



# ELIZABETH I, THE ARMADA, AND “THE BLACK LEGEND”

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1533	Born
1558	Succeeded to the throne
1587	Execution of Mary Stuart
1588	Defeat of Spanish Armada
1603	Died

She had a sharp tongue, a vile temper, almost no feminine delicacy, and little or no feminine modesty. Of personal loyalty and affection she seems to have commanded little or none.<sup>1</sup> The woman thus so unflatteringly described was Elizabeth I, Queen of England; the describer, Conyers Read, the most eminent American scholar of Tudor England. And yet Read goes on to point out, as he did in a dozen other works, that Elizabeth was “Good Queen Bess” to the great bulk of her subjects and that she has held an unrivaled place in the affections of the English since the end of the sixteenth century. Most other modern Elizabethan scholars would agree. They would also agree that despite their own learned assessments of the importance of one aspect or another of Elizabeth’s reign—her management of the economy, her relations with Parliament, her domestic religious settlement—the most enduring of all Elizabethan traditions is that of Elizabeth and her England pitted against the Spain of Philip II, culminating in the dramatic English victory over the Spanish Armada in the late summer of the year 1588.

This hardy tradition has its origin in the Armada fight itself and in the events surrounding it. English hostility to Spain was growing for a number of reasons: sympathy for the beleaguered French Huguenots and the Protestants of Holland locked in their own desperate struggle

<sup>1</sup>Conyers Read, “Good Queen Bess,” *American Historical Review*, 31 (1926), 649.

with Philip; the undeclared sea war with Spain that English privateers and pirates had already been carrying on for a generation; as well as the gnawing fear of a domestic fifth column of Spanish spies and English Catholics ready to betray their country for the sake of their religion. Holinshed's famous *Chronicle*, for example, quotes a speech given by one "Maister James Dalton" in the year 1586 having to do with the designs of certain captive traitors and Spanish sympathizers, one of whom "vomited these prophane words out of his vncircumcised mouth; that it was lawfull for anie of worship in England, to authorise the vilest wretch that is, to seeke the death of hir highnese whose prosperous estate the italish préest and Spanish prince doo so maligne." Dalton goes on to decry "an inuasion long since pretended" and the popish threats "that would burn hir bones, and the bones of all such as loued hir, either alive or dead [and] that this was to de doone, when they held the sterne of gouvernement; which shall be, when errant traitors are good subjects, and ranke knaues honest men."<sup>2</sup>

In the years immediately following the Armada, such sentiments were even more strongly voiced. Sir Walter Raleigh in his spirited account of "The Last Fight of the Revenge," written in 1591, spoke of "how irreligiously [the Spanish] cover their greedy and ambitious pretences with that veil of piety," and how they "more greedily thirst after English blood than after the lives of any other people of Europe, for the many overthrowes and dishonours they have received at our hands, whose weakness we have discovered to the world, and whose forces at home, abroad, in Europe, in India, by sea and land, we have even with handfulls of men and ships over thrown and dishonoured."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, by the end of the sixteenth century, the major elements of what modern Hispanic scholars have come to call "The Black Legend" were substantially formed: Spain was England's implacable enemy, cruel in victory, craven in defeat; Spaniards were treacherous and cowardly, made more so by their "popery"; and, though outmanned and out-gunned, English ships could either defeat Spanish ships or, if not, at least show how "beardless boys" could go to heroic death. The center of the legend was the Armada, which, "more than any other event, implanted anti-Hispanism in the English consciousness."<sup>4</sup> And Queen Elizabeth became the exemplar of the virtues of her nation and the symbol of its hostility to Spain.

<sup>2</sup>Holinshed's *Chronicle* (London, 1808; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1965), IV, 920.

<sup>3</sup>Sir Walter Raleigh, *Selected Prose and Poetry*, ed. Agnes M. C. Latham (London: University of London-Athlone Press, 1965), pp. 85, 87.

<sup>4</sup>William S. Maltby, *The Black Legend in England: The Development of Anti-Spanish Sentiment, 1558-1660* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1971), p. 84.

## The Legendary Elizabeth

SIR FRANCIS BACON

Elizabeth's "Gloriana" image was a bit tarnished during the last years of her reign by grievances that had finally begun to surface, by the residue of unfulfilled hopes and unredeemed promises, and by a general restlessness after almost half a century of her rule. But the succession of her Stuart cousin James I shortly restored Elizabeth's luster. The Elizabethan Age and Elizabeth herself assumed heroic stature when compared with James I, "who feared his own shadow and manifested such unkingly habits as drivelling at the mouth, picking his nose, and closeting himself with pretty young men."<sup>5</sup> Yet it was not his personal habits, no matter how offensive, not even his penchant for playing at "kingcraft" or the muddle he made of the religious settlement that most alienated James's English subjects; it was his resolution to abandon the tradition of hostility to Spain, indeed to court a Spanish-Catholic alliance.

Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was a functionary of James's court and one of the leading men of affairs in the new reign. But he had also been a figure of Elizabeth's court and a member of Parliament during the Armada. Though he had not advanced under Elizabeth as grandly as he thought his merits deserved, still, looking back to her reign, even the cold and analytical Bacon could not help being moved. In the summer of 1608, the year following his appointment by James as Solicitor General, Bacon wrote in Latin a memorial to Elizabeth that he titled "On the Fortunate Memory of Elizabeth Queen of England." He circulated the piece privately to a few friends but provided that it be published only after his death. Bacon was not only a stupendous genius but also a good judge of his own advantage.

