

ZOIA

FROM THE TUDOR TO THE RESTORATION

In the fifteenth century England underwent several changes in its economy and society. The development of the textile and mining industry was associated to the agricultural field. From the open fields, deeply connected to a medieval type of economy, the fields were closed. This new technique called enclosure consisted of a privatization of the fields, which led to the concentration of cultivable and grazing lots in the hands of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy, causing a mass migration of unemployed labour to the cities.

The development of urban and rural bourgeoisie was supported by the new Tudor monarchy that claimed the throne after the Wars of the Roses. The first monarch of this dynasty was Henry VII, who weakened the aristocracy, claimed their wealth and promoted the emergent middle class, who enriched in spite of the aristocrats. Such support was granted by the middle class to the king too, and the king was able to gain even more power and wealth.

The king used this wealth to invest in shipbuilding and worldwide explorations, bringing decisive technological advancements to ships and navigation devices, new lands and new trade routes. The riches were accumulated and a new economy arose: mercantilism.

When the king died, his son Henry VIII succeeded him. He was a patron of the arts and he was a poet and musician himself.

He married his brother's widow when he died, thus binding England to Spain, which was very powerful, but he then asked the pope to let him divorce from her because she gave him a daughter, Mary, but no son, and because he wanted to marry Anne Boleyn. The pope refused and the king broke the link with the Church of Rome. The Parliament passed a series of acts regarding the matter. In 1534 the Parliament passed an act known as Act of Supremacy that declared that the King was the Head of the Anglican Church. An oath of obedience was imposed to the clergy and a refusal meant a

death sentence. The king also claimed every possession of the Catholic Church on English soil and sold them to gain more wealth and gave the monasteries to protestant families who became the new Tudor aristocracy.

After Henry VIII died, the kingdom was passed on to his only son Edward, who kept the protestant line of action while ruling and started persecuting Catholics, and then to Mary Tudor, known as "bloody Mary" for the ferocious repression of the protestants in her rule. She was the daughter of Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife, and wanted to re-establish Catholicism in England and persecuted protestants. When she died the English kingdom was deeply dependent from Spain (her husband was King Philip II of Spain) and the kingdom fell in her Anglican step-sister Elisabeth's hands.

Elisabeth was clever, determined and tolerant, and she ensured internal peace and commercial power by passing a second Act of Supremacy and by making the Book of Common Prayer compulsory. After the discovery of America she supported new explorations thanks to the powerful fleet she invested in. she also encouraged the birth of companies that exploited overseas trade.

The only internal menace the Queen had to face was her Catholic cousin, queen Mary Stuart of Scotland, second in succession to the throne. Scotland was still Catholic, but the people were against the ever-growing corruption of the clergy and she was forced to run away after a powerful revolt and took refuge in England. The English Catholics tried to make her queen and she became the centre of several plots against the Queen of England. The Parliament repeatedly asked for her execution, but Elisabeth refused and imprisoned her instead. After nineteen years of imprisonment, when the latest plot was discovered Elisabeth consented to Mary's execution. After that, relationships between Spain and England got worse and when in 1588 Philip II of Spain tried to invade England. To demonstrate the superiority of the English fleet it defeated in the English Channel the Invincible

Armada, the most powerful fleet in Spain. This marked the beginning of the English dominance of the seas.

When Elisabeth died her throne went to James VI Tudor of Scotland. Scotland and Britain remained different countries with different Parliaments until 1707, when the Treaty of Union proclaimed the union of the two reigns as the United Kingdom of Great Britain.

James tried to impose an absolute monarchy and he imposed a strictly Anglican worship, excluding both Catholics and Puritans from the government. He was not considered a legitimate ruler by the Catholics who tried to kill him and the members of the Parliament in the Gunpowder Plot on 1605, but the attack failed.

The Puritans, protestants who believed in a strong reformation of the Anglican liturgy to get rid of every Catholic element and who aspired to climb up the ladder of society, gaining wealth and power as their religion dictates, were seen as particularly dangerous from both the king and the Aristocracy. The king unleashed a violent repression against them and many of them left England to look for a better life elsewhere. Some of them embarked on a ship named Mayflower and sailed to North America, when they founded New Plymouth in 1620. They were the Pilgrim Fathers.

James's son, Charles I, intended to consolidate his power in an absolutist way since he believed it was his divine right to rule, given him by God and not by the people. The opposition was strong and the people demanded more decisional power on the how the nation was governed. In 1628 the Parliament affirmed its central role with the Petition of Rights and approved the law that granted men a trial before imprisonment.

The tension between Royalists/Cavaliers and Parliamentarians/Roundheads eventually led to a Civil War. The Roundheads, led by Oliver Cromwell, were mostly rich merchants. The Royalists were in favour of the King because they received lands from the English Crown during the Middle Ages. Day

labourers took their side because they worked (and consequently depended) on rich land owners.

With the victory of the Roundheads, the King was beheaded, Cromwell established a Republic and the son of the king was exiled in France.

The first and last republic in the English history was called Commonwealth or United Republic of England, Scotland and Ireland. Cromwell was appointed Lord Protector but his government soon turned into a dictatorship: in 1653 the theatres were closed, people had to dress and wear their hair in a certain way and heavy taxation and a strict way of life were imposed. In 1660 the Parliament recalled the rightful king from its exile to restore the monarchy.

Charles II restored the church of England and granted freedom of religion to Puritans and Catholics even if he had assented to the Act of Uniformity of 1662. In 1672 he issued a Declaration of Indulgence to suspend all penal laws against Puritans and Catholic non-conformists.