

CHAPTER  
**17**

Section 3

HISTORYMAKERS

# Elizabeth I

## Gloriana

*"It is my desire to live nor reign no longer than my life and reign shall be for your good. And though you have had, and may have, many princes more mighty and wise sitting in this seat, yet you never had, nor shall have, any that will be more careful and loving."—Elizabeth, addressing Parliament (1601)*

Called "Gloriana," Elizabeth I, the new queen of England in 1558, ushered in a period of unmatched artistic growth and political achievements. She survived a difficult childhood to reach the throne at age 25. She patched over religious differences, skillfully manipulated other rulers who sought her hand in marriage, helped guide England past a serious foreign threat, and presided over a period of intellectual and artistic flowering. She became a magnificent symbol of England's rise.

The daughter of Anne Boleyn, the second wife of Henry VIII, Elizabeth was forced to grow up fast in an unstable and dangerous court. When she was not yet three years old, her father accused her mother of conspiracy and had Anne Boleyn executed. Elizabeth, like her older half-sister Mary, was declared illegitimate. In 1544, Elizabeth was named third in line to the throne, but her troubles did not go away. She was suspected of being involved in a plot against her half-brother Edward when he became king. She responded well to tough questions, though, and her innocence was accepted.

After Edward's death, Mary became queen. She was Catholic, and became suspicious of Elizabeth, who was Protestant. Once again, Elizabeth was wrongly accused of plotting against the crown. She was arrested and placed in the Tower of London but was released two months later. In 1558, Mary died, and Elizabeth was crowned queen.

Elizabeth inherited a miserable situation in England. One contemporary described the state in hopeless terms: "The queen poor. The realm exhausted. The nobility poor and decayed. . . . The people out of order. Justice not executed." However, her reign reversed these trends and revived the English spirit.

In the first decades of Elizabeth's rule, she played a skillful game of cat-and-mouse with the powerful nobles of Europe, who wanted to marry her and win control of England. She entertained several possible husbands, changing her course as she believed was best for English policy. In the

end, she frustrated all suitors and never married. While her policy ensured the independence of England, it was risky. If she died unexpectedly, a struggle for the throne was bound to result.

Elizabeth also attempted to heal the religious differences that plagued England. In 1559, she persuaded Parliament to approve a law that made England Protestant but that also gave some concessions to Catholics. Though laws against Catholic practices grew stricter under her rule, she managed to lighten them in practice.

In the 1580s, England drifted toward war with Spain. Elizabeth allowed English sea captains to plunder Spanish ships bringing gold and silver from the New World. She also sent aid and English troops to the areas of the Netherlands that were fighting to win independence from Spain. In 1588, Philip II of Spain launched a huge fleet, the Armada, against England. England's faster ships outsailed the Spanish fleet and inflicted heavy damage on them. A severe storm destroyed many Spanish ships and helped defeat the Armada.

In Elizabeth's later years, England suffered other problems. The Irish, encouraged by Spain, rebelled against English control. These wars and the defeat of the Armada drained the treasury. The economy weakened. Nobles and government officials jockeyed for power and influence. During this time, however, English writers produced an outpouring of poems, plays, and other works that showed great creativity and skill. The queen, now 70, finally weakened and died in 1603.

## Questions

1. **Making Inferences** What actions do you think demonstrated that Elizabeth was both a clever and fair ruler? Explain.
2. **Drawing Conclusions** Why was Elizabeth such a desirable match in marriage?
3. **Clarifying** What policies led to conflict with Spain?