"On the Fortunate Memory of Elizabeth Queen of England" is of considerable interest because it is the mature reflection of one who had been close to the center of events. The memorial is equally important because it shows a renewed interest in "the heroic Elizabeth" in the light of her unheroic successor and the new foreign and religious policies he was already considering. Bacon was writing a memorial not only to Elizabeth but to an age of giants now sadly past.

<sup>5</sup>Lacey Baldwin Smith, *The Elizabethan World* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), pp. 204-5.

I account . . . as no small part of Elizabeth's felicity the period and compass of her administration; not only for its length, but as falling within that portion of her life which was fittest for the control of affairs and the handling of the reins of government. She was twenty-five years old (the age at which guardianship ceases) when she began to reign, and she continued reigning until her seventieth year; so that she never experienced either the disadvantages and subjection to other men's wills incident to a ward, nor the inconveniences of a lingering and impotent old age. . . .

Nor must it be forgotten withal among what kind of people she reigned; for had she been called to rule over Palmyrenes or in an unwarlike and effeminate country like Asia, the wonder would have been less; a womanish people might well enough be governed by a woman; but that in England, a nation particularly fierce and warlike, all things could be swayed and controlled at the beck of a woman, is a matter for the highest admiration.

Observe too that this same humour of her people, ever eager for war and impatient of peace, did not prevent her from cultivating and maintaining peace during the whole time of her reign. And this her desire of peace, together with the success of it, I count among her greatest praises; as a thing happy for her times, becoming to her sex, and salutary for her conscience. . . .

And this peace I regard as more especially flourishing from two circumstances that attended it, and which though they have nothing to do with the merit of peace, add much to the glory of it. The one, that the calamities of her neighbours were as fires to make it more conspicuous and illustrious; the other that the benefits of peace were not unaccompanied with honour of war,—the reputation of England for arms and military prowess being by many noble deeds, not only maintained by her, but increased. For the aids sent to the Low Countries, to France, and to Scotland; the naval expeditions to both the Indies, some of which sailed all round the globe; the fleets despatched to Portugal and to harass the coasts of Spain; the many defeats and overthrows of the rebels in Ireland;—all these had the effect of keeping both the warlike virtues of our nation in full vigour and its fame and honour in full lustre.

Which glory had likewise, this merit attached,—that while neighbour kings on the one side owed the preservation of their kingdoms to her timely succours; suppliant peoples on the other, given up by ill-advised princes to the cruelty of their ministers, to the fury of the populace, and to every kind of spoliation and devastation, received relief in their misery; by means of which they stand to this day.

Nor were her counsels less beneficent and salutary than her succours; witness her remonstrances so frequently addressed to the

King of Spain that he would moderate his anger against his subjects in the Low Countries, and admit them to return to their allegiance under conditions not intolerable; and her continual warnings and earnest solicitations addressed to the kings of France that they would observe their edicts of pacification. That her counsel was in both cases unsuccessful, I do not deny. The common fate of Europe did not suffer it to succeed in the first; for so the ambition of Spain, being released as it were from prison, would have been free to spend itself (as things then were) upon the ruin of the kingdoms and commonwealths of Christendom. The blood of so many innocent persons, slaughtered with their wives and children at their hearths and in their beds by the vilest rabble, like so many brute beasts animated, armed, and set on by public authority, forbade it in the other; that innocent blood demanding in just revenge that the kingdom which had been guilty of so atrocious a crime should expiate it by mutual slaughters and massacres. But however that might be, she was not the less true to her own part, in performing the office of an ally both wise and benevolent.

Upon another account also this peace so cultivated and maintained by Elizabeth is a matter of admiration; namely, that it proceeded not from any inclination of the times to peace, but from her own prudence and good management. For in a kingdom laboring with intestine faction on account of religion, and standing as a shield and stronghold of defence against the then formidable and overbearing ambition of Spain, matter for war was nowise wanting; it was she who by her forces and her counsels combined kept it under; as was proved by an event the most memorable in respect of felicity of all the actions of our time. For when the Spanish fleet, got up with such travail and ferment, waited upon with the terror and expectation of all Europe, inspired with such confidence of victory, came ploughing into our channels, it never took so much as a cockboat at sea, never fired so much as a cottage on the land, never even touched the shore; but was first beaten in a battle and then dispersed and wasted in a miserable flight with many shipwrecks; while on the ground and territories of England peace remained undisturbed and unshaken.

Nor was she less fortunate in escaping the treacherous attempts of conspirators than in defeating and repelling the forces of the enemy. For not a few conspiracies aimed at her life were in the happiest manner both detected and defeated; and yet was not her life made thereby more alarmed or anxious; there was no increase in the number of her guards; no keeping within her palace and seldom going abroad; but still secure and confident, and thinking more of the escape than of the danger, she held her wonted course, and made no change in her way of life.

Worthy of remark too is the nature of the times in which she flourished. For there are some times so barbarous and ignorant that it is as easy a matter to govern men as to drive a flock of sheep. But the lot of this Queen fell upon times highly instructed and cultivated, in which it is not possible to be eminent and excellent without the greatest gifts of mind and a singular composition of virtue. . . .

