The Stuarts

13 Crown and Parliament

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The Stuart monarchs, from James I onwards, were less successful than the Tudors. They quarrelled with Parliament and this resulted in civil war. The only king of England ever to be tried and executed was a Stuart. The republic that followed was even more unsuccessful, and by popular demand the dead king's son was called back to the throne. Another Stuart king was driven from his throne by his own daughter and her Dutch husband, William of Orange. William became king by Parliament's election, not by right of birth. When the last Stuart, Queen Anne, died in 1714, the monarchy was no longer absolutely powerful as it had been when James VI rode south from Scotland in 1603. It had become a "parliamentary monarchy" controlled by a constitution.

These important changes did not take place simply because the Stuarts were bad rulers. They resulted from a basic change in society. During the seventeenth century economic power moved even faster into the hands of the merchant and landowning farmer classes. The Crown could no longer raise money or govern without their co-operation. These groups were represented by the House of Commons. In return for money the Commons demanded political power. The victory of the Commons and the classes it represented was unavoidable.

Charles I on horseback, painted in 1633 by the great court painter Anthony Van Dyck. This picture announces the triumph of kingship. At the time Charles was at the height of his power. He had no need of Parliament and it seemed that the king could rule alone, as the king of France was doing. Charles was fatally wrong. It was Parliament that triumphed during the seventeenth century. By the end of the century the powers of the sovereign were limited by the will of Parliament. In the bottom left corner are the Stuart arms, combining for the first time the English "quarters" with the Scottish Lion Rampant and the Irish Harp.

It would be interesting to know how the Tudors would have dealt with the growing power of the House of Commons. They had been lucky not to have this problem. But they had also been more

James I was a disappointment to the English. As James VI in Scotland he had acted skilfully to survive the plots of his nobles. In England he was better known for his lack of skill in dealing with Parliament and with his ministers.

willing to give up their beliefs in order that their policies would succeed. The Stuarts, on the other hand, held onto their beliefs however much it cost them, even when it was foolish to do so.

The political developments of the period also resulted from basic changes in thinking in the seventeenth century. By 1700 a ruler like Henry VIII or Elizabeth I would have been quite unthinkable. By the time Queen Anne died, a new age of reason and science had arrived.

Parliament against the Crown

The first signs of trouble between Crown and Parliament came in 1601, when the Commons were angry over Elizabeth's policy of selling monopolies. But Parliament did not demand any changes. It did not wish to upset the ageing queen whom it feared and respected.

Like Elizabeth, James I tried to rule without Parliament as much as possible. He was afraid it would interfere, and he preferred to rule with a small council.

James was clever and well educated. As a child in Scotland he had been kidnapped by groups of nobles, and had been forced to give in to the Kirk. Because of these experiences he had developed strong beliefs and opinions. The most important of these was his belief in the divine right of kings. He believed that the king was chosen by God and therefore only God could judge him. James's ideas were not different from those of earlier monarchs, or other monarchs in Europe.

He expressed these opinions openly, however, and this led to trouble with Parliament. James had an unfortunate habit of saying something true or clever at the wrong moment. The French king described James as "the wisest fool in Christendom". It was unkind, but true. James, for all his cleverness, seemed to have lost the commonsense which had helped him in Scotland.

When Elizabeth died she left James with a huge debt, larger than the total yearly income of the Crown. James had to ask Parliament to raise a tax to pay the debt. Parliament agreed, but in return insisted on the right to discuss James's home and foreign policy. James, however, insisted that he alone had the "divine right" to make these decisions. Parliament disagreed, and it was supported by the law.

James had made the mistake of appointing Elizabeth's minister, Sir Edward Coke, as Chief Justice. Coke made decisions based on the law which limited the king's power. He judged that the king was not above the law, and even more important, that the king and his council could not make new laws. Laws could only be made by Act of Parliament. James removed Coke from the position of Chief Justice, but as an MP Coke continued to make trouble. He reminded Parliament of Magna Carta, interpreting it as the great charter of English freedom. Although this was not really true, his claim was politically useful to Parliament. This was the first quarrel between James and Parliament, and it started the bad feeling which lasted during his entire reign, and that of his son Charles.

James was successful in ruling without Parliament between 1611 and 1621, but it was only possible because Britain remained at peace. James could not afford the cost of an army. In 1618, at the beginning of the Thirty Years War in Europe, Parliament wished to go to war against the Catholics. James would not agree. Until his death in 1625 James was always quarrelling with Parliament over money and over its desire to play a part in his foreign policy.

Charles I found himself quarrelling even more bitterly with the Commons than his father had done, mainly over money. Finally he said, "Parliaments are altogether in my power . . . As I find the fruits of them good or evil, they are to continue or not to be." Charles dissolved Parliament.

Charles's need for money, however, forced him to recall Parliament, but each time he did so, he quarrelled with it. When he tried raising money without Parliament, by borrowing from merchants, bankers and landowning gentry, Parliament decided to make Charles agree to certain "parliamentary

rights". It hoped Charles could not raise enough money without its help, and in 1628 this happened. In return for the money he badly needed, Charles promised that he would only raise money by Act of Parliament, and that he would not imprison anyone without lawful reason.

