

Chapter 1 The Stuarts



GUY FAWKES DISCOVERED UNDER THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

James I (1603–1625) The Wisest Fool In Christendom¹



Since 1567, when he was one year old, James had been king of Scotland. He looked forward to ruling England. As king of Scotland he was poor; in comparison as king of England, he would be rich.

In appearance James must have been an unpleasant shock to English courtiers used to the regal bearing of the Tudor monarchs. He was fat, awkward in his movements and weak-kneed. He dribbled when he ate and was subject to bouts of wild temper.² There had been much anxiety in England over what would happen when Queen Elizabeth died. People were relieved when James succeeded to the throne without any disputes. It was this great relief which inspired the praise for James which we find in the preface to the Authorized Version of the Bible.³ In Scotland too, he had made a solemn speech, praising God that he had been born at a time when there was Gospel light, and saying that the Scottish Presbyterian church was “the sincerest kirk⁴ in the world.” The English Puritans did not know that he had said this without really meaning it.

James wanted to unite England and Scotland closely by combining the Parliaments, churches and laws of the two countries and establishing free trade⁵ between the two nations. He also had grand schemes for bringing peace to Europe. James was not a warlike man and he had great ideas of himself as a peacemaker. He soon found it impossible to put his ideas into practice.

James’s ideas did not appeal to his subjects. Englishmen and Scotsmen refused to combine their governments and free trade between the two countries could not be established because the English feared competition from the Scots. James had to make do with a decision of the judges that any child born in Scotland or England after his accession to the throne was automatically a citizen of both countries.

James’s plans for toleration for Roman Catholics were abhorrent to Englishmen. They had been reared on Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* and remembered the Spanish Armada. Jesuits were still active in the country. Their aim was to have Protestantism put down by force in England. The Jesuits were disliked and feared by the majority of the people. In 1604 in an effort to bring forward his ideas for European peace James made a treaty with the old enemy Spain. This was most unpopular in England.

Fortunately for James, he inherited from Elizabeth a good counsellor, Robert Cecil the son of William Cecil, Lord Burghley. James made him Earl of Salisbury and he served the king until his death in 1612. Cecil was able to guide the policy of the government and helped James avoid some serious mistakes.

The Church

Roman Catholics in England hoped James would be more favourable to them than Elizabeth had been. After all, he was the son of a Roman Catholic – Mary Queen of Scots (Mary Stuart). Roman Catholicism was strongest in the North and Midlands but most English people were not Roman Catholics. They looked on Roman Catholics with suspicion, regarding them as traitors because they

1 This is what Henry IV of France called James I. It referred to his great learning (the wisdom) and his stubbornness, lack of common sense and poor judgement of character (the folly).

2 Some of these defects were caused by a hereditary disease, Porphyria, from which James I suffered. The disease reappeared generations later in George III. See Chapter 8, “Madness”, p. 101.

3 See below, “Hampton Court Conference”, p. 4.

4 Kirk – church.

5 Free trade is trade between nations unhindered by customs barriers.

owed allegiance to the pope above the king of England. The Puritans on the other hand were gaining in strength. Many merchants and yeomen farmers were Puritans,⁶ as were many justices of the peace. Many of them were elected as Members of Parliament. The Presbyterians in particular hoped that they would be favoured by James because he had been brought up in the Presbyterian system of Scotland. Had he not declared it to be the sincerest kirk in the world? Alas for them! James was not really in favour of the Presbyterian system. It was far too democratic⁷ for his taste. The English system of Bishops pleased him. “No bishops, no king!” he declared. He had probably little notion how largely the heart of England was already Puritan.⁸

Divine Right Of Kings

James believed that kings were appointed by God and that they were only answerable to God for their actions. James considered that while a good king would act within the law, he was not *bound* by it; a good king only acted within the law to be a good example to his subjects. As the fountain of law and of justice James claimed he had special powers, the Royal Prerogative, that put him above the law. He wrote a book *The True Law of Free Monarchies* in which he set out his ideas. He made it plain to his first Parliament that if they had any powers, it was only because the king allowed them to have those powers.