With regard to her moderation in religion there may seem to be a difficulty, on account of the severity of the laws made against popish subjects. But on this point I have some things to advance which I myself carefully observed and know to be true.

Her intention undoubtedly was, on the one hand not to force consciences, but on the other not to let the state, under pretence of conscience and religion, be brought in danger. Upon this ground she concluded at the first that, in a people courageous and warlike and prompt to pass from strife of minds to strife of hands, the free allowance and toleration by public authority of two religions would be certain destruction. Some of the more turbulent and factious bishops also she did, in the newness of her reign when all things were subject to suspicion—but not without legal warrant—restrain and keep in free custody. The rest, both clergy and laity, far from troubling them with any severe inquisition, she sheltered by a gracious connivency. This was the condition of affairs at first. Nor even when provoked by the excommunication pronounced against her by Pius Quintus (an act sufficient not only to have roused indignation but to have furnished ground and matter for a new course of proceeding), did she depart almost at all from this clemency, but persevered in the course which was agreeable to her own nature. For being both wise and of a high spirit, she was little moved with the sound of such terrors; knowing she could depend upon the loyalty and love of her own people, and upon the small power the popish party within the realm had to do harm, as long as they were not seconded by a foreign enemy. About the twenty-third year of her reign, however, the case was changed. And this distinction of time is not artificially devised to make things fit, but expressed and engraved in public acts.

For up to that year there was no penalty of a grievous kind imposed by previous laws upon popish subjects. But just then the ambitious and vast design of Spain for the subjugation of the kingdom came gradually to light. . . .

. . . It is true, and proved by the confession of many witnesses, that from the year I have mentioned to the thirtieth of Elizabeth[’s reign] (when the design of Spain and the Pope was put in execution by that memorable armada of land and sea forces) almost all the priests who were sent over to this country were charged among the other offices belonging to their function, to insinuate that matters could

not long stay as they were, that a new aspect and turn of things would be seen shortly, and that the state of England was cared for both by the Pope and the Catholic princes, if the English would but be true to themselves. . . .

. . . This so great a tempest of dangers made it a kind of necessity for Elizabeth to put some severer constraint upon that party of her subjects which was estranged from her and by these means poisoned beyond recovery, and was at the same time growing rich by reason of their immunity from public offices and burdens. And as the mischief increased, the origin of it being traced to the seminary priests, who were bred in foreign parts, and supported by the purses and charities of foreign princes, professed enemies of this kingdom, and whose time had been passed in places where the very name of Elizabeth was never heard except as that of a heretic excommunicated and accursed. and who (if not themselves stained with treason) were the acknowledged intimates of those that were directly engaged in such crimes, and had by their own arts and poisons depraved and soured with a new leaven of malignity the whole lump of Catholics, which had before been more sweet and harmless; there was no remedy for it but that men of this class should be prohibited upon pain of death from coming into the kingdom at all; which at last, in the twenty-seventh year of her reign, was done. Nor did the event itself which followed not long after, when so great a tempest assailed and fell with all its fury upon the kingdom, tend in any degree to mitigate the envy and hatred of these men: but rather increased it, as if they had utterly cast off all feeling for their country, which they were ready to betray to a foreign servitude. . . .

## The “New” Elizabeth

JAMES ANTHONY FROUDE

James Anthony Froude (1818–1894), for all the criticism he received—his Oxford rival E. A. Freeman called him “the vilest brute that ever wrote a book”<sup>6</sup>—was surely one of the most influential historians “that ever wrote a book.” The book on which both his reputation and his influence most firmly rest is his massive, twelve-

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in F. Smith Fussner, *Tudor History and Historians* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), p. 55.

volume *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada*. Froude began work on it about 1850, and it was published in two-volume installments roughly every other year between 1856 and 1870 to a rising chorus of popular acclaim. Ignoring the factual inaccuracies that bothered Froude's fellow scholars, the public was delighted by his preference for advocacy rather than objectivity. The people tended to agree with Froude that history proclaimed, or should proclaim, "the laws of right and wrong." Moreover, they agreed that right resided in the Church of England and wrong, more often than not, in the Church of Rome. If proof was needed for their prejudices—or his—it was abundantly available in the profusion of facts that crowded Froude's *History* and gave it an unequalled sense of authenticity. For Froude was one of the first modern British historians to go extensively to the original sources for his research; he was aided by the fact that only in his lifetime was the great mass of English public documents of the Tudor Age at last being systematically edited and published.

Froude considered the Tudor Age to be the pivot of all English history. The topical limits he set to his own great *History* display his thesis. The fall of Wolsey and Henry VIII's break with Rome marked the start of the English Reformation; the defeat of the Spanish Armada marked the triumph of English Protestantism and the beginning of England's supremacy in the modern world. Like his lifelong friend Carlyle, Froude was more impressed with people than with large economic or social forces. Heroic people accomplish heroic deeds. Henry VIII was Froude's hero, standing stalwart and unblinking at the beginning of his narrative. At the other end stood the most heroic deed in English history, the defeat of the Armada. Yet careful research revealed that Elizabeth, Henry's daughter, was—at least by Froude's standards—considerably less than heroic. Where Henry had been defiant, Elizabeth preferred to negotiate. Where Henry had carried the fight to the enemy, Elizabeth was suspicious of fighting and more than reluctant to throw her resources into the great national effort against Spain. Even when the fight was inevitable, she was stingy of her support and vacillating in her resolve. Worst of all, Froude found her, at the most charitable, to be a guarded and circumstantial Protestant, perhaps even a crypto-Catholic. If Henry VIII was Froude's hero, Elizabeth was his burden. In order to reconcile his low opinion of Elizabeth with the importance he attached to the Armada, Froude made the triumph over the Armada a victory "in spite of" Elizabeth, the product of the patient policy of her great Protestant advisers and the selfless heroism of her seamen.

