moderate terms it suggested to the king that the sign of the cross should be removed from the baptismal ceremony and that the marriage ring was unnecessary. The words 'priest' and 'absolution' should be 'corrected', and the rite of confirmation abolished. The cap and the surplice, the vestments of conformity, were not to be 'urged'.

The king himself liked nothing so much as doctrinal discussion,

in which he could display his learning. The first important act of his reign, therefore, was to bring together a small number of clerics at his palace of Hampton Court where they might debate matters of religious policy and religious principle. Five distinguished and learned puritan ministers were matched against the leading ecclesiastics of the realm, among them the archbishop of Canterbury and eight bishops.

This was an age of religious polemic, perhaps prophesying the civil wars of the succeeding reign. On the side of the bishops were those generally satisfied with the doctrines and ceremonies of the established Church; they were moderate; they espoused the union of Church and state. They put more trust in communal worship than in private prayer; they acknowledged the role of custom, experience and reason in spiritual matters. It may not have been a fully formed faith, but it served to bind together those of unclear or flexible belief. It also suited those who simply wished to conform with their neighbours.

On the side of the puritans were those more concerned with the exigencies of the private conscience. They believed in the natural depravity of man, unless the sinner be redeemed by grace. They abhorred the practice of confession and encouraged intensive self-examination as well as self-discipline. They did not wish for a sacramental priesthood but a preaching ministry; they accepted the word of Scripture as the source of all divine truth. They took their compass from the stirrings of providence. Men and women of a puritan tradition were utterly obedient to God's absolute will from which no ritual or sacrament could avert them. This lent them zeal and energy in their attempt to purify the world or, as one puritan theologian put it, 'a holy violence in the performing of all duties'. Sometimes they spoke out as the spirit moved them. It was said, unfairly, that they loved God with all their soul and hated their neighbour with all their heart.

They were not at this stage, however, rival creeds; they are perhaps better regarded as opposing tendencies within the same Church, and their first formal confrontation took place at Hampton Court in the middle of winter. The proceedings of the first day, 14 January 1604, were confined to the king and his ecclesiastics. James debated with his bishops the changes suggested in the

'millenary petition'. On the second day the puritan divines were invited to attend. John Reynolds, the first to be called, argued that the English Church should embrace Calvinist doctrine. The bishop of London, Richard Bancroft, quickly intervened. He knelt down before the king and demanded that 'the ancient canon might be remembered', by which he meant that '*schismatici*' should not be permitted to speak against the bishops. James allowed the discussion on specific matters to continue.

In the subsequent debate the king seems to have been shrewd and judicious. He did not accede to the puritans' demand for Calvinism, but he did accept their proposal for an improved translation of the Bible. This request bore magnificent fruit in the King James translation published later in the reign. The delegates then discussed the problem of providing a learned ministry, and the difficulties of dealing with issues of private conscience. The king was willing to concede certain matters to the puritans, in the evident belief that a middle way would encourage unity within the Church. In the bitter weather the fires of Hampton Court roared, while the king sat in his furs; the bishops, and even the puritan delegates, were also clad in fur cloaks.

All seemed to be proceeding without much incident until Reynolds recommended that the bishops of the realm should consult with the 'presbyters'. At this, the king bridled. 'Presbyter', the term for the elder or minister of a Christian church, had for him unfortunate connotations. He had previously been outraged by the Presbyterian divines of Scotland, who did not always treat His Majesty with appropriate respect; they inclined towards republicanism and even egalitarianism. One of them, Andrew Melville, had called him to his face 'God's silly vassal'.

James now told Reynolds and his colleagues that they seemed to be aiming 'at a Scottish Presbytery which agreeth with monarchy as well as God and the devil'. He added that it would mean 'Jack and Tom, and Will and Dick, shall meet, and at their pleasure censure me and my council and all our proceedings'. He concluded with advice to Reynolds that 'until you find that I grow lazy, leave it alone'. His motto from this time forward would be 'no bishop, no king'. He observed, as the puritan delegates left his presence, that 'if this be all they have to say, I shall make them conform

themselves, or I will harry them out of the land, or else do worse'.

