# *Introduction*
# *Elizabeth's England*

Mary Tudor, the first female English monarch, had reigned for five unhappy years. The daughter of Henry VIII by his first wife, Katherine of Aragon, she had suffered a miserable youth as a result of her father's treatment of her mother, whose marriage had been annulled so that Henry could marry her lady in waiting, Anne Boleyn. A fervent Catholic, Mary had also been appalled by her father's break with Rome and later by the establishment of the Protestant faith in England by her brother, Edward VI, Henry's child by his third wife, Jane Seymour, whom he had married after Anne Boleyn was beheaded for treason. Hence when Edward died prematurely at fifteen in 1553, and Mary, his heiress, having overcome a Protestant plot to replace her with her cousin, Lady Jane Grey, ascended the throne to unprecedented public acclaim, she resolved to restore the Catholic faith. But in order to produce Catholic heirs to carry on her work, she made a fatally ill-judged and unpopular marriage with Europe's premier Catholic ruler, Philip of Spain, and at a stroke lost the love of her subjects. Matters were made worse when she reintroduced the laws against heresy and sanctioned the burning of some three hundred English Protestants – an act that would later earn her the sobriquet 'Bloody Mary' . In the last year of her reign, England lost Calais, the last outpost of her great medieval continental Empire, to the French, and Mary was blamed for it. Having suffered two phantom pregnancies and been deserted by her husband, she sickened and died, a very unhappy woman.

She left England in what her successor would describe as 'a sad state', reduced to the status of a minor power on the edge of a Europe riven by religious and political strife, and a prey to the ambitions of the two major international monarchies, Spain and France. England and Spain were technically allies against France, but the re-establishment by Elizabeth of the Protestant faith in England, which was confidently

expected by many of her subjects, could not but cause dangerous discord with King Philip, who saw himself as the leader of the European Counter Reformation and had vowed to stamp out heresy. Backed by the Papacy, the Inquisition, the Jesuits and the wealth of Spain's territories in the New World, there was no doubt that he could prove a very formidable enemy if provoked. France was torn by civil and religious warfare, yet the French King, Henry II, had not only occupied Calais but was also maintaining a threatening military presence in Scotland, whose rulers were his allies. There was no money in the English treasury because much of it had gone to finance Philip of Spain's foreign wars, and the country had been stripped of its arms and munitions; its chief defences and fortresses were ruinous and, had war come, it could not have defended itself.

Internally, there was dissension and dissatisfaction. Many persons had lost confidence in the government, which was in debt to the tune of £266,000 – an enormous sum in those days. The people of England – who numbered between three and four million – having lived through a quarter-century of Reformation and Counter Reformation, were now divided by deep religious differences. The Count de Feria, Philip's ambassador in England at the time of Queen Mary's death, claimed that two thirds of the population was Catholic; he may have been exaggerating, but the fact remained that London, the seat of court and government, was aggressively Protestant and influential in public affairs. Where London led, the rest of the country eventually followed.

On the domestic front, life was not easy. England was not a wealthy country and its people endured relatively poor living standards. The landed classes – many of them enriched by the confiscated wealth of former monasteries – were determined in the interests of profit to convert their arable land into pasture for sheep, so as to produce the wool that supported the country's chief economic asset, the woollen cloth trade. But the enclosing of the land only added to the misery of the poor, many of whom, evicted and displaced, left their decaying villages and gravitated to the towns where they joined the growing army of beggars and vagabonds that would become such a feature of Elizabethan life. Once, the religious houses would have dispensed charity to the destitute, but Henry VIII had dissolved them all in the 1530s, and many former monks and nuns were now themselves beggars. Nor did the civic authorities help: they passed laws in an attempt to ban the poor from towns and cities, but to little avail. It was a common sight to see men and women lying in the dusty streets, often dying in the dirt like dogs or beasts, without human compassion being shown to them.

'Certainly', wrote a Spanish observer in 1558, 'the state of England lay now most afflicted.' And although people looked to the new Queen

Elizabeth to put matters right, there were many who doubted if she could overcome the seemingly insurmountable problems she faced, or even remain queen long enough to begin tackling them. Some, both at home and abroad, were of the opinion that her title to the throne rested on very precarious foundations. Many regarded the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn as a bastard from the time of her birth on 7 September 1533, although, ignoring such slurs on the validity of his second marriage, Henry had declared Elizabeth his heir. When, in 1536, Anne Boleyn was found guilty of adultery and treason, her marriage to the King was dissolved and Elizabeth was declared illegitimate and excluded from the succession. Later on, having mellowed towards his younger daughter, Henry VIII named her in his will as his successor, after Edward and Mary, and had the terms of that will enshrined in an Act of Parliament. But his failure to declare her legitimate and Elizabeth's suspected leanings towards Protestantism made her a vulnerable target for ambitious foreign princes and disloyal Englishmen with designs on her throne. Added to this, she was a woman, and England's experience of Mary, its first female sovereign, had not been a happy one. In that patriarchal age, the consensus of opinion held that it was against the laws of God and Nature for a woman to hold dominion over men, for women were seen as weak, frail, inferior creatures who succumbed to temptations and were constitutionally unfit to wield power in a male-dominated world. A woman's role was, as St Paul had decreed, to keep silent in church and learn in humility from her husband at home.

However, respect for the royal bloodline was even more powerful than reservations about a woman exercising sovereign power, and Elizabeth was, after all, great Harry's daughter, who had for some years now enjoyed the affection and loyalty of a people who regarded her as their future liberator and the hope of Protestantism. And what England needed most now was a firm and able hand to guide her on a safe course, provide her with stable government and security, heal her divisions, set her finances on a stable level, and enhance her prestige abroad. It was a seemingly impossible task, but many of her subjects hoped that Elizabeth would be equal to it.

The England that Elizabeth inherited was, on the face of it, a strictly hierarchical society, with each man born to the degree God intended, and each class defined by its style of living, manners and dress. This was the medieval ideal, of which the new Queen heartily approved, yet it masked a new mobility, both social and geographical, given impetus by the burgeoning materialism and competitive spirit that was insidiously pervading all classes and which gathered momentum as the reign

progressed and opportunities for self-enrichment widened with a reviving economy. This was in fact no medieval society, but a nation that was to grow increasingly secular, confident and proud of its achievements and its increasing prosperity – a prosperity that would enrich not only the nobility but also the merchants and yeomen who were the backbone of English society. In the 1590s, a Pomeranian visitor observed that many an English yeoman kept greater state and a more opulent table than the nobles of Bohemia.

Elizabeth's subjects were a hard-headed race, largely conservative in their outlook. Superstitious in the extreme, they believed in witches, fairies, goblins and ghosts, and set great store by the predictions of seers, wizards and astrologers. Lives made difficult because of high mortality rates – average life expectancy was around forty years – limited medical knowledge, more severe winters than are usual today, regular epidemics of plague and, for many, the grinding poverty of a daily existence in which starvation might be a very real prospect, bred in these people not only a stoicism and fortitude rare today, but also a morbid preoccupation with death. Life could be short and a wise man prepared himself to meet his Maker at any time.

One of the chief concerns of Elizabethan society was that the Queen's peace should be maintained throughout the kingdom, so that the lives of her subjects could be lived in orderly fashion, yet there was lawlessness and violence both in town and country areas, and it could be dangerous to walk the London streets at night. The roads were the haunt of footpads, and those who could afford to hired bodyguards when they travelled abroad. The law in its full majesty could be very severe on offenders, and the punishments meted out were often savage – more than 6000 persons were executed at Tyburn alone during Elizabeth's reign, and whipping, branding or confinement in the stocks or pillory were common – though these did not always act as a deterrent.

Travelling about sixteenth-century England was not easy at the best of times. The landed classes were supposed to pay for the upkeep of roads in their locality, but few bothered, hence many roads were impassable in bad weather. Most roads were just footpaths or narrow tracks, yet the main roads – the Queen's Highways – did at least have the benefit of a fine assortment of wayside inns, said by foreign visitors to be the best in Europe. Most people got about on foot or on horseback, whilst ladies of quality would travel by horse litter. It was not until later in the reign that horse-drawn carriages – unsprung and very uncomfortable – were used, and then only by the very rich.

London, the capital city, boasted a population of 200,000 by the end of the sixteenth century. It was a crowded, dirty, noisy place where plague was endemic in the summer, but under Elizabeth it became a

thriving commercial centre, handling most of England's trade, while at the same time the city boundaries spread beyond the old medieval walls, creating suburbs from the outlying villages. London was not only a great trading centre and port, but also boasted good shops, especially in Cheapside, where goldsmiths sold their wares, and the famous market in the nave of the medieval St Paul's Cathedral. Along the Strand, on the banks of the Thames, the great nobles had their town houses, with gardens sloping to the river. Each had a private jetty, for the narrow streets were so congested that it was quicker and easier to travel by water. South of the Thames, on the Surrey shore, were to be found brothels and, later, the first theatres, among them Shakespeare's Globe. On the opposite bank stood the grim bulk of the Tower of London, which served as palace, prison, armoury and fortress; during the reigns of the Tudors it had acquired a sinister reputation as the scene of royal executions, yet this did not prevent the Londoners from taking their children to visit the famous menagerie which was housed there.

Within the walls of London, rich merchants built themselves fine houses, controlled the craft and trade guilds, and decked themselves and their wives in fine velvets and gold chains in emulation of their betters. Philip Stubbs, a contemporary writer, described the Londoners as 'audacious, bold, puissant and heroical'. Bear-baiting and cock-fighting were their favourite entertainments. London was by far the largest city in England; the next largest and most prosperous cities were Norwich and Bristol.

The English, being an island people and on the periphery of European life, were fiercely insular and patriotic, their new queen being no exception. The Reformation had made them even more so, and had given birth to an age in which map-makers and geographers were recording England's physical features in detail for the first time, and secular historians chronicling her history for an ever-widening audience. The English language, soon to reach its apotheosis in the plays of Shakespeare, was by Englishmen accounted the equal of any other language, classical or modern. Since the introduction of printing in the 1470s, books had become popular with an increasingly literate population whose favourite reading was the Greek and Roman classics, (which were available in many editions, in their original form or in translation) or more modern Italian literature by Castiglione, Boccaccio, Machiavelli (whose books were officially banned) or Ariosto. Poetry, especially erotic verse, was enormously popular. Learning, once the province of the ruling classes and the clergy, was now embraced by the burgeoning middle classes, and from 1550 increasing numbers of grammar schools were founded, many under the auspices of Queen Elizabeth herself, who cared passionately about education. All of this laid

the foundations for the flowering of English culture – and, in particular, drama – that took place in the 1580s and 90s, the age of William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser and Christopher Marlowe.