Parliament

Parliament had grown much stronger under Elizabeth’s rule. It disagreed with the king’s ideas on the Divine Right of Kings. Parliament began to insist on the right to control elections, the right to discuss whatever matters it chose, and the right of its members to be free from arrest during sessions of Parliament. James did not understand Parliament. The Parliament of Scotland had no real power and James could not accept the idea that the English Parliament was different. Parliament began to attack the prerogative courts such as the Court of the Star Chamber⁹ and to assert that everyone, including the king, was subject to the laws passed by Parliament. We have seen how the Common Law, based on precedent was different to Roman Law. It was under Roman Law that the prerogative courts operated. In Roman Law the king was the source of the law. The judges were merely “lions under the throne” whose job was to obey the will of the king. Because Common Law was based on precedent, it did not originate with the king. A battle between these two systems of law was beginning.

Parliament claimed the right to criticize the king’s policy on any matter. It also took steps to ensure that it could remove any of the king’s ministers if it felt they were not doing a good job. For this purpose they revived the practice of “impeachment”. A minister could be tried with the House of Lords as Judge and the House of Commons as Prosecutor.¹⁰

It was becoming harder and harder for the monarch to make ends meet.¹¹ This made the tax granting powers of Parliament important. When the king asked Parliament for money, Parliament could reply, “redress precedes supply”. In other words, the king had to put right the matters that Parliament brought to his attention before it would grant the money he wanted. In all these matters Parliament appealed to the Magna Carta as the basis for the rights it claimed. It may be that those

6 Under this heading we can include not only those who wished for purity in the Church of England but also Separatists and Presbyterians.

7 Democratic systems are those in which the people choose (usually by voting) who is to rule them.

8 Horne, C. S., *A Popular History of the Free Churches* (London, 1903), p. 69.

9 See Eastwood, C. A., *The Story Of God's Dealings With Our Nation*, vol. 1, (Chirk, 2007), “The Star Chamber”, p. 107.

10 This practice had begun during the Good Parliament (1376). See Eastwood, C. A., *ibid.*, “The Good Parliament”, p. 84.

11 See Eastwood, C. A., *ibid.*, “Parliament”, p. 140.

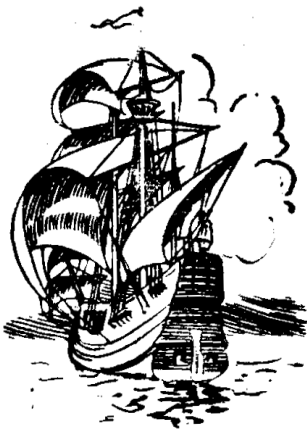
who framed the Magna Carta had not intended it to be used in this way. Nevertheless, it is a great blessing that Parliament was able to use it to contend for the idea that the monarch should seek the approval of Parliament for his actions. In Europe parliamentary institutions were decaying and losing their power. James would have much preferred this to have happened to the English Parliament.

Hampton Court Conference (1604)

James had been presented with a petition signed by a thousand ministers of the Church of England asking him to make the church more Biblical in character.¹² James had no sympathy with their views, but he ordered a conference to take place at Hampton Court which he would chair. Of course, the Puritan ministers were not the only ones at the conference. Ministers of the High Church or Arminian Party were also present.¹³ James became angry at the suggestions of the Puritans at the conference and refused to grant their demands. “I will make them conform, or I will harry¹⁴ them out of the land,” he said. Those who favoured the Presbyterian system of church government must have been shocked to hear James (who in Scotland had declared that Scotland’s Presbyterian church was “the sincerest Kirk in the world”) now declare: “Scots Presbytery agrees with monarchy as well as God and the devil.”

After the conference, 300 Puritan ministers were thrown out of the Church of England. Worship outside the Church of England (Nonconformist or Separatist worship) was illegal. If they wanted to continue to preach, these ministers had to face persecution. People who could no longer worship in the Church of England fled abroad, to Holland at first and then later to the New World.

The Mayflower Pilgrims And The Beginnings Of The British Empire



The Mayflower

In 1607 a colony had been established in Virginia where tobacco quickly became the main crop. In 1624 the colony had a governor appointed by the king and a legislative assembly elected by the colony. James’s persecution had driven many Separatists into exile in Holland. In 1620 some of them decided to seek a home where they could, among other things, continue to worship freely but bring up their families as English rather than Dutch. They returned to Plymouth and then crossed the Atlantic in the *Mayflower*. They landed further north on the American coast than had been intended, near Cape Cod. Here they faced many hardships but God graciously enabled them to persevere. They were joined by thousands of others over the next twenty years who wished to escape from the persecution of the Stuart kings.

¹² The Millenary Petition.