It may be charged that Froude, more than most historians, took his conclusions to his sources and then found them there. But this

failing is surely not unique with him. Even his severest critics today admit that Froude's *History* is "one of the great masterpieces of English historical literature,"<sup>7</sup> that it is "a classic"<sup>8</sup> for its period, and that "more than any other nineteenth-century English historian James Anthony Froude set the nineteenth-century version of Tudor history."<sup>9</sup> An indispensable part of that version was Froude's equivocal image of the "new" Elizabeth.

We turn now to the summation of Froude's account of Elizabeth and the Armada, from the conclusion of his *History*.

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It had been my intention to continue this history to the close of Elizabeth's life. The years which followed the defeat of the Armada were rich in events of profound national importance. They were years of splendour and triumph. The flag of England became supreme on the seas; English commerce penetrated to the farthest corners of the Old World, and English colonies rooted themselves on the shores of the New. The national intellect, strung by the excitement of sixty years, took shape in a literature which is an eternal possession of mankind, while the incipient struggles of the two parties in the Anglican Church prepared the way for the conflicts of the coming century, and the second act of Reformation. But I have presumed too far already on the forbearance of my readers in the length to which I have run, and these subjects, intensely interesting as they are, lie beyond the purpose of the present work. My object, as I defined it at the outset, was to describe the transition from the Catholic England with which the century opened, the England of a dominant Church and monasteries and pilgrimages, into the England of progressive intelligence; and the question whether the nation was to pass a second time through the face of a reconciliation with Rome, was answered once and for ever by the cannon of Sir Francis Drake. The action before Gravelines of the 30th of July, 1588, decided the largest problems ever submitted in the history of mankind to the arbitrement of force. Beyond and beside the immediate fate of England, it decided that Philip's revolted Provinces should never be reannexed to the Spanish Crown. It broke the back of Spain, sealed the fate of the Duke of Guise,<sup>10</sup> and though it could not prevent the civil war, it

<sup>7</sup>Conyers Read, *Bibliography of British History: Tudor Period, 1485–1603*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 30.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>Fussner, p. 55.

<sup>10</sup>The leader of the radical Catholic League in the French Wars of Religion.—Ed.

assured the ultimate succession of the King of Navarre.<sup>11</sup> In its remoter consequences it determined the fate of the Reformation in Germany; for had Philip been victorious the League must have been immediately triumphant; the power of France would have been on the side of Spain and the Jesuits, and the thirty years' war would either have never been begun, or would have been brought to a swift conclusion. It furnished James of Scotland with conclusive reasons for remaining a Protestant, and for eschewing for ever the forbidden fruit of Popery; and thus it secured his tranquil accession to the throne of England when Elizabeth passed away. Finally, it was the sermon which completed the conversion of the English nation, and transformed the Catholics into Anglicans. . . .

. . . The coming of the Armada was an appeal on behalf of the Pope to the ordeal of battle and the defeat of Spain with its appalling features, the letting loose of the power of the tempests—the special weapons of the Almighty—to finish the work which Drake had but half completed, was accepted as a recorded judgment of heaven. The magnitude of the catastrophe took possession of the nation's imagination. . . . Had the Spanish invasion succeeded, however, had it succeeded even partially in crushing Holland and giving France to the League and the Duke of Guise, England might not have recovered from the blow, and it might have fared with Teutonic Europe as it fared with France on the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Either Protestantism would have been trampled out altogether, or expelled from Europe to find a home in a new continent; and the Church, insolent with another century or two of power, would have been left to encounter the inevitable ultimate revolution which is now its terror, with no reformed Christianity surviving to hold the balance between atheism and superstition.

The starved and ragged English seamen, so ill furnished by their sovereign that they were obliged to take from their enemies the means of fighting them, decided otherwise; they and the winds and the waves, which are said ever to be on the side of the brave. In their victory they conquered not the Spaniards only, but the weakness of their Queen. Either she had been incredulous before that Philip would indeed invade her, or she had underrated the power of her people: or she discerned that the destruction of the Spanish fleet had created at last an irreparable breach with the Catholic governments. At any rate there was no more unwholesome hankering after compromise, no more unqueenly avarice or reluctance to spend her treasure in the cause of freedom. The strength and resources of England were

flung heartily into the war, and all the men and all the money it could spare was given freely to the United Provinces and the King of Navarre. The struggle lasted into the coming century. Elizabeth never saw peace with Spain again. But the nation throve with its gathering glory. The war on the part of England was aggressive thenceforward. One more great attempt was made by Philip in Ireland, but only to fail miserably, and the shores of England were never seriously threatened again. Portugal was invaded, and Cadiz burnt, Spanish commerce made the prey of privateers, and the proud galleons chased from off the ocean. In the Low Countries the tide of reconquest had reached its flood, and thenceforward ebbed slowly back, while in France the English and the Huguenots fought side by side against the League and Philip. . . .