During the first half of the sixteenth century it had become fashionable for gently-born girls to be educated in the same way as their brothers – Elizabeth herself had benefited enormously from this – but after the publication of Balthasar Castiglione's *The Courtier* in 1561, the trend was towards proficiency in social skills rather than academic ones. Well-reared young ladies were expected to be able to read, write letters, paint, draw, make music, do fine needlework and dance – accomplishments all designed to enhance their chances in the marriage market. Nevertheless, those ladies in attendance on the Queen, who was a formidable intellectual, were expected to be well-read and erudite, for the court was a centre of high culture.

Most arts of the Elizabethan period reflected the domestic tastes of the upper and middle classes. Portraiture flourished, but the vogue was for detailed costume pieces rather than the realistic portrayals by Holbein and Eworth that had inspired an earlier generation. It had been Holbein who gave impetus to miniature painting in England, but it was left to the genius of Nicholas Hilliard to make it popular and start an English tradition that continues to this day.

Architecture flourished: this was an age of aristocratic building, with great houses being either restored or built anew in the English Renaissance style. This was characterised by classical design, sculptured ornaments and friezes, tall chimneys, large mullioned windows, balustrades on the parapets, decorated columns and Italianate facades. Gone were the fortified manor houses and castles of the Middle Ages; if crenellations, gatehouses and moats were included in the Renaissance designs, their purpose was purely decorative.

Inside each mansion was to be found the by now obligatory long gallery with its tapestries and family portraits, and other rooms sumptuously adorned with marble, wall murals, linenfold panelling, decorative plastered ceilings and glass stained and leaded with colourful coats of arms set in large oriel or bay windows. Heraldic or symbolic motifs were incorporated into the decor everywhere. In the rooms might be found furniture of English oak, upholstered with leather or velvet, looking-glasses of silver, great tester beds with embroidered hangings, and often a set of virginals, reflecting the current craze for instrumental chamber music, a fashion set by the Queen herself. Music was one of the great domestic arts of the period, with the ballads and madrigals of Thomas Morley, John Wilbye, Thomas Weelkes and John Dowland rivalling the inspiring devotional anthems and motets written at court by Thomas Tallis and William Byrd.

The gardens that surrounded the stately houses, and also those outside more humble homes, attracted admiring comments from foreign visitors. It is now rare to find an Elizabethan garden in its original state, but what is clear from contemporary records is that vineyards, orchards and flower beds containing rare and unusual plants were considered more important aesthetically than kitchen or herb gardens, although the latter had their practical uses when it came to flavouring food or distilling medicines. The fashionable garden would provide an elegant setting for the house, and would be of formal design, surrounded by stone walls or thick hedges of holly or hornbeam, all set at rigid right angles to each other. Shaded arbours and classically inspired urns or statues completed the scene.

The Elizabethans made costume their own peculiar art form. Never before had fashions been so fantastic. Men wore tight-fitting doublets with high collars and padded shoulders over lawn or cambric shirts with frills that were exposed at the neck. Starched ruffs later replaced this detail. Men's balloon-shaped breeches, which were often stuffed with horsehair and might reach to the knees, sometimes achieved ludicrous proportions and made their hose-clad legs look ridiculously stick-like. Only men with well-turned calves could carry off this fashion well. Cloaks were short and attached to the doublet at the shoulders, whilst hats sported plumes and were set at a jaunty angle. Apart from his sword or dagger, the Elizabethan gentleman of fashion adorned his costume with as much embroidery, braiding and jewellery as there was space for.

Women's dress changed subtly during the period, but still managed to exaggerate the contours of the female shape. The square necklines of earlier decades continued to predominate, but for many years they were worn over embroidered chemises. It was only towards the end of the century that the bosom was again exposed. Like men, women wore ruffs – small frills at first, which later developed into the large pleated cartwheel ruffs of the 1580s and the open-front design of the 1590s, the latter often being worn against a stiffened collar of gauze. Skirts grew ever wider and fuller, supported by the Spanish farthingale, a petticoat stiffened with whalebone or thin steel rods. Above was worn a stiff bodice that tapered to a point over the stomach. One wit remarked that ladies of the court looked like trussed chickens set upon bells.

Sleeves – separate attachments for a gown – were full, and were often richly embroidered or slashed to show puffs of the fine lawn undershirt beneath. Materials were usually silk or velvet, whatever the season, and jewels were worn in abundance – hair ornaments, necklaces, ropes of pearls, bracelets, rings, brooches, pins, pomanders, girdles and even jewelled books to hang at the waist. Many women used cosmetics, often ruining their complexions with concoctions containing lead or arsenic.

Frequently the cosmetics were used to hide the ravages of smallpox, then a common and much-feared disease.

For all their insularity, the Elizabethans did look beyond their island to the new worlds being discovered overseas. The sixteenth century was England's age of exploration and adventure, of speculation in overseas expeditions, of Sir Walter Raleigh, who founded the first English colony in Virginia, named after the Queen, and of Sir Francis Drake, who circumnavigated the world.

At home, as trade flourished, so industry expanded. Protestant refugees from the Continent introduced lace-making, silk weaving, engraving, needle- and thread-making and other skills into England, whilst the woollen cloth industry continued to thrive and bring prosperity to an ever-widening area. The Statute of Apprentices of 1563, by making long indentures mandatory, helped to bring stability to industry and farming.

Yet commercial success had its debit side. The pursuit of wealth and the frantic race to acquire land and power meant that most people cared only for their own interests and not for the public good or the needs of those weaker than themselves. It was a greedy, avaricious age, corrupt in many ways. The court was seen as a magnet for grasping scavengers, and there were many who managed to suborn the laws by bribery.

The rich lived well. The writer Philip Stubbs observed: 'Nowadays, if the table be not covered from the one end to the other with delicate meats of sundry sorts, and to every dish a sauce appropriate to its kind, it is thought unworthy of the name of a dinner.' People were prepared to spend liberally on expensive imported spices, which were often used to disguise the taste of meat that had gone off during winter storage, for most animals were slaughtered in the autumn and their meat salted down and barrelled for use until the spring. Small beer or ale was drunk in preference to water by all ages and classes, and fine wines were imported from the Continent. Drunkenness was common, so it became commonplace to serve drinks from a sideboard rather than at table, in the hope that people would not drink as much.

Although Sir Walter Raleigh is widely credited with introducing tobacco into England from America, it was probably John Hawkins who first imported the weed in 1566. By the 1590s, pipe-smoking was a common, if costly, habit – tobacco cost three shillings an ounce. Everybody, it seemed, was using it – princes, courtiers, noble ladies, soldiers and sailors.

Such was the England of Elizabeth Tudor. When she came to the throne her subjects knew relatively little about her. Nurtured in a hard school, having suffered adversity and uncertainty from her infancy, and having gone in danger of her life on at least two occasions, she had

learned to keep her own counsel, hide her feelings and live by her wits. Already, she was a mistress of the arts of deception, dissimulation, prevarication and circumvention, all admired attributes of a true Renaissance ruler. At twenty-five years old, she was at last in control of her destiny, and having lived in one kind of constraint or another for the whole of her existence so far, she was determined to preserve her independence and autonomy. She had learned from her sister's mistakes, and resolved never to repeat them. She would identify herself with her people and work for their common interests. She would bring peace and stability to her troubled kingdom. She would nurture it, as a loving mother nurtures a child. For this, she believed, God had preserved her life.

# I

# *'The Most English Woman in England'*

The first act of Queen Elizabeth had been to give thanks to God for her peaceful accession to the throne and, as she later told the Spanish ambassador, to ask Him 'that He would give her grace to govern with clemency and without bloodshed'. With the calamitous example of her sister before her, she had already decided that there should be no foreign interference in the government of England, not from Spain or Rome or anywhere else, and was resolved to be herself a focus for English nationalism – 'the most English woman in England'.

Elizabeth could certainly boast of her English parentage. Her father, Henry VIII, had been of royal Plantagenet stock, with some Welsh blood from his father Henry VII, while Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn, had been an English commoner whose ancestors had been Norfolk farmers and merchants who had risen to prominence through their wealth and a series of advantageous marriages with daughters of the nobility. Through Anne's mother, Elizabeth Howard, Elizabeth was related to the Howards, earls of Surrey and dukes of Norfolk, England's premier peers, and through the Boleyns themselves to many other notable English families such as the Careys and the Sackvilles.

When Henry VIII fell in love with Anne Boleyn in approximately 1526, he had been married for seventeen years to a Spanish princess, Katherine of Aragon, whose maid of honour Anne was. Katherine had failed to provide Henry with the male heir he so desperately needed, and for some years he had entertained doubts about the validity of the marriage, on the grounds that the Bible forbade a man to marry his brother's widow: Katherine had briefly been married to his elder brother Arthur, who died aged fifteen, but she stoutly maintained that the marriage had never been consummated.

Henry had had affairs before, but his passion for Anne Boleyn was all-consuming, and burned ever more fiercely after she made it clear that

she would not be his mistress. Her virginity, she declared provocatively, would be the greatest gift she would bring her husband.

By early 1527, Henry VIII had decided to apply to the Pope for an annulment of his marriage. At around the same time, he resolved to have Anne Boleyn for his wife, as soon as he was free. But the Pope, scared of Katherine's powerful nephew, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, refused to co-operate. The King's 'Great Matter' dragged on for six years, by the end of which time the English Church had been severed from the Church of Rome, and Henry VIII had declared himself its Supreme Head. Thus liberated, he was able to have his marriage to Katherine declared null and void, and marry Anne, which he did as soon as she became pregnant in 1533. The new Queen was vastly unpopular among his subjects.

Henry and Anne had confidently anticipated that their child would be a son, and were disappointed when it turned out to be a girl. Named after both her grandmothers, Elizabeth of York and Elizabeth Howard, the Princess Elizabeth was nevertheless a healthy baby, and her parents were hopeful of providing her with a brother shortly.

This was not to be. Two, possibly three unsuccessful pregnancies followed, during which time Henry fell out of love with Anne and began paying court to one of her ladies, Jane Seymour. He had realised also that Anne was entirely unsuitable as queen, since she was over-flirtatious, immoderate in her public behaviour, and vengeful towards her enemies. She was, in the brief time allowed her, a good mother, incurring her husband's displeasure by insisting on breastfeeding Elizabeth herself, which high-born mothers never did, and choosing pretty clothes for the child. She rarely saw her, however, for the Princess was given her own household at Hatfield House at three months old, and thereafter her mother could only visit when her other duties permitted.

The loss of a stillborn son in January 1536, on the day of Katherine of Aragon's funeral, sealed Anne's fate. Arrested with five men, one her brother, she was charged with plotting to murder the King and twenty-two counts of adultery – eleven of which have since been proved false, which suggests that the rest, for which there is no corroborative evidence, are equally unlikely. Anne was taken to the Tower, tried and condemned to death. After her marriage had been annulled and her daughter declared a bastard, she was beheaded on 19 May 1536.

