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THE ENGLISH CIVIL WARS AND THE ABOLITION OF MONARCHY**

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ABSTRACT

There is perhaps no man who had a greater impact on England than King Charles I. The reign of the second Stuart king was tumultuous, plagued with political blunders and culminated in not just the death of a monarch but the death (albeit short-lived) of the entire institution of monarchy. The political upheaval of the seventeenth century is unparalleled in English history and war decimated the country but can one man be blamed for such a catastrophe? Much has been made of the individual role of the king in the cataclysmic events of the 1640's. Whig historians have tended to hold Charles almost entirely responsible for the outbreak of war whereas more recent revisionist work has questioned that theory. This thesis attempts to examine the role Charles played in causing the civil war and his subsequent execution and analyse the extent of his culpability. By exploring the many political errors and misjudgements he committed throughout the course of his reign, it attempts to judge the impact of his actions and if the moniker so often imputed to him by his enemies- the man of blood- is befitting. In doing this, the thesis attempts to prove that while no singular cause can be ascribed the English Civil War, the words and actions of the King played an incredibly significant role. Furthermore in examining the reasons for Charles' execution and the subsequent abolition of monarchy it finds that there is a strong case to suggest that Charles was almost singlehandedly responsible.

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THE MAN OF BLOOD

An Introduction

England was not an easy country to rule. The political battle between absolutism and constitutionalism in England had been on-going since the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215. The English people had very strong feelings about what was legal and fair but an innate willingness to obey authority and antipathy toward armed resistance meant that even the most incompetent king was unlikely to incite revolution. In the case of Charles I the people did not just revolt but they tried and executed the king. Such an attack on the institution of monarchy was unprecedented. Previously kings had been killed, forced to abdicate or deposed but never before in English history had a monarch been arraigned before a court. Furthermore when a king had previously been stripped of his power it was by men of royal blood and so that they may be replaced by an alternative royal. Charles was being tried by men who, before the war, were of little standing, and with no successor in mind.¹

The English Civil War was catastrophic and completely transformed the country. As many as a third of the male population were at arms at some point over the course of the conflict and the death toll, as a percentage of the population, was probably higher than that of the First World War.² But what drove the people of England to partake in such a brutal conflict? England was a law abiding and generally submissive country, to take such extreme measures they would have to feel tyrannised to an exceptional degree. When examining the causes of the English Civil War the role of King Charles I was monumental. The king's character flaws and poor decision making probably had the most significant impact on the discontent permeating England during the 1630's. This does not mean that the king was entirely culpable; indeed, there were certainly other aspects owing to the eventual outbreak of

¹ Allan Massie, *The Royal Stuarts* (London, 2009)p210

² John Miller, *A Brief History of the English Civil Wars* (London, 2009)p3

war, but the fact remains that the principal aim of the war was to force the king acquiesce to certain demands and to stop him enforcing unacceptable ones. In analysing the reasons why the New Model Army ultimately took the decision to execute the king, and eradicate the monarchical system which had been in place in England for as long as history had been recorded, the blame, it would appear, lies almost solely at his feet.

A PEACEFUL NATION

The Background

The political tumult of the seventeenth century is unrivalled in English history yet one of the main problems of explaining the causes of the English Civil War was that it occurred within a society 'far from teetering on the edge of anarchy, was profoundly orderly and stable' and there is very little indication that contemporaries saw it coming.³ At first glance the country should have been less susceptible to political breakdown under Charles than in the previous reigns of the Tudors or even King James. The fifteenth century witnessed the protracted struggle for the crown known as the War of the Roses and the sixteenth century saw the Reformation wreak havoc upon Europe producing catastrophic religious warfare throughout the continent. The religious wars constantly threatened to spread to England and from the time of Henry VIII's death in 1547 to the execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587 there was always a legitimate claimant to the English throne of the opposite religion. There was a widespread fear of invasion from Catholic France or Spain, the latter England was at war with from 1585, and the succession crisis- which Queen Elizabeth caused through her failure to marry and produce an heir- was also a major cause for concern. All of this would seem a perfect recipe for civil war and yet none ensued.

It seemed that from the ascension of Henry VIII monarchy had become more secure and challenging a monarch had become unacceptable. The English people generally acquiesced to the break with Rome under Henry VIII and reacted with extraordinarily little demur as the country reverted to Catholicism under Mary I and back to Protestantism under Elizabeth I. While there were sporadic rebellions from Catholic England, none of these were directed against the monarch. The main cause of this submissive attitude the English now displayed was due to the fact that the power of the nobility was diminishing rapidly. Nobles

³ John Miller, *A Brief History of the English Civil Wars* (London, 2009)p2

no longer wielded the same influence over their tenants or servants to raise an army and furthermore Henry VIII embarked upon a brutal campaign to eliminate anyone who might be a threat. Consequentially England became more orderly, law enforcement more effective and disputes were now settled by law rather than force.⁴

The succession of James VI of Scotland as James I of England was smooth and brought great relief. The people of England now felt the country to be stabilised as James brought certain qualities Elizabeth lacked. He already had two sons so there would be no repeat of the succession crisis which plagued the latter part of Elizabeth's reign. Furthermore as Scotland and England now shared a royal dynasty Scotland would no longer provide a strategic route for European enemies to enter England. The continental wars began to abate in 1604 when James made peace with Spain and, although conflict on the continent would be renewed in 1618 with the beginning of the thirty years war, the fear of revolt or conquest was never as prominent under James or Charles as it had been during the Elizabethan period. The Tudors nationalisation of the church had brought instability and uncertainty. The conversion to Protestantism was a slow and arduous process and, although it was not completed by the ascension of James, it was certainly well advanced.⁵ Different strands of Protestantism were coexisting peacefully under James and religion was uniting the kingdom rather than dividing it. A war of religion in England at this point seemed inconceivable. By the time Charles ascended the throne in 1625 it would seem, for all intents and purposes, that he was inheriting a peaceable nation. What the king failed to realise was that, although the English were law abiding people and unlikely to rebel, this behaviour was conditional upon their ruler acting in accordance with what they believed to be just and fair. The people of England still had the capacity to revolt but did not feel the need to as their rulers were wise enough not to overstretch the limits of their loyalty and obedience. Charles would not be so wise.

