PROLOGUE

The law of nature moves me to sorrow for my sister. The burden that is fallen upon me makes me amazed and yet … ordained to obey His appointment, I will thereto yield, desiring from the bottom of my heart that I may have the assistance of His Grace to be the minister of His heavenly will in this office now committed to me.

Elizabeth I, on hearing of her accession to the throne of England. Hatfield, 17 November 1558.[1]

Elizabeth Tudor's long years of torment, anxiety and fear finally ended just before noon on 17 November 1558, reputedly beneath the spreading branches of a gnarled old oak tree in the verdant grounds of Hatfield Palace, in Hertfordshire, 20 miles (32.2 km) north of London.

Six senior members of Queen Mary I's Privy Council, accompanied by Sir William Cordell, speaker of the House of Commons,[2] had cantered breathlessly across the greensward to bring her the news she had long dreamt of receiving – but in her dark days of despair, feared would never come.

After hastily dismounting, they knelt on the grass before the princess, who had been walking outside in the chill November air, and solemnly informed her of her half-sister's death.

Elizabeth, the twenty-five-year-old red-headed daughter of Anne Boleyn and King Henry VIII, had succeeded at last as Queen of England.

Although the fateful message from London had been expected almost hourly, its import still stunned her. She too fell to her knees and must have breathed a prayer of profound thanks both for her survival and her safe accession. At length, after 'a good time of respiration', exaltation flooded through her body and she spoke her first

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words as monarch, choosing, in Latin, verse twenty-three from the Old Testament's Psalm 118: '*Domino factum est istud, et est miribile in oculis nostris*' – 'This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes'.[3]

Around seven o'clock that morning, Mary had died in St James' Palace, London, only moments after the sacred Host had been solemnly elevated during a Mass celebrated in her bedchamber. Drifting in and out of consciousness, she died in great pain from the ovarian cysts or uterine cancer that finally killed her. Death was energetically stalking abroad that day. An epidemic of influenza (or more probably the 'English Sweating Sickness' a form of viral pneumonia),[4] which had carried off up to a fifth of her subjects over the previous two years, still claimed its victims, including Cardinal Reginald Pole, her Archbishop of Canterbury, who succumbed to its fevers within twelve hours of his sovereign's passing.

Elizabeth had become the last of Henry's disparate brood to occupy the throne of England. Many believed it was something of a miracle that she had lived long enough to wear the crown: no wonder those words of praise to God for His infinite mercy were chosen as her first public reaction to her accession. Doubtless the phrases were carefully rehearsed beforehand, with a typical Tudor eye to history's judgement.

Her path to the throne had been perilous and strewn with lethal pitfalls.

Her despotic father's obsessive infatuation with her feisty mother, driven by his restless longing for a lusty male heir, had been the root cause of a cataclysmic rupture with Rome that created a renegade church in England in the 1530s which was briefly returned to papal authority during Mary's reign. Henry's fixation and its aftermath spawned decades of religious discord that brutally cost the lives of hundreds of men and women who remained faithful to their creeds on both sides of the Catholic–Protestant divide.

Three months after Elizabeth's birth (on 7 September 1533 at Greenwich Palace) she had been moved to Hatfield with her own household. She was joined there shortly afterwards by seventeen-year-old Mary (the only child of Henry VIII and his Spanish wife Katherine of Aragon), who was now legally bastardised and formally stripped of her royal rank of princess because of the

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divisive annulment of the king's marriage with her mother.

Thomas Howard, Third Duke of Norfolk and uncle to Anne Boleyn, mischievously asked her on her arrival if she would like to 'see and pay court to the princess'. Mary snapped back defiantly that 'she knew of no other princess in England but herself … The daughter of Madame de Pembroke [Anne Boleyn was created Marchioness of Pembroke before she became queen] is no princess at all. This is a title that belongs to me by right and no one else.' Mary lumped Elizabeth in with Henry's bastard son, Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond (by Bessie Blount, one of Katherine's maids of honour); they were simply her illegitimate brother and sister. Did she have any message for the king? 'None,' said Mary, 'except that the Princess of Wales, his daughter, asks for his blessing.' Norfolk dared not return to court with such a dangerous message; 'Then go away and leave me alone,' Mary ordered imperiously.[5]