Elizabeth was not yet three when her mother was executed, and no one knows when or how or what she found out about that tragic event. She was a precocious child, and soon noticed the change in her life, asking her governor why she had been addressed as my Lady Princess one day and merely as my Lady Elizabeth the next. The loss of her

father's favour can only have led to more awkward questions, so it is reasonable to suppose that she found out what had happened to her mother sooner rather than later. The effect on her emotional development can only be guessed at, but it must have been profound.

Nor do we know whether or not she believed in her mother's guilt. She made only two references in adult life to Anne Boleyn, neither of them particularly revealing, although she was close to, and promoted the interests of, several relatives on her mother's side. What is clear is that throughout her life she revered the memory of her sometimes terrifying father, who had had her declared baseborn and could not bear to have much contact with her in the years following Anne Boleyn's disgrace. Those years brought a succession of stepmothers, all of whom took pity on the motherless child and did their best to restore her to favour.

Perhaps the worst episode in her childhood occurred when Elizabeth was eight. The King's fifth wife, Katherine Howard, a cousin of Anne Boleyn, was a giddy young girl who unwisely admitted former lovers into her household and – it was later alleged – into her bed. Late in 1541 her crimes were discovered. The King wept when told, but would not see her. In February 1542, she met the same fate as Anne Boleyn.

It was around this time that Elizabeth told her friend, young Robert Dudley, son of the Earl of Warwick, 'I will never marry.' Some writers have suggested that the events of her childhood led her to equate marriage with death, and although there is no evidence to support this theory, there can be little doubt that this was a traumatic time for Elizabeth, with Katherine Howard's execution reviving painful thoughts of what had happened to her mother.

It was not until Henry married Katherine Parr in 1543 that Elizabeth came to enjoy a semblance of family life, as the Tudors understood it, and even then she incurred her father's displeasure for an unknown offence and was banned from seeing him for a year. They were reconciled before his death in January 1547, when his nine-year-old son Edward VI succeeded to the throne and Elizabeth went to live under the guardianship of Katherine Parr at the latter's dower palace at Chelsea.

Henry VIII may have neglected his younger daughter in many ways, but he did ensure that from the age of six she should be educated as befitted a Renaissance prince. Katherine Parr made it her business to supervise the education of her stepchildren and engaged the best tutors for Elizabeth, among them William Grindal and the celebrated Cambridge scholar, Roger Ascham. Ascham and his circle were not only humanists, dedicated to the study of the ancient Greek and Latin classics and to the education of women, but also converts to the reformed faith, or Protestants, as such people were now known, and it is almost certain that Elizabeth was fired by their ideals at an impressionable age.

She had a formidable intelligence, an acute mind and a remarkably good memory. Ascham declared he had never known a woman with a quicker apprehension or a more retentive memory. Her mind, he enthused, was seemingly free from all female weakness, and she was 'endued with a masculine power of application'; he delighted in the fact that she could discourse intelligently on any intellectual subject. There were many learned ladies in England, but Ascham was not exaggerating when he claimed that 'the brightest star is my illustrious Lady Elizabeth'.

Like most educated gentlewomen of her day, Elizabeth was encouraged to become the equal of men in learning and to outdo 'the vaunted paragons of Greece and Rome'. The curriculum devised for her was punishing by today's standards, but she thrived on intellectual exercises and had a particular gift for languages, which she enjoyed showing off. As queen, she read and conversed fluently in Latin, French, Greek, Spanish, Italian and Welsh. She had read the New Testament in Greek, the orations of Isocrates and the tragedies of Sophocles, amongst other works. Her interest in philosophy and history was enduring, and throughout her life she would try to set aside three hours each day to read historical books.

Elizabeth was also skilled at many of the traditional feminine pursuits of the English gentlewoman. In youth, she was adept at needlework and is known to have embroidered bookbindings. Ascham testifies to the beauty of her work and the hours she spent engaged upon it. Her talent as a calligrapher is evident in the many surviving examples of her 'sweet Roman [italic] hand' that survive. 'Nothing can be more elegant than her handwriting,' commented Ascham. She had inherited her parents' passion for music, and could play the lute and virginals with virtuosity, as well as sing and write music. She was an excellent horsewoman and one of her favourite forms of exercise was to go hunting. At other times she enjoyed walking outdoors, or shooting with a crossbow. Above all, she passionately loved dancing, although prior to her accession she had had little opportunity to indulge in this pastime.

Elizabeth's education continued at Chelsea under the auspices of Katherine Parr, but there was also learning of a very different kind, for Katherine had taken, with almost indecent haste, a new husband, the Admiral Thomas Seymour, brother of the late Queen Jane. The Admiral was a shallow, ambitious man and jealous of the power enjoyed by his elder brother, Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset and Lord Protector of England during the King's minority. Anxious to increase his influence at court, Seymour had entertained the idea of marrying one of the old King's daughters, but had been firmly warned off by the Council. Now, a newly-married man, this swashbuckling Lothario indulged in daily romps with the adolescent Elizabeth, tickling and slapping her as she lay

in her bed, or coming into her room in his nightclothes. Her governess, Katherine Ashley, thought this scandalous, and reported it to Queen Katherine, although the Dowager Queen dismissed the Admiral's behaviour as innocent fun, and even joined in the romps on a few occasions.

Then Katherine became pregnant, and Seymour's flirtation with Elizabeth grew more serious. How far he became involved with her is not known, but his activities aroused sufficient concern for Katherine to send Elizabeth away from her household in order to preserve not only her own marriage but also the girl's honour. After Katherine died in childbirth in 1548, the Council found out how Seymour had behaved towards Elizabeth, who was second in line of succession after her sister Mary by the terms of both her father's will and an Act of Parliament, and could not marry without the sovereign's consent. The Admiral was suspected of having secretly plotted once more to make her his wife. In fact, he was plotting the overthrow of his brother, and was soon afterwards arrested after having been caught with a loaded pistol outside the young King's bedroom. He was charged with treason and executed, Elizabeth commenting with commendable control, for there is little doubt that she had been strongly attracted to him, 'This day died a man of much wit and very little judgement.' Again, she may have made the equation that sexual involvement was inextricably linked with death.

Subsequently, Elizabeth's servants were questioned, as was she herself, and the sordid details of Seymour's behaviour were exposed, almost ruining Elizabeth's reputation and placing her life in danger. Nevertheless, she defended herself most ably, despite her youth and the intolerable pressure put upon her by her interrogators to confess. Although he was fond of his sister, the young King was powerless to help her, and it was only by adopting the dullest and most circumspect way of life, as well as the sober mode of dress so beloved by her brother and his religious reformers, that Elizabeth eventually managed to salvage her good name.

After Edward died of tuberculosis in 1553, John Dudley, formerly Earl of Warwick and now Duke of Northumberland, staged an abortive coup to place Lady Jane Grey on the throne. Lady Jane Grey was Henry VIII's great-niece, the granddaughter of his favourite sister Mary, to whose heirs he had willed the succession of the crown after the lines of Edward, Mary and Elizabeth had died out. Northumberland, who had ousted and replaced Somerset as *de facto* ruler of England during the young King's minority, was anxious to remain in power and determined that the Lady Mary, an ardent Catholic, should never have the opportunity of overthrowing the Protestant religion established under Edward VI. To this end, he married Lady Jane to his son Guilford and

persuaded Edward to sign an illegal device altering the succession. The people of England, however, rose in Mary's favour, and she succeeded to the throne on a tide of popular approval. Northumberland, convicted of treason, and Lady Jane Grey, his innocent victim, later went to the block.

Elizabeth took no part in Northumberland's coup, wisely remaining in the country. When her sister Mary emerged triumphantly as queen, Elizabeth rode to London to greet her. But relations between the half-sisters had never been easy, and they soon deteriorated when Mary began to suspect Elizabeth of being a secret Protestant. Accused of complicity in Sir Thomas Wyatt's rebellion of 1554, which began as a protest against Mary's plans to marry Philip of Spain, Elizabeth spent three months in the Tower, expecting daily to be executed. Nothing could be proved against her, yet although she was eventually freed without charge, Mary remained convinced of her guilt. By Elizabeth's own later admission, her spell in the Tower was the most traumatic event of her youth; in a speech to Parliament, she recalled, 'I stood in danger of my life; my sister was so incensed against me.' She never ceased to render thanks to God for her deliverance, and often spoke of it as a miracle. Thanks were due in fact to Philip of Spain, who had interceded with Mary on her behalf, but Elizabeth had prayed for God's help, and believed He had answered her, thus confirming her belief in the efficacy of prayer. As late as 1579, she was still composing private prayers of praise to the Almighty for 'pulling me from the prison to the palace'.

After her release, Elizabeth lived quietly in the country, evading involvement in plots against her sister, whilst Mary made a disastrous marriage with Philip.

Elizabeth was twenty-five years old at her accession. She was tall and very slender, with a tiny waist, small bosom and beautiful, long-fingered hands, which it pleased her vanity to display to advantage in a variety of affected poses. She had a swarthy, 'olive' complexion like that of her mother, although she made a habit of whitening it with a lotion made up of egg-whites, powdered eggshell, poppy seeds, borax and alum, which made her face appear white and luminous. She had inherited also Anne Boleyn's long, thin face, high cheekbones and pointed chin. From her father she had her red, naturally curly hair and high, hooked nose. In 1557, a Venetian envoy had written: 'Her face is comely rather than handsome, but she is well-formed and has fine eyes.' They were bright and piercing, beneath thin, arched brows, but their colour is still a matter for dispute. If she was not conventionally attractive, she certainly had a definite charm that attracted men: not all her courtiers' flattery proceeded from sycophancy. Above all, wrote one ambassador, 'Such an

air of dignified majesty pervades all her actions that no one can fail to suppose she is a queen.'

Elizabeth's character was something of a mystery to most people in 1558. She had learned early on to keep her own counsel, control her emotions, and to behave circumspectly in public, thus giving the lie to any adverse rumours about her. Although she had lived most of her life away from the public gaze, she had cleverly managed to convey to her future subjects – without making any public declaration of the fact – that she identified their interests with her own and that she would be the champion of the true religion, Protestantism.