Two days later the king summoned the bishops for a further conference. He then called back the puritans, and ordered them to conform to the whole of the orthodox Book of Common Prayer reissued forty-five years before. The conference was over. The impending translation was the greatest benefit of the proceedings but, altogether, the conference cannot be counted a great success. It had now emerged that there was perhaps not one national Church, after all, but at least two Churches with different meanings and purposes.

The king was, as ever, delighted with his performance at Hampton Court. 'I peppered them soundly,' he said. The bishops had told him that he had spoken with the power of inspiration. 'I know not what they mean,' Sir John Harington wrote to his wife, 'but the spirit was rather foul-mouthed.' The king had said, at one point, 'A turd for this argument. I would rather my child were baptized by an ape as by a woman.' He also chastised the puritans by remonstrating 'Away with your snivelling!'

He was, however, in many respects a learned man. All his life he had argued, and debated, with his Scottish clergy. He delighted in theological controversy, and according to an early observer 'he apprehends clearly, judges wisely and has a retentive memory'. The king also believed himself to be a master of the written word and composed volumes on demonology, monarchy, witchcraft and smoking. On his accession medal he is crowned with a laurel wreath, a sure sign of his literary pretensions. He even replied to 'rayling rhymes' published against him with his own doggerel verse. In 1616 he collected all of his prose writings into a folio volume, the first English monarch ever to do so. So he became known, sometimes sarcastically, as 'the British Solomon'.

John Whitgift, archbishop of Canterbury, now close to death, realized that the conclusion of the Hampton Court conference was by no means the end of religious controversy. He knew well enough that parliament, about to meet, contained many lords and gentlemen of a puritan persuasion. The king had decided to ride in state through the capital four days before the opening of parliament on 19 March 1604. Now that the threat of plague had lifted it was declared that people from every 'county, borough, precinct, city,

hamlet' had flocked to give praise to the new monarch. Seven triumphal arches, in the style of imperial Rome, were erected along the processional route from the Tower to Whitehall. Yet magnificence did not necessarily command assent.

It was a large parliament, eager to take the measure of James I. In his opening speech the king made some remarks upon the state of religion and admonished the puritans for 'being ever discontented with the present government'. When it became clear that the Commons were more concerned with various matters of privilege and grievance, James rebuked them 'as a father to his children'. Further causes of contention soon emerged.

A dispute had arisen over the election of a member for Buckinghamshire and the ensuing argument pitched king against parliament. On 5 April the Speaker delivered a message from James that he desired 'as an absolute king' that there might be a conference between the Commons and the judges. No monarch had spoken to parliament in that manner for years. Silence and amazement followed this peremptory request, whereupon one member stood up and said that 'the prince's command is like a thunderbolt; his command upon our allegiance like the roaring of a lion; to his command there is no contradiction'.

That was not necessarily the case. In the middle of April it was proposed that James should assume the title of king of Great Britain, with the union of his kingdoms; it might have been deemed a mere formality under the circumstances. But the Commons were not so easily to be persuaded. What kind of union was being proposed? Economic? Constitutional? By what laws will this 'Britain' be governed? There might be a flood of Scots taking up all posts and honours. How could the common law of England be consistent with the legal traditions of Scotland or even with the customs of Ireland?

The king himself was adamant. 'I am the husband,' he said, 'and all the whole isle is my lawful wife; I am the head and it is my body.' Did they wish him to be a polygamist with two separate wives? The debate lingered into the succeeding year with what the king called 'many crossings, long disputations, strange questions, and nothing done'. He had a vision of a united kingdom with one law, one language and one faith; yet the practicalities of the period

rendered the ambition useless. The English demanded, for example, that the Scots be taxed at the same rate as themselves; the Scots demurred, pleading poverty. The Commons had already agreed that since 'we cannot make any laws to bind *Britannia* . . . let us proceed with a leaden foot'. The king's enthusiasm for the project was as great as his anger against the opponents of union.