⁴ John Miller, *A Brief History of the English Civil Wars* (London, 2009)pp5-8

⁵ Blair Worden, *The English Civil Wars: 1640-1660* (London, 2009)pp3-5

**AT FIRST I LIKED PARLIAMENTS BUT SINCE I WAS GROWN TO
DISTASTE OF THEM**

(Charles in parliament April 4th 1628)

Problems in the Early Reign of Charles I

Since the time of the Reformation and the reign of Henry VIII, an uneasy *modus vivendi* had been established between king and parliament. Charles, like his father, despised the institution of parliament and felt it was designed to undermine the monarch's authority. It never occurred to either king that parliament could be a useful institution and could assist in the government of the country. It could only be useful however if Charles was prepared to engage in dialogue with its members and listen to their advice but this idea was anathema to his entire belief system and his reign would be characterised by an embittered struggle with parliament. The fact that three separate parliaments sat in Charles' first four years on the throne highlights the failure of policy and the breakdown in communication between it and the king.⁶

The main problem was that the king and the members of the House of Commons had a very different understanding of what parliament's function was. The king believed parliament to be merely a tool to satisfy his financial needs whereas members of the Commons saw it as the guarantor of their rights and liberties and preserver of tradition in England. They also believed that parliament had the right to arbitrate domestic and foreign policy whereas the king believed that only he had authority on such matters. To the people of England, parliament was of the utmost importance as it served as a bulwark against papists and conspirators who threatened their religion or liberty. It also fostered a national integration that made England very different from the monarchies on the continent. The precise power of parliament in seventeenth century England is often a topic of debate by historians but more

⁶ John Miller, *A Brief History of the English Civil Wars* (London, 2009)pp22

pertinent is the place it had, both in ideology and practice, among the majority of its people. This is something which Charles failed to grasp.⁷

While King James was certainly not an advocate of parliament, his relationship with it was far less tempestuous than that of his son due in large part to his shrew calculations. In the last four years of James' reign, Charles and his favourite the Duke of Buckingham had used parliament against the king but once he ascended the throne Charles found others using parliament in the same manner against him. Charles did not have the same political acumen as his father and could not understand how to effectively mollify parliament. He saw the measures implemented in the Commons as a personal attack and believed it a conspiracy to strip him of power. Due to this mistrust his disdain for parliament intensified and the deterioration of the relationship between Charles and parliament after 1625 was rapid and intense.⁸

The refusal by parliament to grant Charles the usual import duties for life upon his ascension outraged the king, particularly as he had just embarked on a war with Spain at its behest. Due to this he collected the duties without the consent of parliament. Having failed to secure a grant of taxation in 1626 he implemented a forced loan demanding his subjects to lend him money and imprisoning those who did not. The implementation of the forced loan was in many ways the most revealing political event of Charles' early reign as it showed the king's increasing preference for the 'new councils' demonstrating a reliance on prerogative taxation rather than parliamentary taxation. The loan did not just concern the wealthy elite, all subsidy men were liable and as such Charles invoked the ire of a broad cross section of society and left them questioning to what extent the prerogative was acceptable. It also highlighted Charles' growing suspicion of the Puritan subversion of monarchical authority

⁷ Anne Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (London, 1998)p154

⁸ Charles Carlton, *Charles I: The Personal Monarch* (London, 1995) p69

and marked the beginning of the popular perception that Charles was cold, untrusting and did not act in the interest of the people.⁹ Charles used the Privy Council and Star Chamber to punish critics of the regime and those who did not adhere to his demands. By doing this he seemed to be demonstrating that he could act without his subjects consent while also attacking the protection that the law was intended to give them. England was a country very much defined by its sense of liberty and, through Charles' actions, that liberty, and the very institution of parliament, seemed to be under threat.¹⁰

The main grievances parliament had with Charles were the mismanagement of the wars with France and Spain, the dominance of the Duke of Buckingham, Charles marriage to the French princess Henrietta Maria and the increasing dominance of the high Anglicanism which the king subscribed to. Charles in turn became increasingly aggravated by the House of Commons which he regarded as factious and problematic and frequently threatened dissolution. In 1628 the more moderate members of parliament sought a way to limit the king's powers through legislation rather than attacking Buckingham (as they were aware that the latter would likely cause dissolution) and this resulted in the Petition of Right. The petition asserted that 'that no tallage or aid shall be laid or levied by the king... without the good will and assent of the archbishops... and other the freemen of the commonalty' and that 'no person should be compelled to make any loans to the king against his will'.¹¹ It also protested against imprisonment without trial, martial law, forced loans and conscription (from the French war which Parliament had demanded). The document was monumental as it illustrated the extent to which the members of the Commons valued their liberty but also because it was the first instance of their challenging Charles- although it did use that age old sophism of blaming 'evil advisers' rather than the king himself. Unfortunately Charles'

⁹ Anne Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (London, 1998)pp153-154

¹⁰ Richard Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life* (Harlow, 2007)pp64-69

¹¹ 'The Petition of Right 7th June 1628' (<http://www.constitution.org/eng/petright.htm>) (April 12th 2013)

perceived acceptance of the petition (which he subsequently bypassed) could not assuage the relationship between he and parliament and tension remained.¹²

By this point Charles was exasperated with parliament but, as he was engaged in a war which needed financial backing, for the time being, dissolution was not attainable. By 1629 Charles had resolved to stay out of European conflicts and it now became possible to bring parliament to an end. He was given his opportunity to do so when, in defiance of the king's orders to adjourn, a group of MP's held the speaker of the Commons in his chair while they passed resolutions and proclaimed anyone who helped the crown 'a capital enemy to this country'. Such flagrant insubordination had to be punished. The king imprisoned those who were responsible, dissolved parliament and informed his subjects that only when they had 'come to a better understanding of themselves' would he recall it.¹³ Although Whig historians label this period the eleven years tyranny, Charles' decision to dissolve parliament was not altogether unconstitutional- Queen Elizabeth had called just nine parliaments in her forty-five year reign- but he had failed to take into consideration the emerging political class of the seventeenth century.¹⁴ He also demonstrated one of his most fatal character flaws in that he could not predict, or comprehend, the consequences of his decisions.