Always dignified and stately in her bearing, she could also be vain, wilful, dictatorial, temperamental and imperious. Her sense of humour sometimes had a malicious edge to it, and she was capable of making sharp, cutting remarks, yet she could be warm and compassionate when occasion demanded, particularly towards the old and the sick, the bereaved and those who had suffered misfortune. She had courage, both in her convictions and in the face of danger, and was not above metaphorically thumbing her nose at her enemies. Possessing an innate humanity, she was not normally cruel – unlike most rulers of her day – and many regarded her as being unusually tolerant in that age of religious dogmatism. She saw herself as a paragon of 'honour and honesty' who dealt with others in a straightforward manner and would stand by 'the word of a prince', but the reality was somewhat different. She could prevaricate, dissemble and deceive as well as any other ruler of her time. The need constantly to economise had made her so careful with money as to appear parsimonious, and to the end of her life she would avoid spending it if she could. Caution was her watchword in all her dealings: she took no more risks than she had to. She had learned in a hard school.

She had also learned to use her femininity to advantage, artfully stressing her womanly weaknesses and shortcomings, even idulging in effective storms of weeping, whilst at the same time displaying many of the qualities most admired in men. She had wisdom, common-sense, staying power, integrity and tenacity, which, along with the ability to compromise, a hard-headed sense of realism, and a devious, subtle brain, would make her a monarch worthy of respect. Men might despise her sex, and they might mistake her finely-calculated sense of timing for dithering, but they learned to appreciate her abilities, even if they did not always understand how her mind worked, her unpredictability, her tendency to unconventional behaviour, and – above all – her ability to change her mind far more than they deemed necessary, or put off making decisions for what seemed an inordinate length of time.

Elizabeth's physical health was robust, and she had boundless energy, but her troubled adolescence had made her neurotic and she suffered

intermittent panic attacks, irrational fears and bouts of emotional paralysis, when she was incapable of knowing what to do. She could not tolerate loud noises, although she had a quick temper and was not above shouting and swearing at her hapless advisers.

There is no doubt that she found it an advantage being a young, marriageable female in a court of men: flirtation was her life blood, and she was well aware that her attraction for men was not entirely due to her exalted status. Like her mother, she knew how to charm the opposite sex into thinking her beautiful by her wit and vivacity, her lively conversation and her expressive eyes. Her personality was compelling and charismatic: she was, as one courtier claimed, at once 'so effervescent, so intimate and so regal'. She was far more at ease in the company of men than in that of women, and was never happier than when indulging in the games of courtly love. Throughout her life, it pleased her to believe that the male courtiers who flattered her and fawned upon her – as she expected them to do – were in love with her. Because of this, she viewed most other women as a threat.

On the afternoon of her accession day, 17 November 1558, the new Queen summoned those councillors who had arrived at Hatfield to attend her to discuss her immediate plans. Dressed in the demure black and white garments so applauded by her Protestant admirers, she presided over the meeting with a self possession and business acumen that surprised those who had felt concern at her lack of political experience. One man, however, who had known Elizabeth since her early teens and had long been one of her foremost supporters, had no doubts about her ability to rule her people. His name was William Cecil, and for the next forty years he was to be her chief adviser and dear friend.

Cecil was now thirty-eight. The only son of a Northamptonshire squire who had served Henry VIII, he had – like Roger Ascham – been educated at Cambridge and similarly influenced by the humanist-reformist movement which flourished there. After university, he was sent by his father to Grays Inn to study law, and within a short time he was offered a handsomely remunerated position in the Court of Common Pleas. His first wife was Mary, sister of Edward VI's tutor John Cheke, another Cambridge humanist, but she died young, and William married secondly another bluestocking, Mildred, eldest of the four highly-educated daughters of Sir Anthony Cooke, Edward VI's governor. Mildred was plain and long-faced, but the marriage was happy and fruitful, and Cecil came to revel in the delights of fatherhood. According to John Clapham, who served in his household and became his biographer, 'If he could get his table set round with his little children

he was then in his kingdom.' Although he loved simple pleasures, the family was wealthy and had residences at Stamford in Lincolnshire – he began the building of the palatial Burghley House in 1553 – and Wimbledon in Surrey.

Under Edward VI, Cecil prospered; he became Master of the Court of Requests, Member of Parliament for Stamford, secretary to the Lord Protector Somerset, a member of the Privy Council and Secretary of State, before being knighted in 1551. He achieved this meteoric rise through sheer hard work and integrity, proving to his masters that he was discreet, learned, trustworthy and a statesman of the highest order. Conservative in his views, he would throughout his life share Elizabeth's belief in the time-honoured medieval ideals of social hierarchy. He was also a patriot and a realist, who reluctantly acknowledged the need for reform, was prepared to put his country's needs before his own, and would not scruple to use ruthless and underhand methods in the national interest. It was his supreme caution that was his greatest strength, and it would be the single most important influence upon the affairs of England during the years to come.

Cecil was a fervent Protestant, and although he concealed his true leanings when Mary came to the throne, his career suffered a period of stagnation; he held no court office during her reign, although he retained his post at the Court of Common Pleas.

John Clapham described Cecil as having 'a well-tempered constitution of body, of stature rather comely than tall, in countenance grave, but without authority'. His portraits – and there are more extant of him than of any other of Elizabeth's subjects – portray him as a great statesman, a man with grey eyes, a pink complexion, greying hair and moustache (his hair was white from about 1572), a brown beard and three warts on his right cheek. As a commoner, he certainly felt at a disadvantage amongst the noble lords of the court, and some of them would indeed resent him in the years to come.

During Edward's reign, and then Mary's, Cecil had advised Elizabeth on financial matters and later used his influence and political experience to counteract the machinations of her enemies. It did not take her long to recognise his worth, nor for him to appreciate her unique qualities, and so began one of the most remarkable partnerships in English history. Before long, she was calling him her Spirit – her bestowal of nicknames on those close to her came to be recognised as a signal mark of favour – and once wrote to him, when he doubted that favour, as he periodically had cause to do:

> Sir Spirit, I doubt I do nickname you, for those of your kind (they say) have no sense; but I have of late seen an *ecce signum*, that if an

> ass kick you, you feel it too soon. I will recant you from being my Spirit if ever I perceive that you disdain not such a feeling. Serve God, fear the King, and be a good fellow to the rest. Do not be so silly a soul as not to regard her trust who puts it in you. God bless you, and long may you last.

Thus it was that Cecil was seated beside Elizabeth when her councillors met on the afternoon of 17 November, when the formal announcement of her accession was issued to foreign courts and English embassies abroad. Three days of mourning for Queen Mary were proclaimed, and then the meeting broke up, although the new Queen would continue to consult individual councillors in private. Meanwhile, so many courtiers and loyal supporters were arriving at Hatfield that it was impossible to find lodgings for them all.

The next morning, Queen and councillors met informally again to make arrangements for the royal household, and later that day the appointment of Lord Robert Dudley as Master of the Horse was announced. There was some murmuring about this, for Dudley was the son of the traitor Northumberland, who in 1553 had unsuccessfully plotted to oust Mary and Elizabeth from the succession in favour of Lady Jane Grey. Both Northumberland and Jane had gone to the block, and Dudley, with his surviving brothers, had spent some time in the Tower. Later he was released and during Mary's reign saw active service in the armies of his patron and friend, Philip of Spain, distinguishing himself at the Battle of San Quentin in 1557. Back at court, he earned himself the reputation of being a superb horseman and accomplished jouster; but the taint of treason still clung to the Dudley name, and there were many who were wary of him.

For Elizabeth, Dudley was the obvious choice to be Master of the Horse, a post which had to be filled with the utmost urgency if arrangements for her court to proceed to London were to be made in good time. To begin with, his eldest brother, John, Earl of Warwick, now dead, had held it under Edward VI, so Robert was his natural successor. More importantly, he was particularly skilled in equine matters, and he had been Elizabeth's friend since childhood; they were almost of an age. Born on 24 June 1533 he had spent time at court as a child, and may have been one of that select group of aristocratic children chosen to share lessons with the royal siblings Edward and Elizabeth, becoming particularly close to the latter. Later in life he would write: 'I have known her better than any man alive since she was eight years old.'

In 1550 Dudley had been appointed Master of the Buckhounds, and that same year he married Amy, daughter and heiress of Sir John Robsart of Syderstone in Norfolk. Edward VI was a guest at the wedding. This

marriage made Robert a wealthy landowner in Norfolk, and to begin with at least it brought him personal happiness: it was, remembered William Cecil, 'a carnal marriage, begun for pleasure'.

In 1553 he became a Member of Parliament and supported his father's abortive coup. He was still a prisoner in the Tower under sentence of death when Elizabeth was confined there in 1554, and although there is no evidence that they met within those grim walls, many writers have speculated that they might indeed have done so, and even that their romance began at that time. This is unlikely, as Elizabeth was held under the strictest security and Dudley had requested and obtained permission for his wife to visit him 'at any convenient time'. All we can surmise is that Robert and Elizabeth's separate experiences of imprisonment under the shadow of the axe forged a common bond between them. After his return from the Continent in 1557, Robert settled in Norfolk, but he did not forget Elizabeth and at one time 'sold a good piece of land to aid her'. As soon as he heard of her accession, he came post haste to Hatfield, symbolically mounted on the proverbial white charger, to offer his loyalty and his services, and Elizabeth found that offer irresistible.

As Master of the Horse, Dudley's annual salary was £1500 along with various perks including a suite of rooms at court. He was permitted to be waited on by his own servants, who had permission to wear the green and white household livery of the Tudors. Four horses were allocated for his personal use. The post was no sinecure, requiring him to purchase, breed, train and maintain horses for the use of the Queen and her court. Dudley attended to his duties with panache, improving the standards at the royal studs, one of which he founded himself at Greenwich for the purpose of breeding barbary horses. He was also responsible for organising state processions and courtly entertainments such as tournaments, masques, plays and banquets, tasks to which he was ideally suited with his flair for organisation and showmanship and his vast knowledge of heraldry and the rules of chivalry. In royal processions, it was his privilege to ride immediately behind the Queen. As Elizabeth took 'great pleasure in good horses', she and Dudley were to be in each other's company almost on a daily basis, and before the court left Hatfield they were seen riding out together in the park; Elizabeth loved nothing more than to be out of doors on a horse, especially in the company of this handsome young man who urged her to regard regular exercise as a necessary escape from her state duties. It was not long before these rides with her Master of Horse became a regular habit.

Dudley was almost six feet tall and very attractive; his skin was so dark as to earn him the nickname of 'the Gypsy', a name used by some to refer to his moral character rather than his face. Sir Robert Naunton

described him as 'a very goodly person and singular well-featured, and all his youth well-favoured, but high-foreheaded.' He had red-brown hair, a reddish beard and moustache, a high-bridged nose and sardonic, heavy-lidded eyes. Elizabeth much admired his long, slender fingers. As a young man he was lean and muscular, with long, shapely legs, and showed his physique off to advantage in fine and fashionable clothes. He was dynamic and energetic: he jousted, rode, played tennis and archery, and enjoyed fishing. He could also dance and sing well, and was an excellent conversationalist. A true Renaissance man, he was fascinated by science, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, cartography and navigation, had read many classical authors and could speak both French and Italian fluently. It is possible that Dr John Dee, the notable scientist, astrologer and reputed magician, had been his tutor, for Dee had once been a member of Northumberland's household, and it was not long before Dudley would introduce Dee to Queen Elizabeth, who came to set great store by the doctor's wisdom and knowledge and would often accompany Dudley to his house at Mortlake.