One of the last times Elizabeth saw her mother was in January 1536, but as a toddler, she probably would not have retained any memory of her visit. News of Katherine of Aragon's lonely death, exiled in spartan Kimbolton Castle, Huntingdonshire, had been received joyously at Henry's court. Queen Anne rewarded the messenger with 'a handsome present' and her father, Thomas Boleyn, Earl of Wiltshire, commented sardonically that it was a pity that Mary 'did not keep company with her [mother]'. The then Spanish ambassador, Eustace Chapuys (never a friend to Elizabeth), reported that the king 'sent for his Little Bastard and carrying her in his arms, he showed her first to one and then another'.[6]

Those happy red-letter days withered on the tortured vine of Henry's determination to safeguard the Tudor dynasty and his fury at being continually thwarted by his lack of sons. Despite three pregnancies, the queen failed wretchedly in her primary duty: to deliver a healthy prince.

That year, Anne Boleyn was competently beheaded by a specially hired French executioner on Tower Green on Friday 19 May for treason, adultery and alleged incest with her brother George. Four days before, Thomas Cranmer, newly appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, had annulled Anne's marriage with Henry, thus rendering Elizabeth, in her turn, a bastard. A new Act of Succession decreed that as she was illegitimate, she was 'utterly foreclosed,

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excluded and banned to claim, challenge or demand any inheritance as lawful heir … to [the king] by lineal descent'.[7] But nothing was ever certain during the Tudor period: a further Act of 1543 reinstated Elizabeth and Mary to the succession and stipulated that if Edward died childless, the crown would pass to Mary. If she too died without issue, it would then pass on to Elizabeth.[8]

Her education was directed by religiously reformist scholars from St John's College, Cambridge and she later admitted to Mary 'that she had never been taught the doctrine of the ancient [Catholic] faith'.[9] Elizabeth became fluent in French, Italian, Greek and Latin, but she did not begin to study Spanish until her twenties. When Henry died in January 1547, her priggish half-brother Edward, son of Henry's third queen, Jane Seymour, wrote to her: 'There is very little need of my consoling you, most dear sister, because from your learning you know what you ought to do … I perceive you think of our father's death with a calm mind.'[10]

The radical Protestant policies of Edward VI's short reign swept English and Welsh parish churches and cathedrals clean of popish imagery, opportunely recycling many of these fixtures and fittings into hard cash for the young king's embarrassingly empty exchequer. Daringly, Mary continued to hear Catholic Masses in her household and when told to cease and desist by Edward's outraged Privy Council, her reaction was predictably forthright:

> You accuse me of breaking the laws and disobeying them by keeping to my own religion – but I reply that my faith and my religion are those held by the whole of Christendom, formerly confessed by this kingdom under the late king, my father, until you altered them with your laws … This is my final answer to any letters that you may write me on matters of religion.[11]

After Edward's death from a bizarre combination of tuberculosis, measles and the unhelpful ministrations of a 'wise woman', Mary determinedly saw off the challenge of her half-brother's preferred Protestant heir, Lady Jane Grey, and entered London in triumph as queen on 3 August 1553. She swiftly returned England to Catholicism, although incongruously, she initially retained her father's title of Supreme Head of the Church in England (until early 1554, when use of the title was phased out in official documents) and

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early on continued to benefit from the sacrilegious sale of church goods.[12] Giovanni Michiel, the departing Venetian ambassador in London, reported in 1557 that seven new monasteries had been opened;[13] 'the churches are frequented, the images replaced and all the ancient Catholic rites and ceremonies performed as they used to be, the heretical being suppressed'.[14] 'Suppressed' was too feeble or facile a word to describe what was happening. Mary burned two hundred and eighty-three Protestants at the stake for refusing to recant their beliefs during just four years – hence history's pejorative soubriquet 'Bloody Mary'.

On 8 September 1553, the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, Elizabeth heard her first Mass but attended such services only erratically thereafter. The Spanish ambassador, Simon Renard, believed her Catholic fervour was mere show and that her heart was not in her conversion. He reported acidly: 'she complained loudly all the way to church and that her stomach ached' and during the liturgy, she 'wore a suffering air'.[15]

Elizabeth was always her father's daughter: characterised by the red hair; her imperious manner; the Tudor rages; the love of magnificence and of gaudy ceremony. Despite her mother's execution, she continued to cherish Henry's memory and to model herself upon him. The princess, the Venetian envoy observed, 'prides herself on her father and glories in him; everybody says that she also resembles him more than the queen does'.[16]

But Mary hated Elizabeth with a black sibling passion. She feared her as a younger rival waiting threateningly in the wings to wear the crown of England once she died or was deposed. Michiel was well aware of the queen's 'evil disposition towards … my lady Elizabeth, which although dissembled, it cannot be denied that she displays in many ways the scorn and ill she bears her'.[17] Mary's suspicions intensified when she was faced by an uprising in 1554 over her projected marriage with Philip, son of the Emperor Charles V of Spain. Mary's Lord Chancellor, the sinister Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, had led the religiously conservative party during Henry VIII's reign, and now feared Elizabeth would become the focal point of a Protestant resurgence. The prelate confided to Renard that 'he had no hope of seeing the kingdom at peace' while the princess lived and he urged Mary to consign her to the Tower – even

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before rumour had implicated her in the abortive Wyatt rebellion.

Gardiner's unease was justified. On 14 March, thousands flocked to London's Aldersgate Street to hear a miraculous 'voice in the wall' which when people cried 'God save Queen Mary' stayed silent, but as the shouts changed to 'God save the Lady Elizabeth' it responded: 'So be it!' When one mischief-maker asked: 'What is the Mass?' the 'spirit' replied: 'Idolatry!' The perpetrator of this hoax was Elizabeth Croft, 'a wench about the age of eighteen', who was imprisoned in the Tower and subsequently executed:

> There was a new scaffold made [at St Paul's Cathedral] for the maid that spoke in the wall and *whistled* in Aldersgate Street … She wept piteously, knelt and asked [for] God's mercy and the queen and bade all people be aware of false teaching for she said that … many good things [had been promised] to her.[18]

Following the defeat of the rebels at the western gates of the City of London, the queen ordered Elizabeth to be taken to the Tower. To prevent the inevitable outbursts of popular support that her progress through the city's streets would incite, the Marquis of Winchester and the Earl of Sussex were instructed to convey Elizabeth to the fortress by boat.

Knowing her life now hung in the balance, she immediately wrote a heartfelt, pleading letter to her sister in her neat, easily read italic handwriting:

> If any did try this old saying – that a king's word was more than another man's oath – I most humbly beseech your majesty to verify it in me and to remember your last promise and my last demand; that I be not condemned without answer and due proof.
>
> It seems that now I am, for without cause proved, I am by your Council from you commanded to go unto the Tower, a place more [accustomed] to a false traitor than a true subject …
>
> I know I deserve it not, yet in the face of all this realm, it appears it is proved. Which I pray God I may die the [most] shameful death that ever any died before I may mean any such thing …
>
> I protest before God … I never practised, counselled or consented to anything that might be prejudicial to you or dangerous to the state …

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> Pardon my boldness which innocency procures me to do, together with hope of your natural kindness. I have heard in my time of many cast away for want of coming to their prince … I pray God … evil persuasions persuade not one sister against the other … I humbly crave to speak with your highness.
>
> As for the traitor Wyatt, he might [by chance] write me a letter but on my faith, I never received any from him.[19]

Fearing that she might be incriminated by the surreptitious addition of a forged postscript, Elizabeth wisely scored a diagonal line across the blank two-thirds of a page at the end of her letter.

While she was writing to Mary, 'the tide rose so high that it was no longer possible to pass under London Bridge' from Westminster to the Tower – so her grim journey by river was postponed to the next day, Palm Sunday, 18 March.[20] En route, Elizabeth was almost tipped into the water as her boat shot the race through one of the nineteen arches of the medieval London Bridge. She flatly refused to disembark at the Tower's privy stairs and sat down in protest at her arrest, announcing, 'It is better sitting here than in a worse place.'[21] It was raining hard and perhaps it was the inclement weather rather than the entreaties of her discomfited escorts that finally persuaded her to struggle out of the boat declaring: 'Here lands as true a subject, being a prisoner, as ever landed [here].' Entering across the drawbridge, the sight of the forbidding grey outer walls, dwarfed by the White Tower within, terrified her. She believed that she would now suffer the same fate as her mother had there eighteen years earlier. Her fears were magnified when she passed the scaffold on Tower Green on which Lady Jane Grey had been beheaded five weeks before.

