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Queen "Bloody" Mary Versus Good Queen Bess

England was on the brink of civil war when, after their father and brother's deaths, Mary I and Elizabeth I were both facing the loss of their inheritance and their individual chance to rule. However, these two women proved to be formidable opponents when someone was trying to take their crown. Although they came together in their mutual time of need, their differences in religion soon drove a wedge between the sisters that would never be mended. Personal appearance and personality, religion, and views on marriage were the most important differences between Mary I and Elizabeth I.

Queen Mary I of England left a strong impression on anyone she met. Mary was thirty-seven (Starkey 123) by the time that she finally came to the throne. She was said to be short with eyes that could "inspire reverence, respect, and even fear." Mary wasn't very pretty and had a deep, manlike voice (Starkey 214). She was very loyal to her religion and to the people that she loved. As a righteous, kind, and careful woman, some say that Mary would probably have been more at home in a convent than ruling a country (Hibbert 114-115).

She was always known to have a strong faith, and she wanted all of her subjects to follow her example. Mary was determined to bring her followers to God, and she knew only one way that could be achieved (Hibbert 115). Therefore, Mary quickly began her self-set task of bringing Catholicism back to England. Then she began putting heretics on trial and then burning them at the stake ("Mary I"). The persecution of Protestants lasted for almost four years, killing

283 people (“Mary I of England”). The people who died by burning became martyrs, and those who survived only increased in loathing of their queen. It was these deaths that earned her the nickname “Bloody Mary” (“Mary I”), even though Mary thought they were necessary to save her subjects (Hibbert 115). Mary even persuaded Parliament to eliminate the religious laws passed by her father and brother (“Mary I of England”).

Mary had been betrothed to many different suitors by her father, but when she became queen, it was her turn to pick her husband. By the time she had come to her crown, Mary was far past her prime childbearing years (Starkey 123). Therefore, she was in a hurry to marry and produce an heir so that her Protestant half-sister wouldn’t follow her to the throne (“Mary I of England”). Without a king, Mary also indicated that she somehow thought that her own queenship was flawed (Starkey 123). Mary was presented with two main suitors, one Englishman with royal blood and one Spanish prince. She married the Spaniard, Philip, as advised by her cousin, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (“Mary I of England”). All of her subjects, even the Catholic ones (“Queen ‘Bloody’ Mary”), opposed the marriage because they feared being under Spanish control. But Philip’s power was extremely limited by the marriage treaty (“Mary I of England”).

Mary I and Elizabeth’s differences extended to every aspect of their individual lives, including looks and personality. Elizabeth was tall, pretty, and pale. She was also said to have nice hands, which she never hid (Starkey 215). Elizabeth took great pleasure in learning about anything that was considered intelligent. She was engaging, quick-witted, and determined (“Elizabeth I of England”). However, some said that Elizabeth was egocentric and that she would “irritably slap her ladies . . . when they annoyed her.” She constantly insisted on getting her own way, never wanted to make up her mind, and then always changed it. When something

went wrong, she would constantly blame it on someone else, but when something was well done, she would want the credit for herself every time (Hibbert 117).

Religion was a big part of English life at the time, and like her father and her brother before her, Elizabeth was a firm believer in the Protestant religion. In 1559, the year that Elizabeth came to the throne, two religious bills were passed, the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Uniformity. The Act of Supremacy named Elizabeth I as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. But many prominent people of the time felt that a woman could not be put at the head of a church. Elizabeth made many compromises to her initial draft of the Act of Uniformity, which was known as the Reformation Bill, in order to get it passed. She then went back, with one of her most-trusted advisors, and made more additions to the Religious Settlement in order to make it more acceptable to the Catholics under her rule. No matter how much pressure Elizabeth received, she never changed the Settlement, and with that Settlement, she set the basis for the current Church of England (“Elizabeth I of England”).

Elizabeth never felt the need to marry in order to secure her queenship. The fact that Elizabeth never married gave her the nickname of the Virgin Queen. It is not exactly known why she never married. One of the most likely reasons for her never marrying was probably for fear of repeating the same mistakes her sister made in marrying a foreign prince and getting mixed up in his wars. She also probably didn't want to share her power. Also, her reign has always been surrounded by rumors of her and Robert Dudley, a man far below her own rank because of his family's betrayal to the royal house. And some say that maybe the reason she never married was because she loved only him and would never marry anyone other than him (“Elizabeth I of England”).

Mary I was short and careful, while Elizabeth was tall and engaging. Mary was Catholic; Elizabeth was Protestant. Mary married a foreign prince and was dragged into his wars, but Elizabeth remained single and never had to share power. They were unique individuals in everything from their appearances to their personalities to their views on religion to their views on marriage.

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