Dudley's appointment and his obvious favour with the young Queen dismayed those at court who feared a revival of his family's ambitions. Some remembered that not only his father but also his grandfather, Edmund Dudley, had gone to the block for treason, the latter at the beginning of Henry VIII's reign, although it now seems likely that Edmund was merely a scapegoat for Henry VII's unpopular financial policies. Yet it was not long before Elizabeth's favour extended to other members of the Dudley family, notably Robert's brother Ambrose and his sister Mary, the wife of Sir Henry Sidney of Penshurst, who became one of the Ladies of the Bedchamber to whom the Queen was most devoted.

Throughout the 18th and 19th of November Elizabeth worked with her advisers to form a new administration, and on 20 November the Privy Council and a large section of the peerage, come to make obseisance to the Queen, met formally in the great hall at Hatfield to hear Elizabeth name the men she had chosen as her chief advisers and make her first public speech.

First, Sir William Cecil's appointment as Secretary of State was announced, and he took the oath of office. The office of Secretary was not the greatest that the Queen could bestow, but it would enable her to form a close working relationship with Cecil, whom she trusted above all other men. He, however, had his misgivings, for he subscribed to the almost universal masculine view that women, being wayward, emotional, weak and vacillating creatures, were unfit to govern and incapable of running an administration. Elizabeth, who was in time to

prove him wrong, now displayed for the first time as queen the regal command and dignified style of oration that was to characterise her public appearances, and told him: 'I give you this charge that you shall be of my Privy Council and content to take pains for me and my realm. This judgement I have of you, that you will not be corrupted with any manner of gifts, and that you will be faithful to the state; and that, without respect of my private will, you will give me that counsel which you think best; and if you shall know anything necessary to be declared to me of secrecy, you shall show it to myself only; and assure yourself I will not fail to keep taciturnity therein.'

The rotund and amiable lawyer Sir Nicholas Bacon was then sworn in as Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, the office of Lord Chancellor being then temporarily in abeyance, then other appointments were announced. Katherine Parr's brother William, out of favour under Mary, was restored to the Marquessate of Northampton and made a Privy Councillor; Sir Nicholas Throckmorton, a zealous and vocal Protestant, became Chamberlain of the Exchequer. Sir Francis Knollys, another fanatical Protestant who was hurrying home from exile upon receiving news of Elizabeth's accession, was the husband of the Queen's cousin Katherine Carey, daughter of Anne Boleyn's sister Mary, and was made a Privy Councillor. Ten of the councillors who had served under Mary were retained, including the Marquess of Winchester and the Earls of Shrewsbury, Derby, Arundel and Pembroke; most were middle-aged men of considerable experience, whose conspiracies against her in the previous reign Elizabeth was prepared to overlook, although she could never bring herself to like Arundel or Pembroke. Those of Mary's councillors who had displayed strong Catholic loyalties were dismissed and replaced with Protestant lords of Elizabeth's own choosing, but the new Privy Council was to be smaller than it had been under Mary, Elizabeth believing, with reason, that forty-four 'councillors would make rather discord and confusion than good counsel'.

Elizabeth then addressed the assembly from her throne under the canopy of estate.

> The law of Nature moves me to sorrow for my sister. The burthen that is fallen upon me maketh me amazed; and yet, considering that I am God's creature, ordained to obey His appointment, I will yield thereto, desiring from the bottom of my heart that I may have assistance of His grace to be the minister of His heavenly will in this office now committed to me. And as I am but one body, so I shall require you all, my lords, to be assistant to me, that I with my ruling, and you with your service, may make a good account to Almighty God, and leave some comfort to our posterity on Earth.

> I mean to direct all mine actions by good advice and counsel. My meaning is to require of you all nothing more but faithful hearts, and of my good will you shall not doubt, using yourselves as good and loving subjects.

For the next three days she was busy, drawing up lists of councillors, formulating policies, cranking the machinery of government into action, and planning her household appointments. First to be promoted were those who had served her faithfully as princess. Her former governess, Katherine Ashley, was made Mistress of the Robes and First Lady of the Bedchamber with responsibility for the maids of honour, who were all young girls from noble families. Ashley's husband John was to be Master of the Jewel House, while Elizabeth's former treasurer, Thomas Parry, was knighted and made Comptroller of the Household. Her old Welsh nurse, Blanche Parry, who had served her since birth and taught her the Welsh language, was appointed Keeper of the Queen's Books. Sir Francis Knollys became Vice-Chamberlain of the Household; his daughter Laetitia, known as Lettice, was one of the Queen's first maids of honour. Another of Elizabeth's cousins, Henry Carey, Mary Boleyn's son and a man of great abilities, was raised to the peerage as Baron Hunsdon.

Several of those Catholic ladies who had served Queen Mary were dismissed and replaced with ladies who professed Protestant beliefs. The Queen was an exacting and demanding mistress who expected high standards to prevail in her household. She disliked employing anyone who was ugly, and once turned down an application for a position from a man whose handsome face was marred by a missing tooth. Yet those who were lucky enough to secure places in the royal household were well looked after, even when they became old or sick. Then the Queen would ensure that they received 'good pensions'.

When Queen Mary lay dying, King Philip had sent an ambassador, the Count de Feria, to England, to present his master's congratulations to his wife's successor and ensure the continuance of the Anglo-Habsburg alliance, which united England and Spain against France and protected the valuable trading markets of the Habsburg-owned Low Countries from French harrassment. The alliance was very important to Philip, and he was prepared to overlook Elizabeth's suspected heretical tendencies in the interests of their common friendship. There had even been rumours, current in Mary's lifetime, that he meant to marry Elizabeth.

De Feria had an audience with Elizabeth at Hatfield, at which his claim that she owed her throne to Philip's influence had met with the contempt it deserved; in this matter, she told him tartly, her gratitude was due solely to her people. But she knew it was not in her interests to

alienate Spain, for she needed Philip's friendship as much as he needed hers. On the day of her accession, the Catholic Henry II of France had publicly declared that, as a bastard, Elizabeth was unfit to be Queen of England, and proclaimed as the true queen his daughter-in-law, Mary, Queen of Scots, great-niece of Henry VIII.

Mary and her husband, the Dauphin Francis, were already displaying the royal arms of England quartered on their own of Scotland and France. Many Catholics had not acknowledged Henry VIII's divorce from Katherine of Aragon, mother of Mary I, nor his marriage to Anne Boleyn, and to them Mary, Queen of Scots was the rightful Queen of England. Elizabeth could not know that Henry II's actions were merely mischievous, and she was angered and immensely troubled by them, becoming even more so when she heard rumours that he intended to persuade the Pope to have her formally proclaimed 'a bastard and a heretic and ineligible to the Crown'. If Spain remained allied to England, the Pope would hardly wish to offend Philip by insulting England's Queen. Moreover, Elizabeth was resolved to win Calais back from the French, and hoped that Philip would help her; she did not yet comprehend that the French were too deeply entrenched in Calais for its recovery ever to be a realistic prospect.

Naturally, de Feria, like most other people, expected the Queen to marry. It was unthinkable that a woman would attempt to rule alone without a man to guide and protect her; he could also father her children and so ensure the continuance of the dynasty and the future security of the realm. Marriage, as Cecil later told the Queen, was her 'only known and likely surety, at home and abroad', and, as she herself acknowledged, 'There is a strong idea in the world that a woman cannot live unless she is married.'

That November, a German envoy observed, 'The Queen is of an age when she should in reason, and – as is woman's way – be eager to marry and be provided for. For that she should wish to remain a maid and never marry is inconceivable.' A husband could share 'the cares, the labours and fatigues of her government'. Although several times during Mary's reign Elizabeth had expressed her desire to remain single, most people put this down to maidenly modesty. Hardly anyone took her at her word. Besides, it was seen as unhealthy for a woman to remain unwed: marriage could provide her with the emotional and sexual satisfaction that brought physical and mental fulfilment. It was acknowledged that women who remained single were sexually frustrated, given to fantasies and lust, and had unstable minds.

In de Feria's opinion, there was only one suitable match for Elizabeth, and that was King Philip himself. The advantages of such a union would be manifold on both sides. On 21 November the Count wrote to his

master: 'The more I think about this business, the more certain I am that everything depends upon the husband this woman may take.' There was little doubt in his mind that, if King Philip proposed, Elizabeth would accept him. 'If she decides to marry out of the country, she will at once fix her eyes on Your Majesty.'

Nevertheless, the Queen had been expressing some disturbingly independent views. Whereas both Philip and de Feria had counted upon her relying on her brother-in-law's advice, both she 'and her people hold themselves free from Your Majesty, and will listen to any ambassadors who may come to treat of marriage'. There was no time to lose, for people were already talking of a marriage with the Austrian branch of the Habsburg family, which would not at present be in Spain's interests. That there would be difficulties in arranging a marriage between Elizabeth and Philip, de Feria anticipated, but 'with great negotiation and money' it might be accomplished. The ambassador went on to give his impressions of the new Queen: he thought her

> sharp, without prudence. She is a very vain and clever woman. She must have been thoroughly schooled in the manner in which her father conducted his affairs. She is determined to be governed by no one.

He had been at once intrigued and baffled by her, being disconcerted by her relaxed manner during the audience and her habit of laughing meaningfully, as if she knew what he was thinking. 'She is a very strange sort of woman,' he concluded.

Rumours about his impending match with Elizabeth were rife at Philip's court at Brussels, yet for the present the King refused to acknowledge them, nor did he instruct de Feria to propose marriage. In truth, he had little inclination to marry again in England, and even less to be united with the heretical Elizabeth, whom he suspected would be less tractable than her sister.

On 23 November, Elizabeth left Hatfield with a retinue of over one thousand courtiers and travelled through Hertfordshire and Middlesex to London for her official reception as Queen. She was cheered along the way by crowds lining the streets to see her, and was received outside the City walls by the Lord Mayor, who made a speech of welcome and presented his aldermen and sheriffs to her. As, smiling, she extended her hand to each to be kissed, she saw the advancing figure of Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London – 'Bloody Bonner', who had been responsible in Mary's reign for the burning of many Protestants. As the Bishop knelt, the Queen withdrew her hand and moved away.