During her incarceration, Elizabeth wrote this prayer; its bleak words eloquently describing her feelings of isolation and hopelessness:

> Help me now O God for I have none other friends but Thee alone.
>
> And suffer me not (I beseech Thee) to build my foundation on the sands but on the rock whereby all blasts of blustering weather may have no power against me.[22]

Her despairing cry in the dark was seemingly heard as her trials and travails were now about to be eased. Sir Thomas Wyatt was taken

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in chains to a scaffold at Hay Hill beside Hyde Park on 11 April, and there he was hung, drawn and quartered, along with three other rebel leaders. Portions of his torso were hung up at the approaches to the City of London as an awful demonstration of the fate of traitors.[23] He went to his death adamantly refusing to implicate the princess in his conspiracy.

Despite strenuous efforts, no solid evidence proving Elizabeth's involvement in the rebellion was ever uncovered to warrant her following him to the executioner's block. Much to Gardiner's chagrin, she was released on Saturday 19 May[24] and taken to the royal hunting lodge at Woodstock in Oxfordshire, where she remained under house arrest. During those tedious, listless days, she used one of her diamond rings to scratch this verse on a pane of window glass there:

> Much suspected by me
> Nothing proved by me
> Quod [said] Elizabeth the prisoner.[25]

Mary had meanwhile married Philip of Spain, enveloping him with a love of unexpected passion. After he ascended the Spanish throne on his father's abdication in 1556, the couple assumed the extravagant style and title of 'Philip and Mary, by the Grace of God, King and Queen of England, Spain, France, Jerusalem, both the Scillies and Ireland,[26] Defenders of the Faith, Archdukes of Austria, Dukes of Burgundy, Milan and Brabant, Counts of Habsburg, Flanders and Tyrol'. Mary not only became Queen Consort of Spain but also 'Queen of the Spanish East and West Indies and of the Islands and Mainland of the Ocean Sea'.

Mary's bridegroom regarded his marriage as a loveless match of mere diplomatic convenience. The queen was eleven years older than him; had been betrothed briefly to his father in the 1520s and her love was unfortunately unrequited. His eyes may have roved lasciviously over his wife's ladies at court: tall and blonde Magdalene Dacre whispered that the king had reached through a window and tried to fondle her breasts as she was washing herself one morning. She grabbed a conveniently placed stick (was this something always kept handy indoors by Tudor ladies in *déshabille*?) and struck his outstretched arm to cool his ardour, prompting his polite praise for her modesty.[27]

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Both Philip's heart and head had no roots in England and he stayed just long enough in his new dominions for appearances' sake. There were hopes that he had begat a child and in April 1555 Elizabeth was recalled to Hampton Court to witness the happy birth of Mary's heir.

She was not yet wholly rehabilitated in the queen's affections and was patently a despondent and reluctant prospective aunt. It did not help that her household had a reputation as a hotbed of Protestant subversion: in July 1554, one of her servants had been imprisoned for sedition; a second followed him into gaol in April 1555 and the following month, Elizabeth's Italian tutor, Battista Castiglione, was sent to the Tower on suspicion of distributing treasonous literature in London. However, he maintained stoutly that he was in the city only to buy new strings for his mistress's lute[28] and was grudgingly released. The princess was therefore still held under arrest – 'the doors being shut upon her, the soldiers in the ancient posture of watch and guard'.[29]

Mary did not produce her heir, having suffered a phantom pregnancy, and her grief and humiliation were deepened by her husband's departure from England soon afterwards. Beforehand, he had urged the queen to offer Elizabeth better treatment as her heiress presumptive and had dissuaded her from yet again declaring Elizabeth a bastard – or exiling her abroad. Behind Philip's outward kindness lay a hard-nosed pragmatism: if Mary's half-sister did not succeed her, the French would certainly press the claims to the English throne of Mary Queen of Scots, who had been betrothed to François, Dauphin of France, the son of King Henri II. Under no circumstances could Spain ever countenance an England in the thrall of France.

Elizabeth was sent back to Hatfield, where she rejected several offers of marriage suggested by her half-sister over the coming years as a means of ridding this troublesome cuckoo from Mary's uncomfortable nest.