The impact of Charles' political errors and the parliamentary conflicts of the 1620's greatly influenced the parliament of the 1640's. In April 1640, when MP John Pym made his famous speech, listing the grievances of the people of England, he asserted that 'the intermission of parliaments has been a true cause of all these evils to the commonwealth'.¹⁵ It is clear that the injustice felt by Charles' dissolution of parliament was Pym's (and the majority of parliamentarians) main grievance and the power which Charles was forced to

¹² Christopher Hibbert, *Charles I* (London, 1968)pp101-103

¹³ Blair Worden, *The English Civil Wars 1640-1660* (London, 2009)pp19-20

¹⁴ Allan Massie, *The Royal Stuarts* (London, 2010)p185

¹⁵ John Pym, 'On Grievances in the Reign of Charles I 17th April 1640', in William Jennings Bryan (ed.), *The World's Famous Orations Volume III Great Britain* (<http://www.bartleby.com/268/3/8.html>) (12th April 2013)

bestow upon the Commons in 1641 was in direct response to this. In examining Charles early reign it becomes clear that the civil war was not caused solely by his errors in the 1630's but was rooted in his entire approach to government.

Charles' first parliament set a grim- and ultimately fatal- precedent. As early as July 1625, just four months after Charles claimed the throne, the Earl of Kellie was exclaiming to the Earl of Mar that 'you cannot believe the alteration in the opinion of the world touching his Majesty'.¹⁶ It was already apparent that the young king was lacking. Charles' political ineptitude and his failure to adequately manage the parliamentary issue in the 1620's would plague his reign. He had already lost the confidence of the people and proved that he did not trust them. This strained relationship between Charles and his subjects would never be healed and play a major role in determining his fate in 1649.

¹⁶ Conrad Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics: 1621-1629* (Oxford, 1979)p240

THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND ARE NOT PLIABLE TO AN ARBITRARY RULE

(Lucy Hutchinson in *Memoirs of Colonel Hutchinson*)

Charles and the Personal Rule

Charles called frequent parliaments in the 1620's because it was a necessity. In the 1630's, as he was no longer burdened by war, he saw no reason for its presence. The king maintained that the parliaments which he called had undermined his capacity to rule adequately and believed that personal monarchy stood in the interest of the people against the selfish concerns of the members of the Commons. He therefore resolved that he would resist calling another by any means necessary.¹⁷ He would instead govern, as the Tudors had, through his Privy Council. Although the dissolution of parliament was an unpopular decision, relations between the king and the nobility gradually improved in the early 1630's. The assassination of the Duke of Buckingham and the end of England's involvement in the European wars removed the most obvious causes of friction and the king could now govern at a time of relative stability.

Charles had no need to summon parliament as long as he had no need for revenue additional to that provided by the crown estates, custom duties, the profits of justice and traditional feudal dues. The import and excise duty known as tonnage and poundage, which was the crown's main source of income, could not be collected without parliament however, so Charles implemented a catalogue of tax raising devices in order to obtain this lost revenue.¹⁸ He fined landowners for encroaching on long forgotten royal land, the nobility was fined for failing to appear at court to be knighted, the Corporation of London was fined £70,000 pounds for failing to fulfil obligations to develop the plantation of Londonderry, civil servants were threatened with a reorganisation of office holding (which was only

¹⁷ Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (Connecticut, 1992)pp59-60

¹⁸ Tristram Hunt, *The English Civil War at First Hand* (London, 2002)p19

abandoned once they paid a large sum of money to the king) and monopolies were revived.¹⁹ Many of these schemes affected only a small minority but there was one fiscal device which was more generally resented and would prove to be the cause of a long standing grudge between the king and his subjects.

Ship money was a tax which had been implemented for centuries whereby the crown would levy a tax on the coastal areas in times of emergency to enable it to build ships and defend the country. Ship money was intended to be paid only by maritime counties but in the 1630's- and with no emergency in sight- Charles extended it so that the entire country was subject to the tax. The king's legal advisers argued that this was acceptable as Charles deemed it was in the best interest of the public. The issue caused by ship money was the same one which the forced loan had caused a decade earlier regarding extensions of the royal prerogative and the legitimacy of un-parliamentary taxation. It outraged the people as it obviously put the future of parliament in jeopardy, as the radical John Milton noted 'grant (the king) this and parliament hath no more freedom than if sat in his noose'.²⁰

When one of the wealthiest men in Buckinghamshire John Hampden refused to pay it in 1637 he was brought to court. The decision to give Hampden a public hearing was a political blunder, characteristic of Charles, with incredibly damaging consequences. Hampden's trial lasted seven months, arousing huge public interest, and marked the point at which people began to openly question the legitimacy of the personal rule, as Norfolk squire Thomas Knyvett pointed out 'the business now talked on in town is only about the question of ship money'.²¹ The king's law officers were confident that he would win the case as they had already posed a hypothetical question to the judges about his capacity to extend ship

¹⁹ John Miller, *A Brief History of the English Civil Wars* (London, 2009)pp24-25

²⁰ John Milton, *Eikonoklastes* in Jim Daems & Holly Nelson (eds.), *Eikon Basilike with selections from Eikonoklastes* (Plymouth, 2006)p269