She then entered London and, because Whitehall Palace was not ready to receive her, took up her lodging at the Charterhouse near Smithfield, a former monastery that was now the residence of Lord North. Here she stayed for five days, receiving visitors, presiding over meetings of the Council and attending to matters of state.

On 28 November, Elizabeth, again attended by her thousand-strong retinue, removed to the royal apartments in the Tower of London. Choosing a different route from the traditional one that she would follow on the day of her coronation, she emerged sumptuously attired in purple velvet with a rich scarf around her neck, and went in procession through the packed, newly-gravelled, banner-bedecked streets of the capital to Cripplegate and Tower Hill, revelling in the acclaim of her subjects, the pretty speeches delivered by children at various places along her route, the music and singing of the City waits, the pealing of the bells of a hundred churches, and the fanfares of trumpets that announced her coming. The procession was led by the Lord Mayor of London and Garter King of Arms, with Pembroke bearing the Sword of State and Lord Robert Dudley, on a black charger, riding behind the Queen's horse. As she approached the Tower via Fenchurch Street and Gracechurch Street, 'there was great shooting of guns, the like was never heard before', which lasted half an hour.

The whole of London, it seemed, had turned out to watch her arrival, and was entranced, especially when the Queen displayed an inclination for 'stately stooping to the meanest sort' of commoner. Sir John Hayward wrote:

> If ever any person had either the gift or the style to win the hearts of the people, it was this Queen. All her faculties were in motion, and every motion seemed a well-guided action; her eye was set upon one, her ear listened to another, her judgement ran upon a third, to a fourth she addressed her speech; her spirit seemed to be everywhere. Some she pitied, some she commended, some she thanked, at others she pleasantly and wittily jested, condemning no person, neglecting no office, and distributing her smiles, looks and graces so artfully that thereupon the people again redoubled the testimony of their joys, and afterwards, raising everything to the highest strain, filled the ears of all men with immoderate extolling of their prince.

The dignified de Feria was shocked at such condescension to her subjects, but the citizens of London would not have agreed with him: they had already embarked upon their love affair with Elizabeth, and they applauded her common touch, which she contrived to exercise 'by

coupling mildness with majesty' without any loss of dignity. Touched by her care for them and her vibrant youth and gracious smiles, they cried out their greetings and blessings with gusto.

As she neared the Tower, Elizabeth reined her horse to a standstill, reflecting that when she had last come here it had been as a prisoner in fear of execution. Now she expressed gratitude for her deliverance before the watching crowds: 'O Lord, Almighty and Everlasting God, I give Thee most hearty thanks that Thou hast been so merciful unto me as to spare me to behold this day.' Then, to her people:

> Some have fallen from being princes of this land to be prisoners in this place. I am raised from being a prisoner in this place to be a prince of this land. That dejection was a work of God's justice. This advancement is a work of His mercy.

She then rode into the Tower precincts and entered the royal apartments, summoning the Lieutenant of the Tower to attend her. He was Sir Henry Bedingfield, her former gaoler. Graciously, she thanked him for his services to the late queen and informed him that he was to be relieved of his duties. Yet there was no animosity in her.

'God forgive you the past, as I do,' she told him, then added mischievously, 'Whenever I have one who requires to be safely and straitly kept, I will send him to you!'

After lodging a week in the Tower, Queen and court went by river, 'with trumpets playing and melody and joy', to take up residence in Somerset House on the Strand, Elizabeth's town house when she was princess. During the winter evenings, she could be seen in her barge, being rowed along the Thames to the sound of music, attended by a host of little boats, and the Londoners grew used to her daily appearances in the streets of the capital, usually en route to dine with various courtiers. She knew well that, to retain her people's love, she had to remain visible.

On 23 December, she moved to Whitehall Palace, which was to be her principal, if not her favourite, residence. Here, the court gave itself up to daily entertainments and celebrations, its members being 'intent on amusing themselves and on dancing till after midnight', following the lead of their mistress, who was determined to enjoy her new-found freedom. Liberated from the fear of danger that had stalked her since early youth, she was thrilled to be not only the centre of attention and flattery, but also the supreme power in the land.

Arriving at Whitehall, Feria was put out to discover that, contrary to the usual custom, no room had been allocated to him; nor could he obtain an audience with the Queen or speak with her councillors – he

noticed the latter trying to avoid him, 'as if I were the Devil'. Elizabeth was already making it clear that she would rule without guidance from any foreign power.

Unlike Henry VIII, who had given all his time over to pleasure during the early years of his reign and left the business of governing to others, Elizabeth worked hard every day, finalising plans for her household and attending to state business. She insisted that every letter arriving at court be brought for her inspection, much to Cecil's dismay, for he believed that a woman had no business poking her nose into matters that were properly the concern of the Council. When he found out that an ambassadorial dispatch from overseas had been taken straight to Elizabeth without first being shown to him as Secretary of State, his irritation increased, and he was further aggravated when the Queen blithely revealed that she had discussed the contents of the letter with the messenger who delivered it. Later, Cecil lectured the poor fellow, saying he had had no right to take it to Her Majesty, 'a matter of such weight being too much for a woman's knowledge'.

The young Queen had from the first established a set daily routine. She rose early and went in all but the worst weather for a brisk walk in the palace gardens. She then had breakfast served to her in her Privy Chamber, where she would remain while she attended to the day's business, summoning her secretaries, who would kneel before her to present letters and documents that needed the royal signature. She might then preside over a meeting of the Privy Council. At noon, dinner was served to her, again in her Privy Chamber, for she rarely ate in public. In the afternoon she might hold formal receptions in her Presence Chamber for foreign ambassadors and other visitors, remaining standing for hours on end and conversing in fluent Latin. Usually, she would set aside time in which to indulge her passion for dancing: it was not unusual for her to dance six spirited galliards in the Presence Chamber. This exercise invariably had a beneficial effect on her mercurial temper.

In the evenings there were state banquets or courtly entertainments to attend. Elizabeth loved music of all kinds, and welcomed many performers at her court. Sometimes she herself would play on the lute or virginals. Later in the evening, after supper, she would play cards with her courtiers, but she usually worked for an hour or so on state papers before retiring to bed, and was not above summoning Cecil and other councillors at all hours of the night if she wanted some advice. Often, she would make a decision at midnight, but change her mind in the morning. Needless to say, this kind of behaviour drove her advisers to near distraction.

On 14 December, Queen Mary was buried in Westminster Abbey, and

the requiem mass sung for her conformed to the traditional Catholic ritual at the new Queen's command. Elizabeth had as yet said little on the crucial matter of religion, yet few people doubted which way she meant to follow. On the day of the funeral, de Feria wrote gloomily to King Philip:

> The kingdom is entirely in the hands of young folks, heretics and traitors. The old people and the Catholics are dissatisfied, but dare not open their lips. Her Majesty seems to me incomparably more feared than her sister, and gives her orders and has her way as absolutely as her father did. We have lost a kingdom, body and soul.

It seemed to de Feria that his mission was hopeless. The precious English alliance seemed now to be in jeopardy, and he had still not been granted an audience. He could not imagine how he was to influence Elizabeth in her choice of husband, and was alarmed by what people were saying at court. 'Everybody thinks that she will not marry a foreigner, and they cannot make out whom she favours, so that nearly every day some new cry is raised about a husband.' Already, Elizabeth had discovered the pleasures and advantages of keeping everyone guessing, a game at which she was to become maddeningly adept. De Feria feared that neither the Queen nor her councillors would consider 'any proposal on Your Majesty's behalf'. His only hope lay in trying to persuade the councillors that an English match would have many drawbacks. If he saw the Queen, he would 'begin by getting her to talk about Your Majesty, and run down the idea of her marrying an Englishman, and thus to hold herself less than her sister, who would never marry a subject'. There were no English suitors worth speaking of, and it would look bad if she married a mere nobleman when there were great princes on the Continent waiting to offer themselves and protect her from the pretensions of Mary, Queen of Scots.

But Philip had not as yet proposed, and de Feria was becoming daily more anxious that he would not. He pressed the matter as much as he dared: 'If she inclines to Your Majesty, it will be necessary for you to send me orders whether I am to carry it any further or throw cold water on it and set up the Archduke Ferdinand [of Austria], because I do not see what other person we can propose to whom she would agree. I am afraid', he added bitterly, 'that one fine day we shall find this woman married, and I shall be the last man in the place to know anything about it.'

On Christmas Day 1558, Queen Elizabeth gave an inkling of her future

religious policy. Normally, the Archbishop of Canterbury would have celebrated mass in her private chapel on Christmas morning, but the primacy was vacant, the last Archbishop, Cardinal Pole, having died on the same day as Queen Mary. Several of the Catholic bishops who had held office under Mary were suspicious of Elizabeth's supposed Protestant leanings, and Nicholas Heath, Archbishop of York, who should have deputised in the absence of a Primate, had made it clear that he would not crown a heretical Queen. Hence it was Owen Oglethorpe, Bishop of Carlisle, who was celebrating the Christmas mass in the Queen's chapel at Whitehall. Prior to the service, Elizabeth had sent a message commanding him to omit the elevation of the Host – for Catholics, the most sacred element of the mass, but for Protestants, the symbol of the miracle of transubstantiation that they denied. Oglethorpe, however, decided to proceed as normal, according to his convictions. When the Gospel had been read, and the Bishop started to raise the bread and wine before the congregation, the Queen loudly ordered him to desist, to the astonishment of those present. But Oglethorpe merely frowned at her and went on with what he was doing, whereupon Elizabeth, in a fury, rose and withdrew from the chapel, determined not to witness what was offensive to her.

Two days later she issued a proclamation decreeing that parts of the mass might be said in English rather than Latin, and forbidding all preaching until further notice. This injunction, she hoped, would deter the fanatics on either side of the religious divide from engaging in a verbal power struggle and inciting unrest. When Parliament met after the coronation, planned for January, the religious issue would be decided.

The twelve days of Christmas festivities that year were lavish and very merry indeed. Lord Robert Dudley was in charge of the court entertainments, which included balls, banquets and masques. One of the latter, staged on Twelfth Night, had a decidedly anti-clerical theme, as Il Schifanoya, a shocked agent of the Duke of Mantua, reported to his master:

> Your lordship will have heard of the farce performed in the presence of Her Majesty on Epiphany Day, and the mummery performed after supper, of crows in the habits of cardinals, of asses habited as bishops, and of wolves representing abbots. I will consign it to silence. Nor will I record the levities and unusual licentiousness practised at the court.

As was customary, gifts were exchanged on Twelfth Night, and it was on this occasion that Elizabeth was presented with her first ever pair of

the new – and expensive – silk stockings. She was delighted with them, and vowed never again to wear cloth stockings.

De Feria's last despondent dispatch had had the effect of prompting King Philip to action, and on 10 January 1559 he informed the ambassador: 'I have decided to place on one side all other considerations which might be urged against it, and am resolved to sacrifice my private inclination and render this service to God and offer to marry the Queen of England.' When de Feria was able to obtain a private audience with Elizabeth, he was formally to propose marriage on Philip's behalf.

But the King was no joyous wooer: 'Believe me', he confided, 'if it was not to serve God, I would not have got into this. Nothing would make me do it except the clear knowledge that it would gain the kingdom for His service and faith.' Despite such a union being of 'enormous importance to Christianity', he felt 'like a condemned man awaiting his fate'. However, as ruler of Spain, Portugal, the Low Countries and much of the New World, he saw himself, as he was in truth, as the champion of Catholicism in Europe, and felt he had no option but to do his best to save England from a downward slide into heresy. He did not want to achieve this by violence, or by papal anathema, but by diplomacy; the truth was that, with his treasury drained by years of war with France, he was in no position to enter into an armed religious conflict, and he needed England's friendship for commercial reasons. If Elizabeth consented to his proposal and undertook to remain, as she had professed to be for the past few years, a devout Catholic, and 'maintain and uphold' the Roman faith in her kingdom, then Philip was prepared to help her regain Calais.

However, as he confided to de Feria on 10 January, he felt there would be 'many great difficulties'. His royal duties would require him to be often absent from England, which had caused great distress to Queen Mary. Because of Elizabeth's suspected heretical beliefs, he could foresee Mary, Queen of Scots's claim to the throne being pressed, and his war with France becoming 'perpetual'. He could not afford to maintain an English household to the standard that he had done in the previous reign. He was only marrying Elizabeth as a service to God, and only on condition that she would abjure her Protestant beliefs, declare herself a Catholic, and obtain absolution from the Pope for her former error. By doing these things she would proclaim that it was Philip who had saved her and England from eternal damnation, and 'it will be evident and manifest that I am serving the Lord in marrying her'.

What Philip failed to take into account was the attitude of the English people towards another Spanish marriage. Many of them had risen in rebellion in 1554 when his betrothal to Mary was announced, and most blamed his influence for the burnings of her reign, notwithstanding the

fact that he had done his best to curb Mary's fanatical enthusiasm for saving souls, knowing what it was doing to her reputation – and his. For Elizabeth to marry the King of Spain now might well cost her the loyalty of her people and even her throne.

There was also the little matter of near affinity: the Church forbade a man to marry his dead wife's sister, yet Philip did not doubt that the Pope would feel the circumstances justified the issuing of a Bull of Dispensation permitting the marriage.

De Feria was relieved and pleased that his master had finally proposed, and felt certain that Elizabeth would be sensible of the great honour being done to her, the ruler of a small island, by the greatest prince in Europe. He had forgotten that prior to her accession she had told him that Queen Mary had lost the love of her people by marrying a foreign prince. He hoped she would now appreciate that there were very many good reasons for the marriage to take place.

His first step was to see her alone, for such a matter must be broached with the utmost delicacy. This proved impossible for the time being, as Elizabeth was much preoccupied just then with plans for her imminent coronation.

She had wanted the ceremony to take place on a propitious date, and – at Robert Dudley's suggestion – had consulted Dr John Dee, who studied his astrological charts and told her that, if she were crowned on 15 January, her reign would be glorious and prosperous. The date being set, Dudley was put in charge of the arrangements and began discussions with the Lord Mayor of London about the lavish pageants and welcoming ceremonies that would be staged by the City in the Queen's honour. Elizabeth had insisted that her coronation and its attendant celebrations be as magnificent as possible, so as to make an indelible impression upon those who had cast doubts on her legitimacy and her title to the throne. The appearance of splendour and majesty meant a great deal in an age that equated greatness with lavish outward show, and so the Queen meant to use her coronation to make a political statement.

By the end of December, preparations were well advanced, with people working 'both day and night, on holidays and weekdays'. Cloth of gold and silver, silks, velvets and satins were imported from Antwerp at a cost to the Exchequer of £4000 and made into liveries, hangings, banners, and clothing for those who were to take part in the processions and ceremonies. Trumpeters and heralds received new tabards, and even the royal jester, Will Somers, and minor officials such as Joan Hilton the laundress and William Toothe, the royal fishmonger, were given new outfits. The royal tailors altered Queen Mary's coronation robes to fit her taller and slimmer sister, and orders were given that the Queen should have first choice of all crimson silk arriving at the Port of

London. Extra seating was erected in Westminster Abbey, and triumphal arches set up in the City streets. Householders hung tapestries and painted cloths from their windows, and the streets through which the Queen would pass were strewn with fresh gravel. Seven hundred yards of blue cloth were purchased to make a carpet that would stretch from the Abbey to Westminster Hall. No detail was omitted, even the purchase of cotton wool 'to dry up the oil after the Queen's anointing'. The total expenditure would add up to £16,741.

However, after Elizabeth's contretemps with Bishop Oglethorpe at Christmas, no bishop showed himself willing to perform the ceremony. Archbishop Heath of York had candidly told the Queen that, since she had refused to witness the elevation of the Host, she could be no other than a heretic, and he would not crown her. Other bishops, most of them Catholics, followed his lead, and only Oglethorpe – after much persuasion had been applied – could be prevailed upon to officiate.

At last, everything was ready, and on Thursday, 12 January 1559, the Queen boarded her barge at Whitehall and travelled along the Thames to the Tower, where English monarchs traditionally spent a night before their coronations. She was escorted by 'the Mayor and aldermen in their barge, and all the crafts [guilds] in their barges, decked and trimmed with the banners of their mysteries'. A Venetian envoy stated that the sight reminded him of Ascension Day in Venice, when the Doge and Signory were symbolically wedded to the sea.

At the Tower, the Queen was formally welcomed by her chief officers of state, and entered the royal apartments to a 'great and pleasant melody of instruments, which played in most sweet and heavenly manner'. The next day, she created several Knights of the Bath, and on the Saturday morning she left the Tower to make her ceremonial progress through London.

# 2

# *'God Send Our Mistress a Husband'*

On the morning of her coronation eve, Queen Elizabeth was attired in a robe made from twenty-three yards of cloth of gold and silver, trimmed with ermine and overlaid with gold lace – one of four she had ordered for her coronation, and on her head was set a golden cap ringed with a princess's crown. Outside, light flakes of snow were drifting down and the sky was leaden, but the courtiers in the Queen's vast retinue glowed in their rich satins and velvets and glittered with jewels. The magnificent procession formed, with over a thousand mounted dignitaries, and Elizabeth walked to her waiting litter, which was lined with white satin, trimmed with gold damask and drawn by two 'very handsome mules'.

Before climbing in, she prayed aloud, 'O Almighty and Everlasting God, I give Thee most hearty thanks that Thou hast been so merciful unto me to spare me to behold this joyful day. Thou hast dealt as wonderfully and as mercifully with me as Thou didst with Daniel, whom Thou delivered out of the den from the cruelty of the raging lions. Even so was I overwhelmed, and only by Thee delivered.' This was an apt prayer, as the lions in the Tower menagerie were just then making their presence known by roars and growls and the bystanders applauded warmly.

Having reiterated her conviction that God Himself had brought her to her throne, the Queen entered her litter, made herself comfortable on eight enormous satin cushions, and with a canopy of estate borne above her head, was carried in state, 'with great majesty', through four miles of London's streets to a tumultuous welcome. The whole event had been planned as a propaganda exercise, intended to cement the harmonious relationship between Elizabeth and her people and herald the new age that was beginning.

Alongside the Queen's litter walked her personal guard, the

Gentlemen Pensioners, wearing their livery of crimson damask and carrying ceremonial gilt battleaxes. She was attended also by many footmen in jerkins of crimson velvet studded with gilt and silver buttons and embroidered with the red and white rose of the Tudors and the initials E R. Before the Queen marched her trumpeters in scarlet, while behind her rode Robert Dudley as Master of the Horse, leading the Queen's palfrey, followed by thirty-nine ladies, all in crimson velvet gowns with cloth of gold sleeves. The Privy Councillors also rode in the procession, bravely decked out in splendid robes of satin.

The City had made great efforts, the Mayor and aldermen having commissioned and spent large sums on a series of five 'stately pageants [and] sumptuous shows and devices' at strategic points along the route, which was packed with sightseers, many of whom had camped out overnight to get a good view of the Queen. Behind wooden rails draped with painted cloths and tapestries stood the members of the City guilds, important in their fur-lined gowns and company liveries. The City was a bastion of Protestantism, and its pageants and tableaux all incorporated meaningful references to the bad days of Queen Mary that were now past and the good things that were hoped for from her successor. Chief among them was the establishment of true religion, and when the Queen heard references to this, she raised her eyes and hands heavenwards and called upon her subjects to repeat 'Amen'.

The City's celebrations began at Fenchurch Street, where a little child attempted to recite welcoming verses against the roar of the crowd. The Queen begged for quiet, and listened 'with a perpetual attentiveness in her face and a marvellous change of look, as if the child's words touched her person'.

The first pageant, 'The Pageant of the Roses', was in Gracechurch Street, and it displayed, on a three-tiered platform, persons representing the Tudor dynasty, supported by Unity and Concord. On the lowest tier were shown – together for the first time in twenty-five years – Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, and on the highest tier Elizabeth herself appeared.

Next to the conduit in Cornhill, a child representing the Queen sat enthroned on the Seat of Worthy Governance, supported by four allegorical figures of the Virtues, including one called Good Religion, who trod the Vices, among them Superstition and Ignorance, underfoot.

Cheapside was noisy with fanfares of trumpets and the singing of the City waits, who stood beside the Eleanor Cross, which had been decorated for the occasion. Here, as custom decreed, the City Recorder presented the Queen with 1000 gold marks (£666) in a purse of crimson satin. She accepted it graciously, saying,

> I thank my Lord Mayor, his brethren and you all. And whereas your request is that I should continue your good lady and queen, be ye assured that I will be as good unto you as ever queen was to her people. And persuade yourselves that for the safety and quietness of you all, I will not spare, if need be, to spend my blood. God thank you all.

Her speech prompted a 'marvellous shout and rejoicing' from the bystanders, who were 'wonderfully ravished' by it.

The pageant at Little Conduit had as its centrepiece Time. The Queen gazed at it and mused, 'Time! And Time hath brought me hither.' The pageant depicted two pastoral scenes representing a flourishing commonwealth and a decayed one. A figure representing Truth emerged from between the two, led by Time, and received from Heaven an English Bible. A child explained in pretty verses that the Bible taught how to change a decayed state into a flourishing empire. Truth presented the Bible to the Queen, who kissed it and held it to her heart, thanking the City most warmly for it and 'promising to be a diligent reader thereof'.