In August 1558, the queen, now aged forty-two, was afflicted by bouts of fever and those around her began, hesitantly and tentatively, to consider the thorny problem of her successor. Others were voting with their feet. The Venetian diplomat Michiel Surian told the Doge in November that 'many personages of the kingdom flock to the house of my lady Elizabeth, the crowd constantly increasing

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with great frequency'.[30] Although these consultations were carried out covertly, it was plain as a pikestaff that plans for her accession were being quietly drawn up. The Spanish envoy Renard observed that she was 'honoured and recognised' [as heiress to the crown] and it would be almost impossible to debar her. He urged Philip to find her a husband overseas – perhaps the Duke of Savoy, 'a man true to God and your majesty'.[31]

Even Mary knew deep down of the unspoken reality that she would never conceive a child and that she should grasp the nettle of the succession to the throne. But she still shied away from naming her half-sister as heir apparent. On 28 October she signed a codicil to her will that acknowledged that 'God has hitherto sent me no fruit nor heir of my body' and requested her 'next heir and successor' to honour the terms of her will, particularly those relating to religious houses and the founding of a military hospital.[32] The successor's name was conspicuous by its absence.

Time was running out for Mary and she began to suffer frequent bouts of delirium. On 6 November, the Privy Council finally convinced her to name Elizabeth to succeed her. Jane Dormer, one of the queen's ladies, took some of her jewels to Hatfield with her fervent request that the Catholic religion should continue in England. Years afterwards Jane remembered that Elizabeth had promised 'that the earth might open and swallow her up alive' if she was not a true Catholic – but others recalled a very different, less explicit pledge: 'I promise this much, that I will not change it, provided only that it can be proved by the word of God, which shall be the only foundation and rule of my religion.'[33]

Another visitor was a special Spanish envoy, Gómez Suárez de Figueroa, Fifth Count de Feria, who, on behalf of his king, wanted to sound out Elizabeth's views on continuing England's alliance with Spain. When he suggested that her brother-in-law Philip was responsible for her belated recognition by Mary, she immediately retorted that she 'owed her crown not to Philip … but to the attachment of the people of England'. The envoy told his master:

> Madam Elizabeth [has] come to the conclusion that she would have succeeded even if your majesty and the queen opposed it [so] she does not feel indebted to your majesty in the matter.

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> It is impossible to persuade [her] otherwise that the kingdom will not consent to anything else and would take up arms on her behalf.

The new queen, Feria concluded, was 'determined to be governed by no one'. She was 'a very vain and clever woman. She must have been thoroughly schooled in the manner in which her father conducted his affairs and I am much afraid that she will not be well-disposed in matters of religion for I see her inclined to govern through men who are believed to be heretics and I am told that all the women around her definitely are,' he ruefully reported.[34]

In Flanders, Philip, who had lost his title as King of England under the terms of his marriage treaty, jotted down his reactions to his wife's passing, almost as a footnote to the business of his day: 'I felt a reasonable regret for her death. I shall miss her even on this account.'[35] He seemed more exercised about the potential loss of gold, jewels and resplendent robes belonging to the Order of the Garter that he had left in England 'packed in a trunk that was … deposited, locked, in the late Queen's chamber' in the Palace of Whitehall and in his own hand, amended two lists of those items to be reclaimed.[36]

Elizabeth joyfully grasped the levers of power. She charged her new council always to offer 'good advice and counsel' and required 'nothing more than faithful hearts in such service as … shall be in your powers towards the preservation of me and this commonwealth'. She appointed Sir William Cecil, formerly the administrator of her estates, as her secretary of state, telling him:

> This judgement I have of you: that you will not be corrupted with any manner of gift and that you will be faithful to the state and that without respect of my private will, you will give me that counsel that you think best and if you shall know anything necessary to be declared to me of secrecy you shall show it to myself only.[37]

He was to serve his queen faithfully for forty years until his death in 1598.

There were some scores that had to be settled. Count de Feria was aghast at the immediate and radical changes: 'The kingdom is entirely in the hands of young folks, heretics and traitors, and the Queen does not favour a single man whom her majesty, who is now in heaven, would have received. [She] will take no one into her

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service who served her sister when she was Lady Mary.' The elderly and the Catholics were dissatisfied 'but dare not open their lips'.

> She seems to me incomparably more feared than her sister and gives her orders and has her way as absolutely as her father did.

