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THE STUARTS (1603-1707)

After Queen Elizabeth I's death, in 1603, without heirs, the throne of England passed to the Scottish family of the Stuarts and they reigned over Great Britain until 1707.

The first Stuart king in England was James I. After his death, he was succeeded by Charles I, with whom England lived very tumultuous years, ended with the sovereign's execution. He was not a good king, in fact, by some unsuccessful expeditions to France and Spain (two countries whose power was becoming bigger and bigger), he lowered the prestige of the English monarchy abroad.

The House of Commons refused to give him money for these wars, so he dissolved Parliament and tried to get money in other ways. But, when he realized that this wasn't possible, he called Parliament again. Parliament accepted to give him the money he needed only if he had accepted the so called "PETITION OF RIGHTS".

After that, Charles could rule basically as he wanted, ignoring any privilege of members of Parliament. He was not a Catholic as his wife was, Henrietta Maria, the daughter of the king of France, and, when Charles made William Laud Archbishop of Canterbury, he fostered the High Church, a section of the Anglican Church.

This fact causes a civil war, in fact Laud started to persecute the Puritans (but not the Roman Catholics because the queen herself was a Roman Catholic). And when he tried to do the same thing with the Scots, who were Presbyterian, they rebelled against England.

So Charles called a Parliament again, that was called "short Parliament" because he dissolved it the following month. The quarrel between Charles and Parliament was also a quarrel between two doctrines, two ways of seeing the law: "Roman Law" (which gave full power to the king) and "English Common law" (that was independent of the king's will and above him).

Six months later, Charles, who had still some problems with the Scots summoned Parliament again. This parliament was called "long Parliament". This parliament didn't give him money and had William Laud imprisoned and then executed.

When Parliament asked the king to let itself control military, civil and religious affairs, he refused and a new civil war broke out.

Those who sided with the king were called CAVALIERS, and the others PARLIAMENTARIANS or ROUNDHEADS. Among these there was Oliver Cromwell.

At last, the king was defeated and then imprisoned and executed in 1649.

THE COMMONWEALTH

The monarchy was abolished and England became a Commonwealth, with a unicameral Parliament, the Commons (known as the Rump).

When in 1653 the Rump was dismissed, the country was ruled by the Army.

In 1654 Cromwell was made LORD PROTECTOR OF ENGLAND AND IRELAND. He was a great man, fond of music, culture and, speaking about religion, he was also tolerant and made England popular abroad.

In 1651 he renewed the Navigation Acts, that established that every good imported into England could be carried only by English ships. This fact caused a war between England and Holland, that had been master of the sea until that moment. But the Dutch were defeated.

Lots of persons wanted England to become a monarchy again. The crown was offered to Cromwell, but he refused. When Cromwell died, in 1658, his son, Richard, took his place but then was obliged to go away.

After 18 months of confusion, a strong man, general Monk, went from Scotland to London and asked for a free Parliament. This Parliament decided to restore the monarchy and the king's son, Charles II, came back. It's the beginning of the RESTORATION.

So, Charles II became king of England in 1660, at the age of 30.

One of the first things he did as king was to summon a new Parliament, which imposed a strict Anglicanism: those who wanted to hold public office had to belong to the Anglican Church and all clergymen had to be ordained by an Anglican bishop.

Parliament did so not because of religious interests, but only to defend its privileges and to get rid of the danger of a Catholic conspiracy.

Charles II was not officially a Catholic, even though in his heart he felt so. For this reason he would actually preferred to be tolerant towards Catholics.

Some time later a new Dutch war broke out, and England was defeated.

So, England decided to make a "triple alliance" with Holland and Sweden against France.

But Charles II made a secret treaty with the king of France, by which Charles was supposed to publically announce his conversion to Catholicism. This would put England under the control of France.

When Parliament knew that, it introduced the "Exclusion Bill" to exclude Charles II's brother –the Catholic James– from his succession to throne and give it instead to James's daughter –Mary–, married to William of Orange.

As answer to this, king Charles dissolved Parliament, that was already divided into two parties: Whigs –that were against James– and Tories –that sided with him.

After his death, however, he was succeeded by his brother James.

James was a Catholic, and being so he wanted England and Scotland to become Catholic again. For this reason there were lots of rebellions in the country, and lots of people were killed.

The situation was really critic.

Beside that, in 1700 King Charles II of Spain had died without having children, making the French Duke of Anjou –Philip, grandson of Louis XIV of France- his heir. England realized that this would have made France too strong and powerful, creating a dangerous situation in Europe.

But James had two Protestant daughters and for this reason the people of England really hoped they could bring peace and Anglicanism back after their father's death.

But when James had a son from his second wife, the English called William of Orange to be their king. Therefore James fled to France.

The war between France and England broke out: according to the English, France was to be challenged and defeated once for all.

William of Orange thus became king of England but his reign was marked by war.

The terrible fight against France ended just some time later, with the "Peace of Utrecht".

FROM WILLIAM AND MARY TO ANNE:

The English called the political changes of William's reign, "the Glorious Revolution", because they were bloodless and peaceful.

But the new monarchs could reign only if they signed the BILL OF RIGHTS, which limited the power of the king in favour of Parliament.

Then two other acts were passed: TOLERANT ACT (which gave freedom of worship but not to the Catholics) and ACT OF SETTLEMENT (which established that Catholic monarchs were excluded from the throne and that, after William's death, the throne would pass to Mary's sister, Anne. If Anne had died without heirs, to the descendants of Sophia of Hannover, grand-daughter of James I).

William of Orange died in 1702.

(QUESTO TESTO -IN INGLESE- E' STATO INVIATO E PUBBLICATO ANCHE
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