Parliament then turned its attention to matters of religion, and in particular to the work of the Hampton Court conference. It was here, as we have seen, that Archbishop Whitgift sensed trouble from the great puritan gentry who had already taken their seats. By the end of May the Commons had brought in two bills, one of which was directed against pluralists and non-residents; these men, who held more than one clerical living or were keen to relegate their duties, included some of the most prominent members of the established Church. The bias of the Commons was clear enough. The second bill expressed the desire for 'a learned and godly ministry', a request tantamount to a demand for puritanism.

The king was vexed, and by way of justification a parliamentary committee drew up a 'form of apology and satisfaction', read to the Commons on 20 June, in which were defended such rights as freedom of speech and freedom from arrest. It was declared that 'our privileges and liberties are our true right and due inheritance, no less than our lands and goods'. It was a parliamentary way, perhaps, of introducing a Scottish king to the peculiar constitution of England. Another section stated that 'your majesty should be misinformed if any man should deliver that the kings of England have any absolute power in themselves either to alter religion . . . or to make any laws covering the same'. The 'form of apology' was never presented to the king; it may have been rejected by a majority as too extreme.

Without doubt, however, James came to hear of it; he resented its implication and was angered at its impudence. He came down to prorogue parliament on 7 July, where in the course of his speech he berated some of its members for being 'idle heads, some rash, some busy informers'. He said that in Scotland he was heard with respect whereas here there was 'nothing but curiosity from morning to evening to find fault with my propositions'. In Scotland 'all things warranted that came from me. Here all things suspected.' He added

that 'you have done many things rashly, I say not you meant disloyally'. Then, at the conclusion, he advised that 'only I wish you had kept a better form. I like form as much as matter.'

He was perhaps waiting for the assistance of Richard Bancroft, newly installed as archbishop of Canterbury, who was a firm upholder of the royal prerogative and no lover of puritans. Even then Bancroft was steering the convocation of senior clergy towards a statement of general religious conformity; the canons of 1604 gave nothing to the puritans but demanded that they submit to the Book of Common Prayer and to the Thirty-Nine Articles. The sectarian ministers must conform or be deprived. The more draconian penalties were in truth rarely applied, but the measures marked the first schism in the history of the reformed English Church.

So the king had prorogued parliament with a very bad grace, little or nothing having been achieved by it. He stated at a later date that it was a body without a head. 'At their meetings,' he is reported to have said, 'nothing is heard but cries, shouts and confusion. I am surprised that my ancestors should ever have allowed such an institution to come into existence.' His opinion may have been shared by others. In the winter of 1604 Thomas Percy subleased a house beside the Palace of Westminster and, with the assistance of Guy Fawkes and other conspirators, began to excavate a tunnel.

2

The plot

In these early years the king was proclaimed as a Caesar, a David, a Noah, a Joash and even a Homer. He was a second Augustus, a true Josiah, a wise and religious sovereign. It is difficult to know what this bewildering wealth of parallels might signify, but one virtue soon became predominant. He was '*rex pacificus*' or '*Jacobus pacificus*'. Blessed was the peacemaker. His was the reign of the fig tree and the vine.

Others were not so satisfied by the pleasures of peace. 'Na, na,' James is supposed to have said after his coronation, 'we'll not need papists now.' He had wooed them in case of trouble, but could now afford to discard them. In February 1604, the Jesuit priests who owed all their obedience to Rome were banished from the realm. It was a sensible precaution, perhaps, but for fervent Catholics it was an ominous sign.

Among these was Thomas Winter, or Wintour, who had unsuccessfully appealed to Philip III of Spain for aid on behalf of the faithful. In the same month of February 1604, he visited his cousin, Robert Catesby, at Lambeth. Catesby was possibly a convert from Protestantism and therefore one in whom the Roman fire burned ever more brightly. It was he, rather than Guy Fawkes, who led what became known as the 'powder plot'. Catesby informed his cousin of his grand plan to blow up parliament with gunpowder,

but of course he needed allies in the work. In April Winter travelled to Flanders from which place he brought back Fawkes himself. We may now refer to them as conspirators. 'Shall we always, gentlemen, talk,' Thomas Percy said, 'and never do anything?' In the following month an oath of secrecy was sworn before they made their way to a house behind the church of St Clement Eastcheap, where they met a Jesuit by the name of Gerard who administered to them the Holy Sacrament.