He added: 'What can be expected from a country governed by a queen, and she a young lass, who although sharp, is without prudence and is everyday standing up against religion more sharply.'[38]

Elizabeth was crowned queen at Westminster Abbey on Sunday 15 January 1559, tartly ordering its monks to remove the popish altar candles as 'she had enough light to see by'.[39]

Sir John Hayward wrote admiringly of the new queen:

> Nature had bestowed … [on her] many of her fairest favours. [She is] of stature mean, slender, straight and amiably composed. Every motion of her seems to bear majesty … in her forehead large and fair, her eyes lively and sweet but short-sighted,[40] her nose somewhat rising in [the middle]. Her virtues are such as might suffice to make an Ethiopian beautiful which the more a man knows and understands, the more he shall admire and love.[41]

With the Tudor dynasty's recurrent nightmare about succession in many people's minds, Elizabeth was soon beset with questions about her marrying. Philip instructed de Feria to formally throw his own feathered and bejewelled cap into the ring as a suitor for the hand of his sister-in-law. He admitted to some troublesome doubts about Elizabeth; he believed her unsound in religion 'and it would not look well for me to marry her unless she were a Catholic. Besides … such a marriage would appear like entering upon a perpetual war with France, seeing the claims that the Queen of Scots has to the English crown.' Philip also fretted about having to pay for 'the costly entertainment necessary' in England when his own exchequer was so depleted. But on the whole, it was more important that England remained Catholic and he was prepared to 'sacrifice my private inclination' and marry Elizabeth, if only in the service of God. Confronted by the prospects of such a marriage, Philip 'felt like a condemned man awaiting his fate'. These were scarcely the words of an eager, blushing bridegroom.[42]

Elizabeth kept the Spanish envoy waiting on tenterhooks for her

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answer to this less than munificent offer of marriage. In February, she discovered an important impediment to her acceptance – the fact that she would be marrying her half-sister's husband. There was more than a little piquancy in suggesting this as a stumbling block; the queen was deploying the Biblical arguments contained in Leviticus 20:21, 'If a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing. He hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless.' This was the self-same argument used by Henry VIII to justify the annulment of his marriage to Katherine of Aragon. How could she therefore marry Philip? It would dishonour the memory of her father. Moreover, no dispensation from the Pope could be sought, as 'she denied point-blank' the authority of Rome.

How she must have savoured the irony of this response! In addition, she had been warned that after marrying Philip, he would return to Spain 'directly'. The Count told his master: 'This she said with great laughter as if she could read [my] secret thoughts. She is so well informed about this it looks as if she has seen your majesty's letters.'[43]

At last that March, Elizabeth gave her final and definitive answer. It teetered on the coquettish; whilst she had no wish to offend 'her good brother' she could not marry him because she was a heretic. The queen, reported de Feria, was 'disturbed and excited and resolved to restore religion as her father left it ... [She said that] so much money was taken out of the country for the Pope every year that she must put an end to it and the bishops were lazy poltroons.'[44] The envoy was horrified: 'This country ... has fallen into the hands of a woman, who is the daughter of the Devil, and the greatest scoundrels and heretics in the land.'[45] Instead, a doubtless relieved Philip the following year married the French princess, Elizabeth of Valois, eldest daughter of Henri II of France and his wife Catherine de Medici, in yet another union of diplomatic advantage.[46]

Although there were other more enthusiastic suitors, Elizabeth had no plans for marriage. She assured Parliament that 'the realm shall not remain destitute of an heir' and promised to deal with selecting a suitable husband 'in convenient time' – but at present she was determined to remain single.[47]

One matter that could not wait was a decision on what would be the state religion for England. The queen sometimes appeared

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bored by the endless wrangling over liturgical minutia and testily told one French envoy: 'There is only one Jesus Christ and one faith and all the rest that they dispute [are] but trifles.'[48] That faith would be Protestantism in her realm, but Elizabeth tried not to alienate or disaffect her Catholic subjects. The compromise that was achieved was based on Edward VI's Protestant settlement but permitted ecclesiastical vestments to be used during the liturgy. She had to accept the title of Supreme Governor of the Church of England, rather than her father's more ostentatious 'Supreme Head', which many (in those unenlightened days) believed was unacceptable for a woman to bear. The religious changes were enshrined in the Act of Supremacy[49] and the Act of Uniformity,[50] which made attendance at church compulsory for all. The 1552 Prayer Book in English became the only liturgy allowed in England and Wales.

Unwittingly, the foundations had been laid for decades of religious turbulence. In Elizabeth's name, more than two hundred Catholics and their priests were executed during the forty-four years of her reign – not burnt at the stake, but butchered on the scaffold as traitors to her crown.

The yawning schism with Rome also became the catalyst for a cripplingly expensive nineteen-year war with Spain that threatened invasion of her realm and day and night made her an assassin's target.

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