[Yet] for Protestantism Elizabeth had never concealed her dislike and contempt. She hated to acknowledge any fellowship in religion either with Scots, Dutch, or Huguenots. She represented herself to foreign Ambassadors as a Catholic in everything, except in allegiance to the Papacy. Even for the Church of England, of which she was the supreme governor, she affected no particular respect. She left the Catholics in her household so unrestrained that they absented themselves at pleasure from the Royal Chapel, without a question being asked. She allowed the country gentlemen all possible latitude in their own houses. The danger in which she had lived for so many years, the severe measures to which she was driven against the seminary priests, and the consciousness that the Protestants were the only subjects she had on whose loyalty she could rely, had prevented her hitherto from systematically repressing the Puritan irregularities; but the power to persecute had been wanting rather than the inclination. The Bishops with whom she had filled the sees at her accession were chosen necessarily from the party who had suffered under her sister. They were Calvinists or Lutherans, with no special reverence for the office which they had undertaken; and she treated them in return with studied contempt. She called them Doctors, as the highest title to which she considered them to have any real right; if they disputed her pleasure she threatened to unfrock them; if they showed themselves officious in punishing Catholics, she brought them up with a sharp reprimand; and if their Protestantism was conspicuously earnest, they were deposed and imprisoned. . . .

To permit the collapse of the Bishops, however, would be to abandon the Anglican position. Presbytery as such was detestable to Elizabeth. She recognised no authority in any man as derived from a source distinct from herself, and she adhered resolutely to her own purpose. So long as her own crown was unsafe she did not venture on any general persecution of her Puritan subjects; but she checked all

<sup>11</sup>The sometime leader of the French Protestant Huguenots who became King Henry IV in 1594.—Ed.

their efforts to make a change in the ecclesiastical system. She found a man after her own heart for the see of Canterbury in Whitgift; she filled the other sees as they fell vacant with men of a similar stamp, and she prepared to coerce their refractory "brethren in Christ" into obedience if ever the opportunity came.

On the reconciliation of the Catholic gentry, which followed on the destruction of the Spanish fleet, Elizabeth found herself in a position analogous to that of Henry IV of France. She was the sovereign of a nation with a divided creed, the two parties, notwithstanding, being at last for the most part loyal to herself.

Both she and Henry held at the bottom intrinsically the same views. They believed generally in certain elementary truths lying at the base of all religions, and the difference in the outward expressions of those truths, and the passionate animosities which those differences engendered, were only not contemptible to them from the practical mischief which they produced. On what terms Catholics and Protestants could be induced to live together peaceably was the political problem of the age. Neither of the two sovereigns shared the profound horror of falsehood, which was at the heart of the Protestant movement. They had the statesman's temperament, to which all specific religions are equally fictions of the imagination. . . .

To return to Elizabeth.

In fighting out her long quarrel with Spain and building her Church system out of the broken masonry of Popery, her concluding years passed away. The great men who had upheld the throne in the days of her peril dropped one by one into the grave. Walsingham died soon after the defeat of the Armada, ruined in fortune, and weary of his ungrateful service. Hunsdon, Knollys, Burghley, Drake, followed at brief intervals, and their mistress was left by herself, standing as it seemed on the pinnacle of earthly glory, yet in all the loneliness of greatness, and unable to enjoy the honours which Burghley's policy had won for her. The first place among the Protestant powers, which had been so often offered her and so often refused, had been forced upon her in spite of herself. "She was Head of the Name," but it gave her no pleasure. She was the last of her race. No Tudor would sit again on the English throne. . . . She was without the intellectual emotions which give human character its consistency and power. One moral quality she possessed in an eminent degree: she was supremely brave. For thirty years she was perpetually a mark for assassination, and her spirits were never affected, and she was never frightened into cruelty. She had a proper contempt also for idle luxury and indulgence. She lived simply, worked hard, and ruled her household with rigid economy. But her vanity was as insatiable as it was common-

place. No flattery was too tawdry to find a welcome with her, and as she had no repugnance to false words in others, she was equally liberal of them herself. Her entire nature was saturated with artifice. Except when speaking some round untruth Elizabeth never could be simple. Her letters and her speeches were as fantastic as her dress, and her meaning as involved as her policy. She was unnatural even in her prayers, and she carried her affectations into the presence of the Almighty. . . .

Vain as she was of her own sagacity, she never modified a course recommended to her by Burghley without injury both to the realm and to herself. She never chose an opposite course without plunging into embarrassments, from which his skill and Walsingham's were barely able to extricate her. The great results of her reign were the fruits of a policy which was not her own, and which she starved and mutilated when energy and completeness were needed. . . .

But this, like all other questions connected with the Virgin Queen, should be rather studied in her actions than in the opinion of the historian who relates them. Actions and words are carved upon eternity. Opinions are but forms of cloud created by the prevailing currents of the moral air. Princes, who are credited on the wrong side with the evils which happen in their reigns, have a right in equity to the honour of the good. The greatest achievement in English history, the "breaking the bonds of Rome," and the establishment of spiritual independence, was completed without bloodshed under Elizabeth's auspices, and Elizabeth may have the glory of the work. Many problems growing out of it were left unsettled. Some were disposed of on the scaffold at Whitehall, some in the revolution of 1688; some yet survive to test the courage and the ingenuity of modern politicians.