²¹ Thomas Knyvett, 'On Hampden's Ship Money Case' in Keith Lindley (ed.), *The English Civil War and Revolution: A Sourcebook* (Oxon, 1998)p35

money inland but this raised many ethical questions. By the judges deciding, even in hypothetical terms, that taxes such as ship money were legal, they were essentially usurping the role of parliament and granting money to the king, leaving him with no necessity to call a new one. Ultimately seven out of twelve judges found Hampden guilty, because technically the king was not breaking the law but more importantly because they were not prepared to question his authority, but the fact that the verdict was not unanimous led to widespread debate and questioning on the issue. Hampden was informed by the judges (which Charles had appointed) that the king, and not his subjects, had the power to judge how and when taxes should be enforced but this angered the general public and isolated Charles. The trial highlighted a growing anxiety amongst the people of England that the king was abusing his power and, as Alison Gill asserts, led to a fundamental shift in the nature of opposition to Charles which became 'more determined and more violent'.²² Charles had failed to learn one of the crucial lessons of the 1620's: that enforcement of law had to be tempered with a sensitivity to political opinion.²³

Charles personal rule was one of the primary factors which led to civil war but the period during which this rule took place was far from chaotic. Although plagued with folly and political blindness the Caroline era of the 1630's was seen as a golden age of the seventeenth century and looked back upon with fondness by men who survived the catastrophe of civil war.²⁴ The case of Hampden's refusal to pay the ship money was rare, and until the outbreak of war with Scotland the majority of people paid the tax, though not without resentment. In truth the England of the 1630's showed relatively few signs of open discontent. The victims of the king's unjust fiscal devices knew there was little redress as the law (as interpreted by the courts) was on his side. Habits of conformity and obedience ran

²² Alison Gill, *Ship money during the personal rule of Charles I: politics, ideology and the law 1634-1640* (Sheffield, 1990)pp452-472

²³ Richard Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life* (Harlow, 2007)pp192-195

²⁴ Allan Massie, *The Royal Stuarts* (London, 2010)p187

deep and the common consensus was that tyranny, however terrible, was better than anarchy. The English therefore, as a thoroughly law abiding people who were accustomed to dealing with kings through parliament, would not revolt.²⁵ The small minority who did voice their opinions were hauled before Star Chamber and usually imprisoned but in comparison to the religious warfare wreaking havoc throughout Europe, the despotic rule of Charles seemed favourable. For most of the 1630's England was prosperous and peaceful, trade was booming and the critics of Charles' regime were temporarily silenced.

The ostensible political calm was deceptive however as behind the façade of submissiveness the nascent political class were growing more and more resentful of the king's rule which, they felt, was verging on tyrannical. Without parliament there was no obvious arena for them to voice their opposition to the king but that did not mean opposition didn't exist. The years of personal rule raised a majority of the politically conscious- both in England and Scotland- against Charles and laid the foundation for his demise. Charles could never quite grasp his father's understanding that 'the prerogative is a secret which rymes (tears) with the stretching of it', and by dissolving parliament, and ruling alone for eleven years, he stretched prerogative to the point where it tore the country in two.²⁶ The personal rule intensified the growing polarisation between king and country and also exacerbated the religious divide. Important currents of opinion were removed from court as Charles began to promote men of similar religious views whilst alienating the Puritans. Unfortunately for Charles, the attempt to make his court more exclusive resulted in his enemies becoming closer. Leading politicians, such as John Pym and the Earl of Warwick, held regular meetings throughout the 1630's and when the time came they were capable of dismantling the king's power.²⁷ As the years of personal rule wore on, Charles became less inclined to listen to

²⁵ Blair Worden, *The English Civil Wars 1640-1660* (London, 2009)pp14-15

²⁶ Pauline Gregg, *King Charles I* (London, 2000)p52

²⁷ Ester Cope, *Politics without Parliament* (London, 1987)p163

members of the Privy Council or take unwelcome advice. The consequence of this was often major political mistakes and a reinforcement of Charles' belief that any slight deviance from royal policy was unacceptable. This also tended to make his reaction to opposition more forceful and less considered which in turn reinforced volatile opposition.

The personal rule did have certain benefits. The navy was strengthened, royal finances were improved and order was generally maintained. Unfortunately these achievements came at a high price. A combination of policy errors, lack of communication and what Conrad Russell refers to as an inability to 'read the political map' prevented Charles from reaping the dividend which he might have expected from the peace and relative prosperity of the latter part of the 1630's.²⁸ The personal rule was seen as corrupt, unjust and left the people of England harbouring a great resentment toward the king. In spite of this, the fact that England would not revolt meant that Charles could have conceivably continued his personal rule indefinitely; it would be in Scotland that the king committed political suicide.²⁹

²⁸ Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (New York, 1990)p208

²⁹ Richard Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life* (Harlow, 2007)pp195-196

RELIGION IS IN TRUTH THE GREATEST GRIEVANCE TO BE LOOKED INTO
(John Pym Speech in Commons 'On Grievances in the Reign of Charles I' 17th April 1640)

Religious Conflict in Caroline England

Many historians cite religious differences as the main cause of the English Civil War, with some even going so far as to claim that the conflict was a delayed reaction to the Reformation and that England was experiencing a war of religion which other countries had faced in the sixteenth century. The main problem with this analysis however is that England's situation was quite different to those that had preceded it.³⁰ Unlike the religious wars in Europe, the English Civil Wars (though a number of Catholics partook) were fought between two opposing visions of the Protestant faith.