¹³ The Dutch theologian Arminius had attacked the biblical doctrine of predestination as taught by John Calvin. Arminius’s followers in England were opposed to the Puritans who agreed with Calvin. The Arminians in the Church of England also wanted elaborate ceremony in the church services while the Puritans wanted simple services with an emphasis on preaching the gospel. English people in general viewed the Arminians as too close to Roman Catholicism and “popery” for comfort.

¹⁴ Harry – hunt or chase.

Gunpowder Plot (1605)

James had begun his reign with a relaxation of the recusancy laws against Roman Catholics. This had the effect of revealing that there were more secret Roman Catholics than had been supposed. Since the Jesuits were bent on overthrowing the government and re-establishing Roman Catholicism in England by force, people became alarmed. The recusancy laws were enforced once more. This angered the Jesuits and the Roman Catholic nobles, some of whom formed a plot to blow up the king and Parliament. The plot was discovered and there was general rejoicing among the people that the king, Parliament and the Protestant religion had been saved. The national dislike of “popery” became even stronger and “Guy Fawkes Night” has been celebrated ever since.

The Bible

The only lasting benefit that James conferred on the English people was a new translation of the Bible. He agreed to this at the Hampton Court Conference and a commission of learned scholars was set up. Their translation, which owed much to William Tyndale’s work, appeared in 1611. It is usually known as the Authorised Version. The beauty of its language, its dignity and accuracy meant that it found a place in the hearts and minds of English people, Puritan or otherwise. It became the most widely read of all books in English and its style and language helped to shape the character of the English language itself. Its instantly recognisable turn of phrase became a common reference point for all English speaking people.

The Welsh Bible of Bishop Morgan was given a slight revision in 1620 with the benefit of the scholarship that went into the Authorised Version, but its size and price put it out of reach of almost everybody – it was only available in church.¹⁵ In 1621 Edmund Prys, who had helped Bishop Morgan make his translation of the Bible, published a metrical translation of the Psalms. The Welsh love to sing and this psalter¹⁶ proved immensely popular. It also had a great unifying influence on the Welsh language.

Archbishop Abbot (1562–1633)

In 1611 James appointed an archbishop with Puritan inclinations. As soon as they heard of this, some of the Separatists who had fled to Holland returned. Thomas Helwisse, a Baptist with Arminian theology,¹⁷ settled with members of his congregation in London. Some members of this Baptist church wrote pamphlets in which they advocated the idea of liberty of conscience.¹⁸ This church was the first known Baptist church to worship in England.

Parliament, Taxes And Favourites

James quickly quarrelled with Parliament. He tried to do without it by imposing taxes which Parliament had not sanctioned. Parliament responded by declaring that taxes imposed without its consent were illegal. After the death of his able minister Robert Cecil, James ruled by means of his favourites. These were men of little ability who gained power with the king by charm and flattery. As far as possible James managed without Parliament. James’ policies were disliked by most people. He pursued a policy of friendship with the old enemy, Spain, and neglected the navy which had been a great source of national pride under Elizabeth. This made merchants, who found their vessels unprotected, very resentful. As if this was not enough, Sir Walter Raleigh, a national hero

¹⁵ See Chapter 2, “The Welsh Bible”, p. 15.

¹⁶ A Psalter is a Psalm book.

¹⁷ Helwisse’s theology was Arminian in respect of his views on predestination. He was not, like the Arminian Bishops in the Church of England, in favour of elaborate vestments, an altar and so on.

¹⁸ Liberty of conscience – the idea that people should be free to worship God in whatever way their conscience leads them.

who had helped defeat the Armada under Elizabeth, was beheaded to please the Spanish ambassador.

Foreign Policy And The 30 Years War

James's foreign policy involved marrying his daughter Elizabeth to the Calvinist¹⁹ Elector Palatine²⁰ and his son Henry (The Prince of Wales) to the Roman Catholic Spanish Infanta.²¹ The first of these marriage schemes was popular in England and the Princess Elizabeth was married in 1613. As you may imagine, the second scheme was unpopular, even Henry himself did not like it. English people did not like the prospect of a future king of England being brought up by a Spanish Roman Catholic mother. Henry died in 1612 and his younger brother Charles became Prince of Wales. Charles was more enthusiastic about the Spanish match than Henry had been.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth and her husband the Elector Palatine became involved in the Thirty Years War in Europe when the Elector accepted the crown of Bohemia. A Roman Catholic army, including Spanish troops, drove the Elector and his wife out of Bohemia and out of his own realm, the Palatinate, as well. James did nothing to help his daughter and her husband, much to the anger of most English people, who sympathised with Elizabeth and felt that the king should help her. Instead of helping the Protestant cause in Europe, James continued to negotiate the marriage of Charles and the Infanta, while Spanish troops attacked his own son-in-law's possessions! The Spanish demanded toleration for Roman Catholics in England. They were secretly promised that although the Puritans would still be treated harshly, the law would not be enforced against Roman Catholics. Archbishop Abbot protested but he did not have much influence.