It was now agreed that a dwelling conveniently close to parliament must be found, but it was not until the beginning of December that a suitable property became available. On the 11th of the month they entered the house, carrying with them a stock of hard-boiled eggs and baked meats. By Christmas Eve the conspirators had dug their way down and, in the words of Thomas Winter, 'wrought under a little entry to the wall of the parliament house and underpropped it as we went with wood'. They believed that the next session would begin in February 1605, but now they learned that it was prorogued until the following October. They had more time. The gunpowder was being stored at Catesby's lodgings in Lambeth but, under conditions of great secrecy and security, it was brought to the house at Westminster. They had already made some progress in penetrating the 9-foot wall, but their work was impeded by the influx of water.

One day, soon after the gunpowder had been acquired, they heard a rustling sound above their heads. Fawkes went out of doors and cautiously investigated. He was met by Ellen Bright, coal merchant, who informed him that she was leaving the premises; it so happened that her cellar or vault ran under the parliament house itself. The deal was quickly settled; Thomas Percy, another conspirator, secured the lease of the space. An iron gate between the basement of the conspirators' house and Mrs Bright's cellar was opened, and Fawkes was able to smuggle some thirty-six barrels of gunpowder into the neighbouring vault. There was enough powder to destroy many thousands of people.

By September fresh barrels of gunpowder were acquired in order to replace those affected by damp. Funds were running low, however, and it was deemed advisable to bring in three other conspirators with money or property. Thirteen men were by this time apprised of the secret, leaving thirteen ways for the secret to be betrayed.

One of the newly recruited conspirators, Francis Tresham, pleaded strongly that his brother-in-law, Lord Monteagle, should be spared the general conflagration. Monteagle was a staunch Catholic who had already defended his Church in the House of Lords. The others demurred at the exception, however well meant. Monteagle was sitting down for dinner on 26 October, at his house in Hoxton, when a letter was brought to him by a messenger. He glanced at it and then requested one of his gentlemen to read it aloud.

'My lord, out of the love I bear to some of your friends, I have a care of your preservation. Therefore I would advise you, as you tender your life, to devise some excuse to shift of your attendance at this parliament . . . ' So it began. The correspondent then went on to warn that 'they shall receive a terrible blow this Parliament, and yet they shall not see who hurts them'. Monteagle immediately set out for Whitehall with the letter in his hand. He came upon Robert Cecil, now the newly created earl of Salisbury, sitting down to supper with some other members of the privy council.

Monteagle took Salisbury into an adjoining room, and showed him the document. Salisbury was at first inclined to dismiss the matter as a false alarm but, on his consulting his colleagues, the possibility of gunpowder as a 'terrible blow' was discussed. The lord chamberlain, the earl of Suffolk, knew intimately the interior of parliament; in particular he was aware of the damp and capacious cellars beneath the building. He, and other privy councillors, agreed that they should be searched before the beginning of the session that had been further postponed to 5 November; but they did not wish to act too precipitately for fear of scaring away the plotters.

The king had been hunting at Royston and, on his return to London at the beginning of November, the letter was shown to him. Instantly he agreed that it suggested 'some stratagem of fire and powder'. On the afternoon of Monday 4 November, Suffolk and Monteagle began their search on the excuse that they were looking for some property belonging to the king. Guy Fawkes opened the door of the cellar.

Suffolk: To whom do these coals and faggots belong?
Fawkes: They belong to Mr Thomas Percy, one of his majesty's gentlemen pensioners.

Thomas Percy was of course a known Catholic, at a time when there was some fear of Catholic disaffection. The king now ordered a further and more thorough search. At eleven o'clock that night a Westminster magistrate, Sir Thomas Knyvett, went down to the cellar with certain soldiers. The door was once more opened by Guy Fawkes. Knyvett then began to brush aside the coals and the bundles of wood only to discover the barrels of gunpowder. Fawkes made no attempt at flight or combat. He admitted that he intended to blow up the king and the two houses of parliament on the following morning. It seems that he was prepared to light a slow match and then to make his way to Wapping where he would take boat to Gravelines in France. When he was asked later, in formal questioning by the council, the reason for procuring so much gunpowder he replied that he wanted 'to blow the Scottish beggars back to their native mountains'. The king was informed of Fawkes's capture, and gave thanks for his miraculous deliverance.