The two main strands of Protestantism which emerged on the continent after the Reformation were Lutheranism and Calvinism. Lutheranism was generally enforced by those in the upper echelons of society whereas the more militantly organised Calvinism, which won out in countries such as Scotland and the Netherlands, tended to be borne out of revolt. England's model was quite unique in that it was imposed from on high (a characteristically Lutheran quality) but in Doctrines of Faith followed the Calvinist model. Continental Calvinists had rejected the hierarchical structure of church government and replaced episcopacy, which ruled from above, with presbyteries whose authority rested on local participation. The English monarchy however continued to use the bishops in controlling the church and retained the Catholic structure while assimilating Calvinist theology. As English Protestantism seemed an amalgamation of the two faiths, it had to contend with many difficulties and often struggled for a sense of identity under Elizabeth, but by the reign of James I it had become a stable force in English life. In fact it is often argued that it was the very moderation of the English Reformation which spared the country from the catastrophic

³⁰ Norah Carlin, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford, 1999)pp46-47

warfare witnessed by its continental counterparts in the sixteenth century.³¹ Under James the episcopal structure was barely challenged although tensions remained. Two rival theological perspectives began to emerge but with his shrewd management they could coexist, under Charles they would divide the nation and lead to civil war. These two strands of Protestantism were defined (in simple terms) as Anglicanism and Puritanism. The moral rigour and theology of the Puritans set them apart from the Anglicans and they believed that change was still needed in the Church of England as it retained many Catholic traditions and values. The driving force behind Puritanism was a desire to further the Reformation.³²

Charles came to power during an adverse time for European Protestantism. The Thirty Years War broke out in 1618 and between 1620 and 1623 his brother-in-law Frederick the Elector Palatine was deprived German territories and eventually overthrown by the Habsburgs. Catholic armies swept Western Europe and Protestantism was under serious threat. England needed to decide what action- if any- it would take. Since the time of the Reformation, the place of religion within English foreign policy had been a divisive issue. Puritans felt it of the utmost importance to be loyal to their faith and were prepared to take up arms to help their co-religionists in Europe. Anglicans on the other hand were vehemently against going to war and tended to place emphasis on the differences rather than similarities of continental Protestantism. While the crown felt an obligation to assist the Elector Palatine its reasons for wanting to do so were in stark contrast to those of the Puritans. The monarchy saw Frederick's ignominious deposition as a dynastic issue and sought to rectify this through friendship with Madrid whereas Puritans saw it as a religious matter and called for a resumption of the Elizabethan naval war. The issue would lead to England briefly entering the Thirty Years War at the beginning of Charles' reign- the first in a long line of political mistakes by the novice king whose reign was already beginning to look ominous. The

³¹ Blair Worden, *The English Civil Wars 1640-1660* (London, 2009)p9

³² Ann Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (London, 1998)pp90-93

excursion was a disaster. England suffered heavy financial losses, fear and apprehension permeated the country and relations between Charles and parliament collapsed. It is interesting- and certainly not coincidental- that, the two times during Charles' reign when relations with parliament reached crisis, in 1626 and again in 1640, was in the wake of crippling defeat in religious warfare, wars that were both avoidable had Charles been more astute.³³

On the domestic front religion was also the source of major problems for Charles in his early reign, with the growing power of Puritanism. The concept of Puritanism is often difficult to grasp and revisionist historians tend to place great emphasis on re-examining what distinguished Puritans from other members of the Church of England as well as whether it can be considered a true movement before 1625. Although puritanism as an ideology could trace its roots back to the Reformation, it can be argued that puritanism as a genuine movement arose out of a backlash against the innovations implemented by Charles within the English church in the 1620's and 1630's.³⁴ Puritanism was politicised in the 1620's mainly due to the polarisation of Puritan and anti-Puritan views (the main arbitrator of which was the king) and this polarisation also led to the rise of Arminianism. Arminianism was a specific theological position which came to loosely refer to the Anglican tendency. In 1624 Richard Montague published *A New Gag for an Old Goose* claiming that Puritanism and Calvinism were a serious hindrance to diplomacy, while also minimising the differences between the Anglican and Roman Churches. The book was highly controversial and meant that Charles inherited a newly empowered anti-Calvinist episcopacy and a simultaneously outraged and apprehensive political nation.³⁵

³³ Blair Worden, *The English Civil Wars: 1640-1660* (London, 2009)pp13-14

³⁴ Norah Carlin, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford, 1999)pp50-51

³⁵ Barry Coward, *A Companion to Stuart Britain* (Oxford, 2003)pp258-259

Charles was the first monarch to have been raised as a member of the Church of England and was devout in his allegiance to it. Unfortunately his view of the church was much narrower than most of his subjects and the 'high Anglicanism' which he endorsed smacked strongly of popery. While James was sympathetic to the Puritan cause, and established a broad spectrum in his episcopacy, Charles made no secret of his disdain towards it. He firmly backed the Anglicans in political matters, patronised Arminian clergymen and promoted them to important positions. The Arminian reverence for ceremony and decorum appealed to his own aesthetic tastes. He also saw it as the most viable means to the inculcation of political obedience and felt the evangelical impulse of Puritanism was a cleverly concealed type of sedition, he therefore strove to curtail at all costs.

While Puritans felt that the Reformation had not gone far enough in its break with Rome, there was a group of Anglican clergymen who taught the reformation had gone too far. They believed that continuities with the past should be celebrated, not regretted, and their main aim was to reclaim some of the authority which the church had lost in the Reformation. The leader of this group was William Laud. Bishop of London from 1628, Laud was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633 and quickly began to assert his dominance over the church. Like Charles, Laud had a narrow view of Anglicanism, and took no consideration of the range of opinion within it. His narrowness of outlook, sharpness of temper and harsh punishment of anyone who disagreed with him quickly made him a number of enemies but in the king he found an ardent believer. Charles liked the principles of the Laudian movement as it emphasised the divinity of monarchy and the sinfulness of disobedience. Both Charles and Laud saw Puritanism as akin to sedition and together they sought to remove all Puritan influence from court and church.³⁶ As the Earl of Clarendon remarked 'the archbishop had, all his life, eminently opposed Calvin's doctrine... and as soon as it was in his power he did

³⁶ Richard Wilkinson, 'Is There a Case for Archbishop Laud?' In *History Review* (Issue 69 March 2011)

all he could to hinder the growth and increase of that faction and to restrain those who were inclined to it'.³⁷ Unfortunately Laud also shared the king's incapacity to foresee political consequences or understand his opponent's point of view and their relationship would prove disastrous.