These rights, known as the Petition of Right, established an important rule of government by Parliament, because the king had now agreed that Parliament controlled both state money, the "national budget", and the law. Charles realised that the Petition made nonsense of a king's "divine right". He decided to prevent it being used by dissolving Parliament the following year.

Charles surprised everyone by being able to rule successfully without Parliament. He got rid of much dishonesty that had begun in the Tudor period and continued during his father's reign. He was able to balance his budgets and make administration efficient. Charles saw no reason to explain his policy or method of government to anyone. By 1637 he was at the height of his power. His authority seemed to be more completely accepted than the authority of an English king had been for centuries. It also seemed that Parliament might never meet again.

Religious disagreement

In 1637, however, Charles began to make serious mistakes. These resulted from the religious situation in Britain. His father, James, had been pleased that the Anglican Church had bishops. They willingly supported him as head of the English Church. And he disliked the Presbyterian Kirk in Scotland because it had no bishops. It was a more democratic institution and this gave political as well as religious power to the literate classes in Scotland. They had given him a difficult time before he became king of England in 1603.

There were also people in England, known as Puritans, who, like the Scottish Presbyterians, wanted a democratic Church. Queen Elizabeth had been careful to prevent them from gaining power in the Anglican Church. She even executed a few of them for printing books against the bishops. In 1604, Puritans met James to ask him to remove the Anglican bishops to make the English Church more like the Kirk, but he saw only danger for the Crown. "A Scottish Presbytery agrees as well with monarchy as God with the Devil," he remarked, and sent them away with the words, "No bishop, no king."

Charles shared his father's dislike of Puritans. He had married a French Catholic, and the marriage was unpopular in Protestant Britain. Many MPs were either Puritans or sympathised with them, and many of the wealth-creating classes were Puritan. But Charles took no notice of popular feeling, and he appointed an enemy of the Puritans, William Laud, as Archbishop of Canterbury.

Archbishop Laud brought back into the Anglican Church many Catholic practices. They were extremely unpopular. Anti-Catholic feeling had been increased by an event over thirty years earlier, in 1605. A small group of Catholics had been caught trying to blow up the Houses of Parliament with King James inside. One of these men, Guy Fawkes, was captured in the cellar under the House. The escape of king and Parliament caught people's imagination, and 5 November, the anniversary, became an occasion for celebration with fireworks and bonfires.

Archbishop Laud tried to make the Scottish Kirk accept the same organisation as the Church in England. James I would have realised how dangerous this was, but his son, Charles, did not because he had only lived in Scotland as an infant. When Laud tried to introduce the new prayer book in Scotland in 1637 the result was national resistance to the introduction of bishops and what Scots thought of as Catholicism.

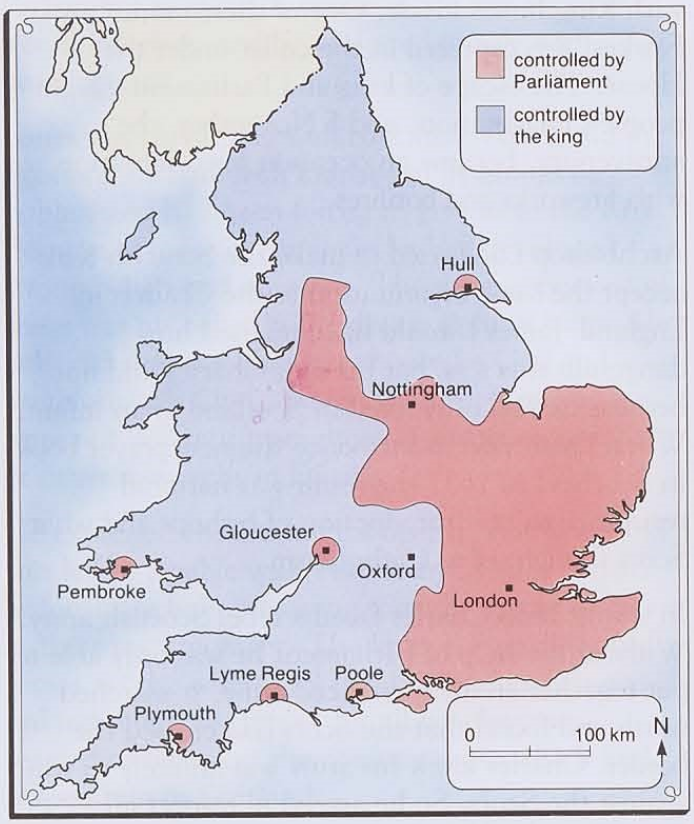
In spring 1638 Charles faced a rebel Scottish army. Without the help of Parliament he was only able to put together an inexperienced army. It marched north and found that the Scots had crossed the border. Charles knew his army was unlikely to win against the Scots. So he agreed to respect all Scottish political and religious freedoms, and also to pay a large sum of money to persuade the Scots to return home.