It was, perhaps, not a miracle at all. Francis Tresham and Lord Monteagle may have conspired in the production of the letter, as a device to gain the favour of the king. It has also been suggested that Salisbury himself was aware of the conspiracy but allowed it to proceed as a way of catching out the Catholics; this is highly unlikely, but not wholly impossible.

News of the arrest, and the intended treason, soon spread. Robert Catesby and the other conspirators fled from London, hoping to create the conditions for a Catholic rising; but the Catholic gentlemen were not about to commit suicide. The principal fugitives then took refuge in Holbeche House, on the borders of Staffordshire, where a lighted coal or stray spark ignited the gunpowder they were carrying with them. Two or three were injured, and were inclined to see in the accident a sign of divine displeasure. One of them cried out, 'Woe worth the time that we have seen this day!' They then knelt in prayer before a picture of the Virgin. The sheriff of Worcester was on their track; his men surrounded the house and fired on its occupants. Some were killed, while the wounded were taken back to London; Catesby was among those shot dead.

Other conspirators were found in hiding over the next few days. On 27 January 1606, Guy Fawkes and seven others were brought for trial to Westminster Hall where all but one of them pleaded

innocence. They were executed a few days later. The Jesuits, who had condoned if not connived in the plot, were soon enough taken to the scaffold. So ended 'the powder plot'. Seven years later the study of Robert Cotton, librarian and antiquarian, was found to contain certain sainted relics of the plotters, including a finger, a toe and a piece of a rib.

The king himself, despite his miraculous survival, was not comforted. The Venetian ambassador reported that 'the king is in terror, he does not appear nor does he take his meals in public as usual. He lives in the innermost rooms with only Scotsmen about him.' James seemed subdued and melancholy, occasionally giving vent to his anger against the Catholics. 'I shall most certainly be obliged to stain my hands with their blood,' he said, 'though sorely against my will.' It did not come to that.

The members of the Commons had continued their ordinary business on the day they were meant to be destroyed; a committee on Spanish trade was established, and a petition was discussed from a member asking to be excused on account of gout. Yet by the end of May 1606, they had passed an Act 'for the better discovering and repressing of popish recusants'; one of its provisions was an oath of allegiance, drawn up by Archbishop Bancroft, which acknowledged James to be the lawful king beyond any power of the pope to depose him. Catholics were obliged to attend the services of the established Church and to receive holy communion at least once a year; the penalties included fines or the impropriation of property. No recusant was to come within 10 miles of London, and a statute of the previous reign was revived prohibiting any recusant from travelling further than 5 miles from his or her home. No recusant could practise as an attorney or as a doctor.

These measures did not bring about the demise of the old faith. The Catholics merely withdrew from political activity during the reign of James and largely remained quiet or quiescent. Most of them were willing to accept the oath of allegiance in order to secure both peace and property; only the Jesuitically inclined were still eager to support the pretensions of the pope. James himself said of the oath that he wished to make a distinction between the doctrinaire Catholics and those 'who although they were otherwise popishly affected, yet retained in their hearts the print of their

natural duty to their sovereign'. The previous sanctions against the puritans had been only hesitantly or partially imposed; the same policy of caution was now pursued against the Catholics. James had no wish to make martyrs out of his subjects. It was in any case far easier, in the early seventeenth century, to make laws than to enforce them.

The court of James I, its excesses having already become public knowledge, was now notorious for its laxity; drunkenness and dissimulation, venality and promiscuity, were its most significant characteristics. Freedom of manners was the only rule. The earl of Pembroke was believed to have a horror of frogs, so the king put one down his neck. The king himself had an aversion to pigs, and so Pembroke led one into the royal bedchamber. One courtier took into the palace at Whitehall 'four brawny pigs, piping hot, bitted and harnessed with ropes of sausages, all tied to a monstrous pudding'. The sausages were hurled about the room while the fools and dwarves of the court began leaping on one another's shoulders.