## Elizabeth and the "Invincible" Armada

GARRETT MATTINGLY

Twentieth-century Elizabethan scholarship has largely forsaken the "standard" view of Elizabeth that, more than anyone else, Froude helped to frame. Froude's Elizabeth is both too simple and too doctrinaire: Elizabeth was neither. There have been literally hundreds of special studies and monographs on various aspects of Elizabeth's reign



and even a number of biographies. But despite this profusion of writing, there is not yet a comprehensive general interpretation of her for our time or an entirely satisfactory biography.

The same cannot be said, however, of the Armada, for that great and popular adventure found its definitive twentieth-century interpretation in the work of Garrett Mattingly, professor of history at Columbia University until his death in 1962. In addition to the sources that Froude had used to such advantage, Mattingly had access to even more and better British sources, for the process of editing and publishing the public documents of the Tudor Age had continued, and new archives and collections had been opened. French and Netherlandish archives were available to him, as well as collections in Italy and Spain. Thus Mattingly had the advantage of a rounded collection of materials that earlier scholars, whether English or Spanish, had not had. And he had the disposition to write a balanced account, free of the special pleading and the special point of view that were ultimately Froude's greatest flaws.

The following excerpt is taken not from Mattingly's slim and elegant masterpiece, *The Armada*,<sup>12</sup> but from a carefully abbreviated account that he prepared for the Folger Shakespeare Library monograph series, entitled *The "Invincible" Armada and Elizabethan England*. It was his last work.

Not surprisingly, the work deals primarily with the Armada rather than with Elizabeth. But many elements of a contemporary view of Elizabeth—even though that view has not entirely coalesced—can be discovered. Mattingly admires Elizabeth's grasp of foreign policy, which reached beyond a simplistic hostility to Spain. He admires her courage to resist the opinions of her naval advisers that the war should be carried to Spanish waters, opinions that she seemed to be almost alone in opposing. The queen's courage was the greater when we realize, as Mattingly points out, that she was already past "the peak of her popularity and prestige." Finally, Mattingly admires the tenacity that enabled Elizabeth to maintain the peace, no matter how tenuously, for thirty years and that led her into war only when it could be fought on her terms. The victory over the Armada was indeed Elizabeth's victory, and, in the words of Froude, she may have the glory of it.

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Probably no event in England's military history, not even the battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo, not even the battle of Hastings, has been so much written about, celebrated, and commented upon as the repulse of the Spanish Armada by English naval forces after nine days

of dubious battle from the Eddystone to Gravelines in the summer of 1588. The repulse foiled decisively, as it turned out, the Spanish plan to invade England with the Duke of Parma's army of the Netherlands, covered and supported by a Spanish fleet, and reinforced by the troop transports and supply ships it convoyed. At first the significance of the repulse was by no means clear. As it became clearer, the chroniclers of both combatants tended to magnify, oversimplify, and distort the event. English writers, pamphleteers, and historians hailed the victory, first as a sign of God's favor to the champions of the Protestant cause, later as evidence of the manifest destiny of an imperial people. . . .

. . . By now, through the efforts of two generations of historians, Spanish and English, most of the mistakes about the Armada campaign and the Anglo-Spanish naval war have been corrected and a more balanced emphasis restored. So far, however, no general account of the correction has been drawn up. Let us attempt one here.

We shall have to begin with the long period of uneasy peace, cold war, and "war underhand," undeclared and peripheral, before the actual outbreak of major hostilities. In general, historians both English and Spanish have tended to assume that since war was coming anyway the sooner it came the better, and that any policy that postponed its coming was feeble, shortsighted, and mistaken. Most English historians have been certain that Elizabeth should have unleashed her sea dogs against the Spanish colossus long before she did and have blamed or excused her for feminine weakness, gullibility at the hands of smooth Spanish diplomats, and miserly reluctance to spend money. The chorus of blame begins in the correspondence of the leading Puritans of her own day. They were always bewailing to one another the Queen's vacillation, her stubborn refusal to subsidize Protestant leaders on the Continent as liberally as they would have liked to be subsidized, her obstinate belief that peace with the armies of Antichrist could still be preserved. The chorus of blame swelled through the centuries until it culminated in the thundering voice of James Anthony Froude, who could as little conceal his boundless, uncritical admiration for the male vigor of Henry VIII, who led England into one vainglorious, financially ruinous war after another, as he could his scorn for the feminine weakness of Henry's daughter Elizabeth, who preferred to save money and stay out of trouble. Since Froude, the chorus of blame has subsided somewhat, but its echoes are still distinctly audible. . . .

. . . Elizabeth . . . and her peace party had reasons more cogent (if any reasons can be more cogent) than prudence and economy. No ruler of this century was more sensitive to the economic inter-

<sup>12</sup>(Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959).



ests of his subjects. She knew the importance of an outlet in the Netherlands—Antwerp for choice—for the vent of English cloth, on which, after agriculture, the prosperity of her realm depended. If there was a tradition of more than a hundred years of alliance with Spain, the tradition of alliance with Flanders, with “waterish Burgundy,” was as old as any coherent English foreign policy at all. In Flanders, Zeeland, and Holland were the ports not only through which English goods could most cheaply and safely reach the Continent, but from which an invasion of England could be launched most quickly and easily. And on the frontier of Flanders lay France, divided for the moment by religious civil wars, but in area, population, productivity, and centralized power easily the greatest state in Europe. Somebody had to guard the Netherlands from France—if not Spain, then England.