Concomitant with Laud's appointment to Archbishop was a rapid acceleration of anti-Calvinist church reforms. Laud, in his new position of power, is generally seen to have given Charles the focus and direction to turn his anti-Calvinist inclinations into actual policies.³⁸ While the Puritans stressed the need for painstaking preaching, the Arminianism which Laud and the king enforced instead stressed the services of the Prayer Book and believed that worship should be dignified, evocative, emotive and not contentious. They asserted that lower classes were repelled or confused by the argumentative austerity of sermon dominated Puritan services and valued the features of mass which the Puritan's most deplored such as the use of ceremony and a set form of service with collective responses.³⁹ While there was some truth in their argument, the crux of the issue was that Laud and Charles were attempting to eradicate Puritanism, and in doing so creating a further schism throughout the country. From a Calvinist perspective Laud was, in the words of Patrick Collinson, 'the greatest calamity ever visited upon the English church'.⁴⁰

The enforcement of the king's policies often led to violence and rioting, when asked as to the reason for such vociferous reaction to the new religious measures there was a simple response, as substantiated by one Berkshire man's testimony, 'it was thought my lord of Canterbury was turned papist'.⁴¹ To Puritans, Laud's insistence on making churches more

³⁷ Edward Hyde Earl of Clarendon, 'The Character of William Laud' in Alan Rudrum (ed.), *The Broadview Anthology of Seventeenth Century Verse and Prose* (Plymouth, 2004)p612

³⁸ Richard Cust, *Charles I: A political Life* (Harlow, 2007)p134

³⁹ John Miller, *A Brief History of the English Civil Wars* (London, 2009)pp28-29

⁴⁰ Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants* (Oxford, 1982)p90

⁴¹ William Horne 'Comment on Laud and the Lambeth Attack by a Berkshire husbandman 1640' in Keith Lindley (ed.), *The English Civil War and Revolution: A Sourcebook* (Oxon, 1998)pp43-45

beautiful and the emphasis he placed on ritual, his draconian methods of enforcing obedience and his determination to restore the wealth and political power of the church lost in the Reformation all seemed suspiciously like popery. The Arminian reluctance to concur with the Puritan identification of the pope as the antichrist and their readiness to accept that Catholicism and Protestantism could coexist also aroused suspicion. The marriage of Charles to French Catholic princess Henrietta Maria was another cause for concern. Charles was not a Catholic (though he looked upon Catholicism far more favourably than Puritanism) but his marriage had an enormous impact. The queen was an immediate target of scorn and derision and many saw her as responsible for Charles' policies and perceived Catholicism. The public were also alarmed by the number of conversions taking place at court under her influence and this bolstered their belief that Charles' Arminianism was a step toward popery.⁴² Puritanism therefore was seen as an attempt to retain the tradition of the Protestant Church which many felt was coming under serious threat and as Protestants flocked toward the Puritan camp, the divide between the two sides continued to escalate.

Hostility to popery had become central to English national identity and by enforcing their vision of Anglicanism upon the people, the king and Laud were invoking the ire of, not just the Puritans, but a large portion of the Protestant population. The English feared the politics as much as the religion of Catholicism. Catholic rulers tended to be absolutist and, in the eyes of the English, tyrannical rulers. Many feared that given Charles' faith (which seemed like a crypto-Catholicism) he too would harbour absolutist ambitions, but the king, perpetually unable to understand the point of view of another or the possible consequences of his actions, continued to forcefully impose his changes within the church. The dissolution of parliament and implementation of personal rule heightened people's suspicions but by forcing through religious measures which seemed suspiciously papist, he confirmed his

⁴² Richard Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life* (Harlow, 2007)p147

absolutist proclivity. The king and Laud aroused further indignation by using the church courts and Star Chamber to severely punish anyone who spoke out against their regime. The meddling of the king was alienating, and resulted in a completely polarised nation, with tensions fraught and conflict inevitable.

The changes in the church forced through by Charles is one of the major aspects owing to the civil wars and proved to Puritans that it was vital to finish the reformation which had been left incomplete under Elizabeth. As the bishops appointed by Charles- and indeed Charles himself- seemed determined to reintroduce popery, Puritans believed that the only way to save Protestantism was to abolish the bishops, which would also reduce the king's power. Charles' complete incapacity to comprehend the religious and political climate of his kingdom would lead to civil war and eventually his death. Many historians are quick to cite religion as the primary cause of the wars and regicide but wars are seldom fought for religion alone. It was the conjuncture of religious and political conflict which proved Charles' undoing and it was his words and actions which caused this fatal collision.⁴³ Charles' decisions and attitudes politicised religious issues far more than any previous ruler. Undoubtedly there would have been Puritan evangelism and anti-Puritan opposition in the church without Charles and religious tensions would persist but perhaps they could have coexisted with one another (as they had done under James and Elizabeth) had the king not been so blatantly partisan.⁴⁴

Often labelled a papist or Catholic sympathiser during his lifetime, it is ironic that Charles and his granddaughter Anne would be the only two Stuart Monarchs who were unwaveringly devoted to the established church, yet his meddling incited fear and anger and was one of the principle factors which led to the civil war and ultimately his execution.

⁴³ Blair Worden, *The English Civil Wars 1640-1660* (London, 2009)p8

⁴⁴ Norah Carlin, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford, 1999)pp140-141

Charles is often given the sobriquet of ‘martyr King’ and this seems incredibly apt for if he had been willing to offer a genuine, rather than merely tactical, compromise on the matter of religion he quite possibly would have kept his crown (with restricted power) and- more importantly- his life.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Allan Massie, *The Royal Stuarts* (London, 2010)p182

FOR MAINTENANCE OF THE TRUE RELIGION

(The Scottish National Covenant 1638)

The Problem of Multiple Kingdoms

The constitutional crisis Charles faced in the 1620's was an English one but in the late 1630's the king faced a British crisis. Although posterity knows the conflict of the 1640's as the English Civil Wars, the collapse of Charles' authority began due to events in Scotland and the final move to civil war was caused by events in Ireland. Charles complete mismanagement of the two would ultimately seal his fate.