It was impossible for Charles to find this money except through Parliament. This gave it the chance to end eleven years of absolute rule by Charles, and to force him to rule under parliamentary control. In return for its help, Parliament made Charles accept a new law which stated that Parliament had to meet at least once every three years. However, as the months went by, it became increasingly clear that Charles was not willing to keep his agreements with Parliament. Ruling by "divine right", Charles felt no need to accept its decisions.

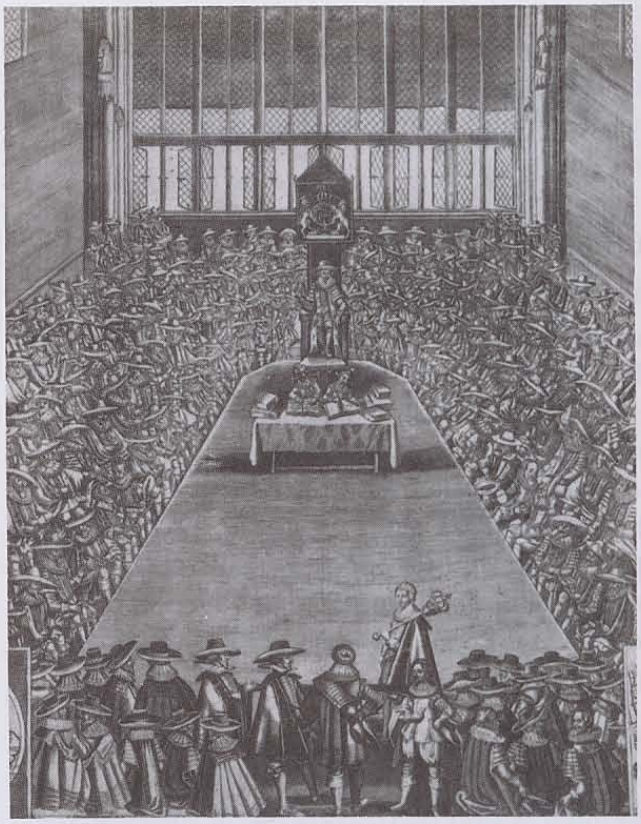
Civil war

Events in Scotland made Charles depend on Parliament, but events in Ireland resulted in civil war. James I had continued Elizabeth's policy and had colonised Ulster, the northern part of Ireland, mainly with farmers from the Scottish Lowlands. The Catholic Irish were sent off the land, and even those who had worked for Protestant settlers were now replaced by Protestant workers from Scotland and England.

In 1641, at a moment when Charles badly needed a period of quiet, Ireland exploded in rebellion against the Protestant English and Scottish settlers. As many as 3,000 people, men, women and children, were killed, most of them in Ulster. In London, Charles and Parliament quarrelled over who should control an army to defeat the rebels. Many believed that Charles only wanted to raise an army in order to dissolve Parliament by force and to rule alone again. Charles's friendship towards the Catholic Church increased Protestant fears. Already some of the Irish rebels claimed to be rebelling against the English Protestant Parliament,



The areas controlled by Parliament and the king halfway through the Civil War, 1642–1645.



Parliament met at Westminster in 1640, determined to limit Charles I's freedom and to ensure that Parliament would meet regularly in future. Because of rebellions in Scotland and in Ireland, Charles had to give in to Parliament's wish to oversee government.

The battle of Naseby in 1645 marked the final defeat of Charles I by Parliament. Charles can be seen in front of his army. General Fairfax commanded the Parliamentarians, and his second-in-command, Oliver Cromwell, commanded the right wing of the army.

but not against the king. In 1642 Charles tried to arrest five MPs in Parliament. Although he was unsuccessful, it convinced Parliament and its supporters all over England that they had good reason to fear.

London locked its gates against the king, and Charles moved to Nottingham, where he gathered an army to defeat those MPs who opposed him. The Civil War had started. Most people, both in the country and in the towns, did not wish to be on one side or the other. In fact, no more than 10 per cent of the population became involved. But most of the House of Lords and a few from the Commons supported Charles. The Royalists, known as "Cavaliers", controlled most of the north and west. But Parliament controlled East Anglia and the southeast, including London. Its army at first consisted of armed groups of London apprentices. Their short hair gave the Parliamentarian soldiers their popular name of "Roundheads".

Unless the Royalists could win quickly it was certain that Parliament would win in the end. Parliament was supported by the navy, by most of the merchants and by the population of London. It therefore controlled the most important national and international sources of wealth. The Royalists, on the other hand, had no way of raising money. By 1645 the Royalist army was unpaid, and as a result soldiers either ran away, or stole from local villages and farms. In the end they lost their courage for the fight against the Parliamentarians, and at Naseby in 1645 the Royalist army was finally defeated.

Most people were happy that the war had ended. Trade had been interrupted, and Parliament had introduced new taxes to pay for the war. In many places people had told both armies to stay away from their areas. They had had enough of uncontrolled soldiers and of paying the cost of the war.