Elizabeth preferred to have the Spanish bear the burden. . . .

There was still one tie between Elizabeth and Philip stronger than profitable trade, old alliances, or strategic necessities. That was the life of Mary Queen of Scots. For nearly twenty years Mary Stuart had been part guest, part prisoner of her cousin. Since she was a devout Catholic and the next in succession to the English throne, she had always been the center of plots by English Catholics. . . . But with each plot the outcry for Mary’s life grew stronger, and at last Elizabeth could no longer resist the clamor. When in February, 1587, the ax fell, the die was cast. As soon as Philip heard the news and had taken his characteristic time to ponder the consequences, he began to put the creaky machinery of his painfully devised plans for the invasion of England into high gear.

His plans were further delayed by Drake’s brilliant raid down the Spanish coast. On the whole that raid has been duly appreciated and well described, but perhaps for the sake of dramatic narrative the emphasis on its importance has been somewhat distorted. . . .

The real damage Drake did the Spaniards was afterward, by his operations off Cape St. Vincent. His mere presence there, though he found no one to fight with, kept the Spanish fleet from assembling. But more, he swept up along the coast a swarm of little coasting vessels, most of them laden with hoops and barrel staves ready to be made into casks for the food and drink of the invasion fleet. Without tight casks made of seasoned wood, provisions spoiled and wine and water leaked away. Drake burned the seasoned barrel staves. They were almost all the fleet at Lisbon was expecting, far more than it could ever collect again. This was the secret, mortal wound. Drake knew exactly what he was doing, but most of his biographers seem not to have appreciated it. . . .

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After a description of the Spanish preparations for the Armada, Mattingly continues.

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If Spanish historians have been too severe with their admiral and not critical enough of his sovereign, English historians have usually made the opposite mistake. From October, 1587, on, the English commanders by sea, Drake and Hawkins and finally even Lord Howard of Effingham, the Lord Admiral, had clamored to be let loose on the coast of Spain. If the smell of booty to be won by the sack of undefended Spanish towns had anything to do with their eagerness, they did not say so to the Queen. What they proposed was that they blockade the Spanish coast, fight the Spanish when they came out, perhaps prevent their sortie, or even destroy them in port. On the whole, English naval historians have warmly approved their plan and condemned the Queen for squelching it. Perhaps they were thinking of Nelson’s ships, or Collingwood’s. Elizabethan ships had not the same sea-keeping qualities. If they had taken station off Lisbon in November, by April they would have been battered and strained, sails and spars and rigging depleted, crews decimated or worse by ship’s fever and scurvy, and provisions exhausted. Even if none of them had foundered, and such foundering was not unlikely, the English fleet would have been in no condition to face an enemy for weeks, perhaps for months. And the cost in pounds, shillings, and pence would have been staggering. Elizabeth, who had kept a wary eye on naval accounts for forty years, knew this. What she probably did not know was that had the fleets met off the Spanish coast and the English adopted the same tactics they later used off the Eddystone, as they surely would have done, they would have fired every shot in their lockers before they had done the Spanish any appreciable harm, and would have been obliged to scuttle home in search of more munitions, while the Spanish could have marched grandly into the Channel. Partly by prudence and partly by luck, Elizabeth’s preference that the battle, if there had to be one, should be fought in home waters was a major contribution to English victory. . . .

. . . About the strength and composition of the two fleets there is actually very little doubt. The Armada sailed from Lisbon with 130 ships. . . . Opposing this force, English lists show 197 ships. Actually, not all of these saw action; some of them, though not so many nor such large ships as in the Spanish fleet, were mere supply ships, practically noncombatants, and a good many, a slightly higher per-

centage than in the Armada, were under a hundred tons, incapable of carrying guns heavier than a six-pounder and useful mainly for scouting and dispatch work. The first line of the English fleet was twenty-one Queen's galleons of two hundred tons and upward, roughly comparable in size and numbers with the ten galleons of Portugal and ten galleons of the Indian Guard which made up the Spanish first line, but tougher, harder hitting, and, on the whole, bigger.

The myth of the little English ships and the huge Spanish ones has long since been refuted by naval historians, without, of course, being in the least dispelled. Taking the official tonnage lists of the two first lines, the biggest ship in either fleet is English, and the rest pair off in what seems like rough equality. . . . We do know that in comparison with their English adversaries the Spanish were seriously under-gunned. . . . In such guns, especially the culverin type, firing round shot of from four to eighteen pounds for three thousand yards or more, the English were superior by at least three to one. . . .

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There follows a detailed description of the battle, the stiff Spanish discipline, the long-range gun battles that did little but deplete shot and powder supplies, and the crucial failure of Parma to "come out" with his barge-loads of soldiers to board the waiting fleet. They were blockaded by the Dutch in the tidal waters, safe from the deep-water Spanish fleet. Then came the English attack on the Armada mounted with fire ships and fire power and finally the famous storm in the channel that permitted the Armada to "escape" to the north and to its ultimate destruction, sailing around the British Isles in a desperate and futile attempt to return home.