Scotland

Scotland was an entirely separate kingdom from England. It had a separate king and a separate parliament. It had formed an identity out of brutal wars against the English and the two nations had a deep-seated hatred of one another. Relations between the two countries improved under Elizabeth, and further still when James VI of Scotland became James I of England, but a mutual animosity remained. James was a very shrewd leader he knew he could not defeat the Scottish Presbyterian Church, the Kirk, directly so instead he gradually diminished its power. He succeeded in reintroducing bishops, re-established the principle of royal supremacy and even managed to bring a more ceremonial element to worship. James was very careful however, not to be seen as challenging the autonomy of the Kirk. These innovations were brought in with great skill and considerable tact as James knew that altering the religious milieu of Scotland would be a long and arduous process. He constantly consulted General Assemblies and was careful not to be overzealous in his actions, all the while taking heed of the political climate. James had the benefit of being king in Scotland for more than thirty years (twenty as an adult) before ascending the English throne. He had a thorough understanding of Scottish religion and politics and knew what would be required in

order for his innovations to be successful. By the time of James' death, the church was firmly under royal control, governed by a mixture of episcopacy and Presbyterianism.⁴⁶

To Charles however, Scottish policy was incomprehensible and he had no understanding of the political or religious issues in his northern kingdom. It was no secret that Charles held the Scots, and more specifically Presbyterianism, in contempt. Although he was of Scottish birth and spoke with a Scottish accent it was clear that the king thought England to be the superior nation. He believed that, as the king, it was his right to enforce whatever policy he so wished and, because he knew so much less about Scottish politics than English, he felt less inhibited by a sense of restriction on his power. As a result his relationship with Scotland offers insights into his attitude to kingship that are not so discernible elsewhere and often reveals his prejudices and preconceptions more visibly. It is in his dealings with Scotland that the Charles' shortcomings are most readily apparent.⁴⁷

Charles began to upset the status quo in Scotland from the moment he claimed the throne and invoked the ire of the two great powers within Scottish society: the nobility and the Kirk. In 1625 he issued the Edict of Revocation which asserted the king's right to revoke all royal land granted since 1540. This immediately poisoned the relationship between Charles and the political class, who had received the land of the pre-Reformation church and were fearful of it being taken back. Charles also angered the people of Scotland by his disinclination to visit the country and when the king finally arrived for his coronation in June 1633 (eight years after he claimed the throne) his intent to enforce English customs was evident. His coronation was conducted with all the trammels of Arminianism and even more offensive was Charles' appointment of the Archbishop of Saint Andrews to the Chancellorship; a position which had not been held by an ecclesiastic since the Reformation.

⁴⁶ Richard Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life* (Harlow, 2007)pp210-212

⁴⁷ Conrad Russell, *The Fall of the British Monarchies* (Oxford, 1995)pp30-31

Charles assumed he was supreme head of the Church of Scotland (which legally he was not) and that he had the right to enforce his policies upon them. Accordingly he and Archbishop Laud began to embark upon the same reforming mission as they had in England, giving no consideration to the opinions of the Kirk or the Scottish people. Whereas James had been diplomatic and believed in moderate reform, Charles (as with his policy in England) strove to achieve his methods by force. By doing this he was destroying all the work of his father to maintain peace and stability throughout his kingdoms and alienating those with whom he should have been building a rapport.⁴⁸

Of all the innovations introduced by Charles in Scotland none had a more profound effect on the country- and Charles' entire reign- than the Prayer Book introduced in 1637. The Scottish Prayer Book was created- without the consultation of the Scottish parliament or the Kirk- in an attempt to bring the Church of Scotland into conformity with the Church of England (although conformity within the Anglican Church itself was not absolute). In trying to make the Scottish Church like the Church of England, Charles had touched on a particularly sensitive nerve. The Kirk was a great source of pride in Scotland and the people felt that its integrity must be upheld at all costs. The book immediately aroused indignation, as Maurice Lee has noted, it aggravated every concern the Scots had regarding Charles: 'fear of popery, of clerical rule, of alien rule, of destruction of the political influence of the landed classes...the end of Scots laws and institutions, of Scotland as an independent entity'.⁴⁹ When the new liturgy was introduced in Edinburgh it was met with rioting and chaos. Popular sentiment in Scotland against the king and the archbishop had already been strong and the introduction of the Prayer Book only further heightened suspicion among the Scots that the king was trying to force conformity upon them; it also reaffirmed their conviction that Charles cared little about their beliefs or opinions.

⁴⁸ Ann Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (London, 1998)pp35-37

⁴⁹ Maurice Lee, *Road to Revolution: Scotland under Charles I 1625-37* (Illinois, 1985)pp154-155

While the king had many critics of his religious reforms in England, even the staunchest opponent did not deny that he, as God's chosen representative, was supreme head of the church on earth. Puritans opposed his reintroducing customs which seemed popish but did not challenge the view that authority over the church should coincide with rule over the state. It was the king's use of his power which was challenged in England not the principle of it.⁵⁰ Scotland however, was a different matter. The Kirk accepted the monarch as supreme ruler in political affairs, but argued that he was subordinate in matters pertaining to religion. Therefore this affront to their religious authority could not be accepted. The Scottish people did not have an intrinsic willingness to obey like the English. They had a stronger tradition of radical political theory and a history of reacting to what they found objectionable. They were also readier to call kings into account, although it took serious provocations from the king before they were willing to do so. The opposition to the king resulted in the signing of the National Covenant in 1638 which was created 'for the preservation of the true religion, laws and liberties' of Scotland. Although it emphasised Scotland's loyalty to the king, that loyalty was contingent on Charles' observance of Scottish laws, and the document makes abundantly clear that any deviance from 'the only true Christian faith and religion pleasing God' will not be tolerated. The Scots swore to simultaneously uphold royal authority and true religion even though, with Charles on the throne, this seemed an unachievable feat.⁵¹

As the riots spread throughout Scotland, Charles was warned by his councillors that he would either have to abandon the prayer book or implement it by force. In May 1639 he mobilised an army, without recalling the English parliament, and commenced what became known as the Bishops War. Neither the king nor the Covenanters wanted to fight and by June Charles had summoned the Scottish Parliament and General Assembly to negotiate.

