

Two

Royal

Elizabeths

by MARTHA LOUISE BLACK, O.B.E.



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England was first settled before the days of Canute by a group of religious people who had come from the South to what was then called "Thorney Island." This island, at that time, we are told, was a small bit of marshland, and what the escaped refugees

most wished for was peace and quiet.

We all remember the story of Canute, who had his royal throne set on the edge of the marshland while he commanded the waves to recede. Dame Rumour has had two different stories as to the success of his royal command — one that a sudden and violent storm was interrupted and all danger to the mainland finished. History in all these years had a habit of changing facts to alter the wishes of those strong enough to enforce their opinions, but be that as it may, from time to time, the ingenuity and ability of man has rendered the “tight little island” a safeguard for all needing refuge.

In view of the approaching coronation of our second Elizabeth, it is natural and meet that we of the British Empire should turn back the pages of history to the days of the first Royal Elizabeth, giving even more than a casual glance to the succeeding sovereigns and finally to make something of a more or less comparative study of the lives and upbringing of Elizabeth I and of Elizabeth II.

Elizabeth I was born of a union between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, a young and reputedly outstandingly beautiful woman,

belonging to the court circles, with no preparation for the Royal position she was suddenly to adorn. She was married in her youth to Henry VIII, a man in his early twenties, the son of his times, with little or no sense of duty or pride in his position. At the end of the thirty-eighth year of his reign and at the age of fifty-six, Henry was a swollen, hideous spectacle, so offensive to every sense that it was difficult to approach him.

At school, St. Mary's Academy, as it was then, but now a college situated within the sound of the bells of Notre Dame, Indiana, my teacher, an English woman, laid great stress on English history, introducing us to Agnes Strickland's "Queens of England," Charles Dickens and the usual school books. We were a flippant group and I have not forgotten our account of Henry VIII:

"Divorced, beheaded, died,
Divorced, beheaded, survived."

When the Sister heard us chant that doggerel, I well remember her reproof, "Young ladies, you would do better to say a few words of prayer for the repose of the souls of those poor women."

Henry VIII was followed by his son,

Edward VI, who reigned for a short period and died in his youth. Lady Jane Gray was then proclaimed Queen, but held that honour for only a matter of days before she was eventually sent to the block. Then Mary, to be known for all times as "Bloody Mary", was proclaimed Queen. She had been married to a Spanish prince who cared little or nothing about her and, whenever he revisited his country, made fun of her.

On the death of Mary, Elizabeth was proclaimed Queen by the people generally. Before his death, Henry VIII had created both Mary and Elizabeth Princesses of Wales, and did all in his royal power to assure their succession to his throne.

Elizabeth I owed much to her stepmother, Henry's first wife, who helped her with her lessons and was in many ways kindly considerate to the motherless child who had been told of her mother's fate.

During the lifetime of Bloody Mary, Elizabeth was never quite sure what fate was to be hers. The relations of the Roman Catholic Church and the English Protestant Church were of the worst possible kind. Persecution followed persecution, beheading and murder done by both churches.





ELIZABETH I

1558-1603



ELIZABETH II

1952



At one time, Elizabeth was so anxious about her own fate that she was dreadfully ill, but decided to attend Mass and receive instructions in the Roman Catholic faith. Fortunately for her sake, Bloody Mary soon passed on to a greater judge.

The British Empire has been laid on the human foundation of mistakes, weaknesses, murder, rapine, theft and utter lack of honour or consideration, yet withal, tinged by occasional high lights of unselfish Christian respect, largely depending on the age of the Empire.

The beheadings, the official murders and the horrible tortures and cruelties inflicted on high and low alike changed and had almost disappeared before the reign of Victoria. It may be that the change arose from the feeling of the people themselves. They were worn out and exhausted by high taxation, the wars with other countries, the horrible persecutions, all brought about in the name of Our Lord, the Prince of Peace.

The long reign of Victoria will always remain outstanding in British history. She had been most strictly brought up, with little freedom for friends. She became known as "Victoria the Good." To her ministers and advisors she undoubtedly

owed a great amount of her success, but outstanding credit should be given to the Jew, Disraeli, who managed so cleverly to steer a simple course between all sections of the country, and as well to the man she later married, a distant cousin, Albert of Saxe-Coburg. The ceremony was celebrated in Westminster Abbey with pomp and elegance. The Queen very quickly decided that Albert was to be the King Consort, but the stodgy and determined Royal Ministers and officials decided otherwise, and it was many years before the Prince was made consort. By that time Her Royal Highness had learned that even though Queen of England, there were many royal-ties and semi-royalties who were not willing to take orders. "The sands of time move slowly, but they move exceeding sure."