Outside St Paul's Cathedral, a scholar of St Paul's School made a speech in Latin extolling Elizabeth's wisdom, learning and other virtues. Music played as she passed through Ludgate into Fleet Street, where she watched the final pageant, which portrayed Deborah, 'the judge and restorer of the House of Israel', who had been sent by God to rule His people wisely for forty years. Deborah was depicted wearing Parliament robes and sitting on a throne, consulting with the three estates of the realm as to how best to provide good government. A poem was presented to the Queen reminding her how Deborah had restored Truth in place of Error.

Elizabeth exhibited great interest and delight in the pageants, and constantly expressed her gratitude to her subjects, being genuinely touched by the welcome afforded her. When the crowds cheered, she waved at them with 'a merry countenance', repeating again and again, 'God save them all!' Several times along the way she demonstrated her humanity by stopping her litter to speak in the most 'tender and gentle language' to humble folk, or accept small gifts, such as posies of flowers offered by poor women. She kept a spray of rosemary, given by a woman supplicant at Fleet Bridge, beside her in the litter all the way to Westminster. Some foreign observers felt that she was over-familiar with her subjects and exceeded the bounds of decorum that preserved a monarch's dignity, but Elizabeth knew her people better. They were responding to her common touch, and if this was the way to win and retain their favour, then she would follow her instincts. Her father had

had such a way with him, and one person, seeing the resemblance, cried out, 'Remember old King Harry the Eighth?' Elizabeth was seen to smile at this.

'Be ye well assured, I will stand your good Queen. I wish neither prosperity nor safety to myself which might not be for our common good,' she declared to her people, and they knew she meant it. An old man turned away, but not before she had espied him weeping. 'I warrant you it is for gladness,' she told those close by.

At Temple Bar, which was surmounted for the occasion by two huge statues of figures from London mythology – Gogmagog the Albion and Corineus the Briton – the City authorities formally took their leave of Elizabeth, and a little child recited a poem, 'Farewell, O worthy Queen!' A pamphlet describing the events of the day came off the publisher Richard Tothill's press ten days later, and was much sought after as a souvenir of the occasion, running into three editions.

At the end of this long and triumphant day, Elizabeth came to the Palace of Westminster, where she lay that night.

Sunday, 15 January – Elizabeth's coronation day – was frosty and crisp, with a light covering of snow on the ground. The Queen emerged from Westminster Hall, wearing her coronation robes beneath a swirling mantle of embroidered silk lined with ermine, with fine silk and gold stockings and a crimson velvet cap adorned with Venice gold and pearls. To the joyous sound of fifes, drums, portable organs and all the bells of London's churches, she went in procession from Westminster Hall to the Abbey along a blue carpet beneath a canopy borne by the Barons of the Cinque Ports; she was followed by the Duchess of Norfolk, who bore her train. No sooner had Elizabeth passed than the crowds fell upon the carpet, tearing off pieces as souvenirs, and almost knocking over the hapless Duchess in the process.

Westminster Abbey glowed with the light of hundreds of torches and candles, which illumined the rich tapestries that had been hung on its walls, tapestries that had been commissioned by Henry VIII and based on designs by Raphael. Elizabeth's magnificent coronation service was notable not only for its glorious music, but also because it was the last in England to be conducted – at Bishop Oglethorpe's insistence – according to the medieval Latin rubric, although parts of it – the Epistle and Gospel – were read in English as well. Oglethorpe officiated, assisted by Dr Feckenham, the last Abbot of Westminster. During the mass, the Queen refused to be present at the elevation of the Host, and retired to a curtained pew in St Edward's Chapel until that part of the ritual was over, a gesture applauded by her hopeful Protestant subjects. Her coronation oath was administered from an English Bible held aloft by

William Cecil, although she was nevertheless proclaimed 'Defender of the True, Ancient, Catholic Faith'.

Nearly the whole peerage was present in the Abbey, and when the Queen was presented for her subjects' acceptance, there were such shouts of acclaim, and such thundering and crashing of organs, trumpets and bells that it seemed to some as if the end of the world had arrived. Elizabeth retired to change her gown during the lengthy ceremonies that followed, emerging after her anointing in crimson velvet surmounted by a mantle of cloth of gold. In this she sat enthroned, as the ring that symbolically wedded her to her people was placed upon the fourth finger of her right hand to the sound of trumpets. Then came the climax of the ceremonies, the crowning itself, when first St Edward's crown and then the imperial crown of England, weighing seven pounds, were placed in turn on Elizabeth's red head.

After the ceremonies were ended, Elizabeth, in full regalia and wearing a smaller crown – perhaps that made for Anne Boleyn in 1533 – and carrying the orb and sceptre, walked in procession back the way she had come, smiling broadly and shouting greetings to the enthusiastic crowds lining her way. 'In my opinion', sniffed the Mantuan ambassador, 'she exceeded the bounds of gravity and decorum.'

There followed the traditional lavish coronation banquet in Westminster Hall, a custom that ended with George IV in 1821. This lasted from three in the afternoon until one o'clock the next morning, and during it, as was customary, the Queen's Champion, Sir Edward Dymoke, rode into the Hall in full armour, daring any to challenge her title. The Queen presided from the high table, beneath a canopy of estate, having changed into yet another gown, this one of purple velvet. Music played throughout, and a delicious variety of dishes were served to her on bended knee by her great-uncle, Lord William Howard, and the Earl of Sussex. The nobility were permitted to keep their coronets on during the feasting, only uncovering when the Queen rose to drink their health, thanking them for all the trouble they had taken on her behalf.

On 16 January, because 'Her Majesty was feeling rather tired' and was suffering from a heavy cold, she postponed the tournament planned for that day, remaining in her Privy Chamber to sleep and attend to state business. The celebrations continued with banquets, masques, and a series of jousts held over the next few days, Robert Dudley being prominent among the contestants. Foreign observers were unanimously impressed with the coronation and its attendant festivities, which had been lavishly staged in order to give the impression that England was a land of great wealth and power. A full-faced portrait, which is no longer extant, of Elizabeth in coronation robes was painted, which was used as

a model for the image on her first Great Seal and early official documents; a later copy, dating from around 1600 and once at Warwick Castle, is now in the National Portrait Gallery.

Now that she was firmly established on her throne, Elizabeth turned her attention to the urgent matters of state that would be debated in her first Parliament. Two issues seemed likely to dominate the session: the controversial subject of religion, and the more delicate matter of the Queen's marriage. For most people, it was not a question of whether she would marry, but whom she would marry. Linked to this was the ongoing problem of the Tudor succession, which had exercised politicians' minds for four decades now; it was not clear who would succeed in the event of Elizabeth's early death.

On the political front there were hopes that a peace would be concluded with France, thereby frustrating those who wished to support the Dauphine Mary Stuart's dynastic claims and removing the necessity for French troops to remain in Scotland. Such a peace was rendered all the more necessary by the news that on 16 January Mary and her husband had begun styling themselves King and Queen of England. Yet it was also imperative that England maintain her friendship with Spain in order to safeguard the lucrative trading links between the two powers and perhaps obtain protection against French ambitions. It was obvious to the Queen from the first that her success in the field of diplomacy would depend upon playing off those bitter enemies France and Spain one against the other.

Lack of money was a major problem that would have to be addressed. Elizabeth's annual income was about £250,000, out of which she had to finance the needs of court and government and pay off Queen Mary's debts of £266,000. Prices were rising all the time, yet Elizabeth set herself to live within her means by practising the most stringent economies and selling off Crown lands. As a result, her annual expenditure never exceeded £300,000 throughout her reign.

Elizabeth went in state wearing her coronation robes, attended by forty-six peers, to open her first Parliament on 25 January 1559, after postponing the ceremony for two days because of her cold and the atrocious weather, which had delayed the arrival in London of many MPs. De Feria informed King Philip that 'the Catholics are very fearful of the measures to be taken in this Parliament' and Elizabeth's own behaviour gave a hint of what was to come. On her way to the House of Lords for the opening of the new session she was met by the Abbot of Westminster at the head of his monks, all carrying lighted tapers, symbols of the old faith that were frowned upon by Protestant divines.

'Away with those tapers!' snapped the Queen tartly. 'We see well

enough!' As she was standing on sanctified ground, the Abbot was profoundly shocked by her words. Still in a bad mood, she stamped to her throne by the high altar in the Abbey, and was only partially mollified when she heard Dr Richard Cox, formerly tutor to King Edward VI, preach a vituperative sermon against monks in general, accusing them of participating in the burning of Protestants. God, he thundered, had raised His servant Elizabeth to the dignity of Queen that she might put an end to the Catholic practices restored by Queen Mary, and he urged her to cast down all images of the saints, to purify her churches of idolatry, and dissolve all religious houses re-established by Mary. Cox ranted on for an hour and a half, while the Queen, who hated sermons, fidgeted and became increasingly irritated, and the peers stood sweating in their robes.

Once enthroned in Parliament in a chair padded with gold cushions, Elizabeth made it clear that she would not brook any presumptuous behaviour from members of the Commons, many of whom expected a female sovereign to be tractable and easily manipulated.

One of the first Acts passed by Queen Mary had been one declaring herself legitimate, Henry VIII having decreed that his marriage to her mother had never been lawful. Elizabeth was in a similar situation: bastardised in 1536, she had been 'excluded and barred' by statute from the succession. This had never been repealed, although in his 1544 Act of Succession Henry named her as his heir after Edward and Mary. Hence Elizabeth's title to the throne was open to question, and she consulted Sir Nicholas Bacon as to whether she should take steps to legitimise herself. His advice was to let sleeping dogs lie, and she took it, but the taint of her bastardy, and its implications for the security of her throne, was to remain a sensitive subject with her to the end of her days.

The succession was another sensitive issue. The Tudors were not a fertile family and there was a dearth of suitable heirs to replace the Queen should she die childless. The 1544 Act and Henry VIII's will provided that, after Elizabeth, the crown should pass to the heirs of his younger sister Mary, Duchess of Suffolk. Mary had left two daughters, Frances and Eleanor Brandon. The elder, Frances, had produced three daughters, one of whom had been the ill-fated Lady Jane Grey. The two other daughters were Lady Katherine and Lady Mary Grey, aged nineteen and fourteen respectively in 1559.

Both were Protestants but Elizabeth heartily disliked them, especially Katherine – 'the Queen could not abide the sight of her'. She was particularly suspicious of their dynastic pretensions, and perhaps with cause, for in 1559 there were rumours that King Philip, aware that Lady Katherine Grey had the strongest claim to the English succession, was plotting to abduct her and make her the wife of his heir, the degenerate