In *Sejanus, His Fall*, a play performed in the first year of the king's reign, Ben Jonson alluded to courtiers when he wrote that:

> We have no shift of faces, no cleft tongues,
> No soft and glutinous bodies that can stick
> Like snails on painted walls . . .

'If I were to imitate the conduct of your republic,' the king told the Venetian ambassador, 'and begin to punish those who take bribes, I should soon not have a single subject left.'

When the king of Denmark arrived in the summer of 1606 the courtiers of Whitehall were said by Sir John Harington 'to wallow in beastly delights' while the ladies 'abandon their sobriety and are seen to roll about in intoxication'. A great feast was held for the two sovereigns, in the course of which was shown a representation of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The lady who played the queen carried various gifts to the two kings 'but forgetting the steps arising to the canopy overset her caskets into his Danish majesty's lap and fell at his feet . . . His Majesty then got up and would dance with the Queen of Sheba, but he fell down and humbled himself before her, and was carried to an inner chamber and laid on a bed of state.'

Other actors in the pageant, such as Hope and Faith, 'were both sick and spewing in the lower hall'. Harington concluded that 'the gunpowder fright is got out of all our heads' and 'I ne'er did see such lack of good order, discretion and sobriety, as I have now done'. He yearned for the days of his godmother, the Virgin Queen, when a certain stateliness and severity touched the atmosphere of the court.

There could be no doubt that the new court differed markedly from its predecessor. The king was known to be devoted to his pleasures rather than what were considered to be his duties. He attended the fights of the Cockpit in Whitehall Palace twice a week, and, like his predecessor, loved to ride or hunt every day. When James rode up to the dead hart he dismounted and cut its throat with dispatch; he then sated the dogs with its blood before wiping his bloodied hands across the faces of his fellow horsemen.

It soon became clear that he did not enjoy the company of spectators at his sports. Quite unlike his predecessor he disliked and even detested crowds. When the people flocked about him he would swear at them and cry out, 'What would they have?' On one occasion he was told that they had come in love and reverence. To which he replied, in a broad Scots accent, 'God's wounds, I will pull down my breeches and they shall also see my arse.' He would bid 'A pox on you!' or 'A plague on you!' As a result of outbursts of anger such as this he became, in the words of the Venetian ambassador, 'despised and almost hated'.

He justified his exertions at the hunt on the grounds that his vigour was 'the health and welfare of them all', no doubt meaning both the court and the nation. Let his officers waste away in closets or at the council table. He must be strong and virile. In any case, he said, he could do more business in an hour than his councillors could manage in a day; he spent less time in hunting than other monarchs did in whoring. One day a favourite dog, Jowler, disappeared from the pack. On the following morning it reappeared with a note tied around its neck. 'Good Mr Jowler we pray you speak to the king (for he hears you every day and so doth he not us) that it will please his majesty to go back to London, for else the country will be undone.' When eventually James did return to Whitehall he feasted and played cards, at which sport he lost large sums of money.

James was continually and heavily in debt. He had thought to come into a realm of gold, but soon found his purse to be bare. Or, rather, he emptied it too readily. He bought boots and silk stockings and beaver hats in profusion. Court ceremonial was more lavish with the arrival of ever more 'gentlemen extraordinary'. There was a vogue at court for 'golden play' or gambling. The king loved masques and feasts, which were for him a true sign of regality. He wished to have a masque on the night of Christmas, whereupon he was told that it was not the fashion. 'What do you tell me of the fashion?' he enquired. 'I will make it a fashion.'

The king also purchased plate and jewels, which he then proceeded to distribute among his followers. It was said that he had given to one or two men more than his predecessor had given to all of her courtiers during the whole of her reign. The earl of Shrewsbury remarked that Elizabeth 'valued every molehill that she gave . . . a mountain, which our sovereign now does not'. His generosity to favourites and to courtiers was by the standard of any age in English history exceptional.