Her Majesty's husband proved an enormous boon to the Empire. She was genuinely and entirely in love with the young man, although it cannot be said that she immediately gave up her wishes. An interesting and amusing story belongs to her reign.

With most husbands and wives there are occasional tiffs and exchange of words. It is told that the Queen on one occasion took so positive a view that she ordered the

Prince from the room. In the course of a short time, Victoria went to the room, rapping on his apartment door. The husband, not to be disturbed, eventually asked, after several knockings, "Who is there?" The reply was made, "The Queen." The answer came back instantly, "The Prince is engaged." Knowing what we do of the Queen's temperament and disposition, it is not difficult to appreciate her thought, but on a second reply to his question as to who was at the door she answered very readily, "The Queen," she received the same response. Not to be finished off positively, the Queen swallowed her Royal pride, returned to her husband's apartment the third time, giving a little rap. It was again asked, "Who wishes to see me?" and Victoria, the Good, this time answered, "Your wife." The door was immediately flung open and again all was well with the Royal lovers. The course of true love is not expected to run any more smoothly in a palace than in the homes of common people.

From the day of Prince Albert's death, Queen Victoria continued to mourn her loss.

From the reign of Victoria, it can be truly said the Golden Age for England

dawned. Gradually the semi-slavery of the working classes was relieved. Before then children were obliged to work in factories from twelve to eighteen hours a day, and to all workers a mere pittance was paid, forcing them to live in poverty and distress.

The Prince Consort brought those conditions and abuses to the knowledge of the Queen, who did what she could to improve them. At the insistence of the Prince, the Crystal Palace was built, bringing to England many distinguished visitors with thousands of much-needed pounds.

The Prince Consort was well named, "Albert the Good."

With the accession of the new ruler comparative peace once again descended on Thorney Island. As time went on there seemed to be very few anxious to resume or take up the old quarrels and religious bickerings. To my mind, after reading my English history for many years, I have not yet been able to determine whether the Roman Catholics or the English Protestants deserve the greatest blame for the horrors that both parties brought to the world. It was merely again the unfortunate part of human nature. Save of late occasional war scares from the Asiatic, rumours of wars are

not a necessary adjunct of day-to-day living.

The present regime that has already taken place with Elizabeth II owes much to the Royal Family (a mixture of German, English, Scottish, Danish blood with just a spike of French) and has been particularly fortunate in the upbringing of the family.

The brief reign of Edward VIII, so popular as Prince of Wales, was terminated by weakness seldom understood by the British people, and brought to a finish by the young King's declaration that he would abdicate the throne rather than give up the woman he loved. He married an American woman, who had been divorced twice, belonging to what might be called the upper middle class of the United States. Evidently neither party attracted the overwhelming support or attention of either the people of England or of the United States, and the occupancy of the throne was soon to be filled properly by his brother, who had married a Scottish girl, not only a titled woman, but a woman of rare distinction who understood and appreciated the position which she had been called to fill. Their oldest child is our present Sovereign, Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth, the

second Elizabeth to be crowned Queen.

The Queen Mother, Mary of Teck, deserves great credit for the care and effort with which she assisted the mother in bringing up her oldest daughter to fulfil a position she had not expected to be obliged to take for her Empire.

There seems to be little or no doubt that the late King George VI died as the result of the unusually heavy burden thrust on his shoulders by the abdication of the Duke of Windsor.

With the coming of the Coronation, which will in a very few months celebrate the crowning of our second Queen Elizabeth, a woman of irreproachable character, trained from infancy by her parents and grandmother, Queen Mary, to fill with all qualifications necessary the position of Queen of England and the Empires beyond the Seas, dawns once more a new and vastly different era of "Elizabeth the Queen."

All of her subjects wish her and her splendid Consort, the Duke of Edinburgh, a reign well beloved and respected by their subjects, coupled with the necessary determination and sincerity of purpose to fill their two great positions.

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN