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When, on the thirtieth anniversary of her reign, the Queen went in state to St. Paul's, where the captured Spanish banners had been hung up, the kneeling, cheering throngs hailed her as the victorious champion of her kingdom and their faith. The next few years were probably those of Elizabeth's greatest popularity, at least around London, and this was almost certainly due to her having come forward at last as the open champion of the Protestant cause, to her gallant conduct in the months of danger, and to the victory, by divine intervention almost everyone believed, which crowned her efforts. It is probable, too, that the victory gave a lift to English morale. It may be that a good many Englishmen, like a good many other Europeans, though not like Elizabeth's sea dogs, had doubted that the Spanish could ever be beaten. Now they knew that they could. The thoughtful and the well-informed understood, however, that England had not

won a war, only the first battle in a war in which there might be many more battles. England was braced for the struggle.

## Review and Study Questions

1. What were the main features of Bacon's characterization of Queen Elizabeth?
2. What were the main features of Froude's characterization of Queen Elizabeth?
3. What were the main features of Mattingly's characterization of Queen Elizabeth?

## Suggestions for Further Reading

To a considerable extent, the central problem of Elizabethan scholarship has been to disentangle the historical Elizabeth from the Elizabeth of legend. This chapter is really about an aspect of that process, for the defeat of the Spanish Armada was a powerful force in creating the Elizabeth legend. The historical Elizabeth still tends to elude scholars, but of all the books on her, the best modern work is still probably Sir John E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (London: J. Cape, 1961), reprinted a dozen times since its publication in 1934. Of the newer books on Elizabeth, the best by far is Lacey Baldwin Smith, *Elizabeth Tudor: Portrait of a Queen* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975). But students may prefer Elizabeth Jenkins, *Elizabeth the Great* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1958), a lively, personal-psychological biography, or the attractive, heavily illustrated Neville Williams, *The Life and Times of Elizabeth I* (New York: Doubleday, 1972). Two additional competent and straightforward biographies are also recommended: Joel Hurstfield, *Elizabeth I and the Unity of England*, "Teach Yourself History Library" (New York: Macmillan, 1960), and Paul Johnson, *Elizabeth I: A Biography* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974). Jasper Ridley, *Elizabeth I: The Shrewdness of Virtue* (New York: Viking, 1988) is a readable, if somewhat superficial, biography, not too flattering to the queen. Students may find interesting Carolly Erickson, *The First Elizabeth* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), a general biography that has a tinge of contemporary feminism. Especially recommended is Alison Plowden, *Elizabeth Regina: The Age of Triumph, 1588-1603* (New York: Times Books, 1980), the culminating work in a series of books on Elizabeth, this one dealing precisely with the period of her life emphasized in this chapter.

Among the great monuments in modern Tudor scholarship are the studies of two of the men around Elizabeth by Conyers Read, *Mr. Secretary Walsingham and the Policy of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 vols. (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1967 [1925]), and *Mr. Secretary Cecil and Queen Elizabeth* (New York: Knopf, 1955) and its sequel *Lord Burghley and Queen Elizabeth* (New York: Knopf, 1960); these books are detailed and complex. Students may prefer the lighter and briefer Neville Williams, *All the Queen's Men: Elizabeth I and Her Courtiers* (New York: Macmillan, 1972). Two works on Elizabeth and her age are especially recommended: A. L. Rowse, *The England of Elizabeth: The Structure of Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), the first of two volumes on the Elizabethan Age, the massive and lively work of a controversial and dynamic British scholar, and Lacey Baldwin Smith, *The Elizabethan World* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967). On the broader topic of Tudor England, the basic work is G. R. Elton, *England under the Tudors*, rev. ed. (London: Methuen, 1974); but students should see also A. J. Slavin, *The Precarious Balance: English Government and Society, 1450-1640* (New York: Knopf, 1973), an important revisionist study of the internal structure of Tudor England.

The standard work on the Armada is Garrett Mattingly, *The Armada* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), eminently readable and exciting. Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *The Spanish Armada: The Experience of the War in 1588* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) is an up-to-date work that supplements Mattingly. For more detailed diplomatic history background, the best work is probably R. B. Wernham, *Before the Armada: The Emergence of the English Nation, 1485-1588* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), and for a closer look at the technical-naval aspects of the Armada, Michael A. Lewis, *The Spanish Armada* (New York: Crowell, 1960). An excellent revisionist account of the Armada is David A. Howarth, *The Voyage of the Armada, The Spanish Story* (New York: Viking, 1981). There is a recent definitive biography of Don Alonso Perez de Guzman, by Peter Pierson, *Commander of the Armada: The Seventh Duke of Medina Sidonia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). For an account of the growth of the English anti-Spanish sentiment, see William S. Maltby, *The Black Legend in England: The Development of Anti-Spanish Sentiment, 1558-1660* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1971). For Mary Queen of Scots, the diplomatic linchpin in the whole background of the Armada, see the large and thoroughly readable biography by Antonia Fraser, *Mary, Queen of Scots* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969), and Alison Plowden, *Danger to Elizabeth: The Catholics under Elizabeth I* (New York: Stein and Day, 1973), a work on a related topic.