When Charles and the Duke of Buckingham (James' favourite) travelled to Spain to woo the Infanta, she hated both of them as soon as she saw them and they had to return home unsuccessful.

James had been forced by lack of money to call Parliament in 1621. It at once set about discussing its grievances. It urged the king to adopt a more Protestant policy and to give up his idea of friendship with Spain. James demanded that Parliament stop debating these matters. Parliament drew up a "Protestation" in which it claimed the right to discuss all matters of government. James was so angry that he tore the page on which the Protestation appeared out of the Journal²² of the House with his own hand and dismissed the Parliament.

When Buckingham returned from Spain with Charles, having failed in his attempt to woo the Infanta, there was general rejoicing in England. Everyone was delighted that the Prince of Wales was not going to be married to a Roman Catholic Spanish princess. Buckingham, the king's favourite, was thoroughly fed up with Spain now too. He urged the king to reverse his pro-Spanish policy and declare war on Spain. When the king adopted this policy Parliament was delighted.

It was at this point that James I died and was succeeded by his son Charles I. James had been a weak king not at all eager to fight with England's enemies abroad. One historian has pointed out that "... we owe more to his weakness and meanness than to the wisdom and courage of much better sovereigns."²³ He had come to the throne when the struggle for power between king and Parliament was beginning. If James had been a warlike king, a great military hero who had fought great

19 Calvinist – someone who follows the ideas of the great theologian John Calvin. The term is often used to mean the opposite of Arminian.

20 The Elector Palatine was a ruler of part of Germany. This marriage was very important later in History as the descendants of Elizabeth's granddaughter, the Electress of Hanover, succeeded to the throne of England and became the House of Hanover or Hanoverian kings.

21 Infanta means princess.

22 See Eastwood, C. A., op. cit., "The Journal Of The House of Commons", p. 122.

23 Macaulay, T. B., *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second*, vol. 1 (London, 1854), p. 69.

campaigns abroad with a large army, he would have been easily able to subdue Parliament. As it was, he was not cut out for such a role. How would the new king Charles I get on with Parliament?

Things To Do:

Discuss with your parents:

“The Commonwealth of America has good reason for thankfulness for the spirit and policy of James. Even as in the first century, through the cruelty of the oppressor, Christianity had free course and was glorified in many lands to which the persecuted Christians fled, so was it to be now in the case of the English Separatists.”²⁴

To which of James I’s policies does this quotation refer? Why should Americans be thankful for this policy?

Children’s history books often contain statements such as “Puritans did not want people to enjoy themselves.” Find out what kinds of entertainments and amusements Puritans really disapproved of and why. Find out what pastimes Puritans did enjoy. Why do you think non-Christian writers label them as kill-joys? Do Christians ever get accused of being kill-joys today? What kinds of entertainments and amusements should Christians shun today? Are some of these the same as those that the Puritans hated? Are some different?

Use your own books to find out about the Mayflower Pilgrims and the Gunpowder Plot.

For information on the Authorised Version translation of the Bible contact:

Trinitarian Bible Society
Tyndale House
Dorset Road
London
SW19 3NN
Tel. 0208 5437857
www.trinitarianbiblesociety.org

For a leaflet about the Plymouth Mayflower Exhibition contact:

Tourism Information
Plymouth Mayflower
3–5 The Barbican
Plymouth
PL1 2LR
Tel. 01752 306330

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²⁴ Horne, C. S., *A Popular History of the Free Churches* (London, 1903), p. 72.

Chapter 1
Worksheet

Name _____

Date _____

James I (-)

Describe James I and mention some of his ideas.

What happened at the Hampton Court Conference?

Why did the Mayflower Pilgrims leave England?

What was the result of the Gunpowder Plot?

Which of the following were policies of James I?

- (a) Friendship with Spain. []
- (b) Neglect of the Navy. []
- (c) His son was to marry a Protestant princess. []
- (d) His daughter was to marry a Protestant ruler. []
- (e) Roman Catholics were to be rigorously persecuted. []
- (f) Frequent Parliaments. []