One particular favourite emerged in the spring of 1607. Robert Carr, twenty-one, was a model of affability and deportment; he was also exceptionally handsome. He took part in a tournament in the king's presence, but he was thrown from his horse and broke his leg. The king was much affected and ordered his own doctor to take charge of the young man; Carr was carried to the hospital at Charing Cross, where the king visited him every day. The patient was placed on a choice diet and, at the insistence of James, was surrounded by surgeons. It was clear to the courtiers that here was a man worth flattering. 'Lord!' one contemporary, Sir Anthony Weldon, wrote, 'how the great men flocked to see him, and to offer to his shrine in such abundance . . .' James had become infatuated with him and, by the end of the year, Carr had been knighted and appointed as a gentleman of the bedchamber. The king decided to educate as well as to promote him. He himself gave Carr lessons in Latin grammar and in the politics of Europe. And of course he lavished gold and jewels upon him. It was observed that the king 'leaneth on his arm, pinches his cheek, smoothes his ruffled garments . . .'

Sir John Harington was still seeking preferment at court after a lifetime of service to Elizabeth. Thomas Howard, earl of Suffolk,

took him aside and offered some advice. He was told that the king 'doth wonderfully covet learned discourse' and 'doth admire good fashion in cloaths'. He was instructed to 'get a new jerkin well bordered, and not too short; the king saith, he liketh a flowing garment; be sure it be not all of one sort, but diversely coloured, the collar falling somewhat down, and your ruff well stiffened and bushy'. Eighteen courtiers had already been dismissed for not conforming to the king's taste in male attire.

Suffolk suggested to Harington that in his conversation he should not dwell too long on any one subject, and touch only lightly on the topic of religion. Never say that 'this is good or bad' but modestly state that 'if it were your majesty's good opinion, I myself should think so and so'. Do not ask questions. Do not speak about the character or temperament of anyone else at court. Remember to praise the king's horse, a roan jennet. You must say that the stars are bright jewels fit for Robert Carr's ears, and that the roan jennet surpasses Bucephalus and is worthy to be ridden by Alexander.

Suffolk also advised Harington that 'silence and discretion should be linked together, like dog and bitch'. The previous sovereign had always spoken of her subjects' 'love and good affections', but James preferred to talk of their 'fear and subjection'. Why did Harington wish to come to court in the first place? 'You are not young, you are not handsome, you are not finely.' So he must rely upon his learning, which the king would admire.

Soon enough James took Harington aside, and questioned him in his private closet. He quizzed him on Aristotle and other philosophers; he asked him to read out a passage from Ariosto, and praised his elocution. He then posed a series of questions to him. What do you think pure wit is made of? Should a king not be the best clerk [the most learned] in his own country? Do you truly understand why the devil works more with ancient women than with others? He told Harington that the death of his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, had been foretold and that at the time of her execution a bloody head was seen dancing in the air; he dilated on the powers of prophecy and recommended several books on the matter. The king concluded by discussing 'the new weed', tobacco, and declared that 'it would, by its use, infuse ill qualities on the

brain'. So ended the audience. Harington passed through the court 'amidst the many varlets and lordly servants who stood around'. Yet he had passed the test, and was appointed as tutor to the young Prince Henry.

Reasons other than favouritism can be adduced for the king's indebtedness. The steady rise in prices, and the reluctance of landowners to pay further taxation, all contributed to the rise in the expenditure of the court above its income. The cost of an extended royal household, complete with wife and three children, was also very high. Queen Anne was extravagant and devoted to the delights of fashionable London; her husband had proposed that she might confine herself to the 3,000 dresses in the previous queen's wardrobe, but she did not care for some of the old fashions. She would appear at court in the guise of a goddess or a nymph, an Eastern sultana or an Arab princess.

James was perpetually surprised by his debts, and continually promised to be more economical; yet it was not in his nature to be thrifty. 'My only hope that upholds me,' he told Salisbury, 'is my good servants, that will sweat and labour for my relief.' But where was the money to be found? Certain taxes had been levied 'time out of mind', or at least since the latter years of the fourteenth century. 'Tonnage' was the duty levied on each 'tun' or cask of wine; 'poundage' was the tax raised on every pound sterling of exported or imported goods. James decided to revise the book of rates, however, and to impose new levies that came to be known as 'impositions'.

A merchant by the name of John Bate refused to pay. He drove a cartload of currants from the waterside before the customs officials had the opportunity to tax them; he was brought before the council, where he declared that the 'imposition' was illegal. His became a test case before the court of the exchequer which ruled that the king had absolute power in the matter; in all aspects of foreign trade, his prerogative was assured.

Nevertheless opposition arose in parliament, where there was talk of money being poured into bottomless coffers. In October 1607 James addressed his council on the pressing problems concerning 'this eating canker of want'. He promised to abide by any

'cure' they prescribed and to accept 'such remedies and antidotes as you are to apply unto my disease'. The case was not an easy one. Salisbury tried various expedients for raising money, by fining for long-forgotten transgressions or by extorting as many feudal 'aids' to the king as he could find.

Yet the Commons were not impressed by the measures. It was an ancient principle that the sovereign of England should 'live of his own'; he should maintain his estate, and bear the cost of government, out of his own resources. It was also universally believed that taxation was an extraordinary measure only to be raised in time of war. The first parliament of James I was summoned for five sessions from March 1604 to February 1611, and in that long period it acquired the beginning of a corporate identity largely lacking during the reign of Elizabeth. More business was enacted, and parliament sat for longer. In 1607, for example, the Commons instituted a 'committee of the whole house'. This committee could elect its own chairman, as opposed to the Speaker chosen by the sovereign, and could debate freely for as long as it wished. It was at the time seen as a remarkable innovation, and might be considered the harbinger of strife between court and parliament.

A group of disparate and variously inclined parliamentarians was not necessarily on the king's side. Francis Bacon wrote to the king that 'that opposition which was, the last parliament, to your majesty's business, as much as was not *ex puris naturalibus* but out of party, I conceive to be now much weaker than it was'. This did not yet embody the partisanship of later struggles, or the creation of 'parties' in the modern sense, but it suggests a change in national affairs. Some of the disputatious details have been recorded. Sir Edward Herbert 'plops' with his mouth at Mr Speaker. John Tey complains that Mr Speaker is 'clipping him off' and proceeds to threaten him.

The king had another doughty opponent. A legal dispute had arisen. Was there a distinction between those Scots born before James's accession to the English throne and those born after it? The king argued that those born after his accession were naturalized by common law and, therefore, could hold office in England. James turned to the judges whom he assumed to take his part. One of them refused to do so. Sir Edward Coke had been chief justice of

the common pleas since 1605, and was an impassioned exponent of English common law. James had no real conception of common law, having been educated in the very different jurisprudence of Scotland. Coke believed, for example, that both sovereign and subject were accountable to a body of ancient law that had been conceived in practice and clarified by usage; it represented immemorial general custom, but it was also a law of reason. This was not, however, the king's opinion. He had already firmly stated that 'the king is above the law, as both the author and the giver of strength thereto'. From this it could be construed that the king possessed an arbitrary authority. James alleged, for example, that he could decide cases in person. Coke demurred: a case could only be judged in a lawcourt. Coke's own report tells the story of bad blood.

James: I thought the law was founded on reason. I and others have reason as well as the judges.
Coke: Although, sir, you have great endowments of nature, yet you are not learned in the laws of England. Causes are not to be decided by natural reason but by the artificial reason and judgment of law.

More debate followed.

James: So then I am under the law? It is treason to affirm that!
Coke: Bracton has said that the king should not be under man but under God and the law.

An observer noted that 'his majesty fell in that high indignation as the like was never known in him, looking and speaking fiercely with bended fist, offering to strike him, which the Lord Coke perceiving fell flat on all fours . . .' Coke might yield and beg for mercy, but over succeeding years the debate between the Crown and the law continued with ever greater volume and seriousness.

The manoeuvres of the court were never still. The favourite, now Sir Robert Carr, needed land to complement his title. By Carr's great good fortune Sir Walter Raleigh, still incarcerated, had forfeited his interest in the manor of Sherborne; he thought that he had conveyed it to his son, but the king's council believed otherwise. It was given to the favourite. Lady Raleigh, accompanied by her two

sons, was admitted into the king's presence where she threw herself at his feet. 'I maun have the land' was his only reply. 'I maun have it for Carr.' This is the true voice of the king.