⁵⁰ Norah Carlin, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford 1999)p13

⁵¹ 'The Scottish National Covenant 1638' in Keith Lindley (ed.), *The English Civil War and Revolution: A Sourcebook* (Oxon, 1998)pp46-51

Negotiations produced the Pacification of Berwick which seemed to give the Covenanters most of what they wanted. The Scots however, would be the first to discover that in trying to get the king to abide by any compromises he made they were pursuing a chimera. By conceding to the Scottish, Charles was merely buying time, the king had no intention of following through with his concessions once his power was restored. The Scottish Parliament passed a Triennial Act and abolished the Lords of the Articles. Both Parliament and the General Assembly appointed committees to manage any matters which arose while they were not in session and by the summer of 1640 the king had effectively no power in his northern kingdom. Charles interpreted this as a case of *lese-majesté* and consulted his ministers on how to react to such an insult.

Although Charles had no first minister after the death of Buckingham there were two men who came to dominate the years associated with personal rule. The first was William Laud, but his role was mainly confined to religious issues, the second was Thomas Wentworth, the Earl of Strafford. Strafford was the most capable and politically astute of all the men at court. Determined and intelligent, he had an authoritarian devotion to discipline and a tenacity of purpose unrivalled amongst the king's ministers. He had been Lord Deputy in (what English people saw as an unruly and barbarous kingdom of) Ireland since 1632 and was recalled when the Scottish problem had reached crisis. Strafford explained that the bellicose policy which he pursued in Ireland had brought law, order and even some prosperity to the country and argued that this same ruthlessness must be employed in the troublesome northern kingdom. Though opinions on the Scottish issue at Whitehall were divergent Charles eventually heeded the advice of Strafford. To crush the rebellion in Scotland, a large sum of money was needed and Strafford argued that to do this parliament must be called.⁵² With great reluctance Charles accepted this dangerous advice and the newly elected members

⁵² Christopher Hibbert, *Charles I* (London, 1970)pp142-147

of parliament, which would come to be known as the short parliament, took their place in the House of Commons on April 13th 1640.

Charles called parliament in order to obtain the finances for war with Scotland but parliament, while willing to consider this, knew it could also exploit the king at a time when he was particularly vulnerable. The king tried to play on the longstanding antagonism between the English and the Scots but was alarmed to discover many MPs were in favour of negotiating with the Covenanters. They believed that they should not finance a war to enforce on Scotland a religious programme which was already so divisive in their own country. The most capable of the men in the Commons was John Pym and he quickly came to dominate proceedings. He delivered a speech outlining the long list of grievances with the current regime and stated that the Commons would grant no funding until these grievances were addressed. His main point was that the ‘three great liberties’ of religion, justice and parliamentary power ‘had been broken’ during Charles’ reign (though he is careful not to blame the king for this).⁵³ Strafford devised a plan to divide parliament by appealing to the Lords on the king’s behalf. The Lords backed the king that finance should be granted before the nation’s issues were addressed but Pym and his allies were tenacious in their opposition. The king, outraged by the apparent lack of respect and fearful of the rumours that his opponents were in communications with the Covenanters, took drastic action. Though the sagacious Strafford beseeched him to remain patient, this time the king would not heed his minister’s advice. He dissolved parliament on May 5th and began preparations for the second Bishops War. While calling parliament at all may have been a political error, dissolving it essentially destroyed Charles. The people were now convinced that he could not be negotiated with and the king once again demonstrated a complete distrust of his subjects and aggravated the divide further. It also marked the point at which the members of the Commons

⁵³ John Pym, ‘On Grievances in the Reign of Charles I 17th April 1640’, in William Jennings Bryan (ed.), *The World’s Famous Orations Volume III Great Britain* (<http://www.bartleby.com/268/3/8.html>) (15th May 2013)

began to negotiate with the Covenanters and it was this partnership which would prove Charles' undoing.⁵⁴

It was difficult to get men to fight for Charles as they knew that they may not be paid and also because they did not believe in what they were fighting for as many in England sympathised with the Scots. Charles' army was made up of men with little training or military knowledge and desertions were rife. In contrast the Scottish army comprised of many professional soldiers who had fought in the Thirty Years War and they were fully united behind their cause. Although the Covenanters appeared to have the upper-hand they often found it difficult to recruit men or get funding and were aware that if public opinion in England was to shift decisively against them, they would be in a very precarious position.⁵⁵ Despite the inadequacy of Charles' army, work by John Adamson has shown that it outnumbered the Scots and was better equipped and funded for war. Had Charles been a more capable military leader, he could have conceivably beaten the Scots and re-imposed his authority. By doing this he would have been able to avoid the catastrophic consequences of defeat in Scotland which led to civil war in England.⁵⁶

Charles' army was roundly defeated at Newburn and the Scots occupied Northumbria, Durham and Newcastle. The defeat was a humiliation and the king's plight showed how isolated he had become in England particularly due to his personal rule.⁵⁷ Charles' council advised him that to maintain his authority in Scotland he would have to negotiate and abolish episcopacy. The king reluctantly acquiesced as it was the only way that he could extricate himself from the mess he had created. In the negotiations with Scotland Charles agreed to abandon his ecclesiastical policy and was also forced to pay the high costs incurred by the

⁵⁴ Christopher Hibbert, *Charles I* (London, 1970)pp148-149

⁵⁵ Richard Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life* (Harlow, 2007)pp244-245

⁵⁶ John Adamson, 'England without Cromwell: What if Charles I had Avoided the Civil War' in Niall Ferguson (ed.) *Virtual History* (New York, 1997)pp95-101

⁵⁷ John Miller, *A Brief History of the English Civil Wars* (London, 2009)p37

Scottish army occupying northern England. To do this it seemed Charles had no choice but to once again parliament and, with the disaster of the Short Parliament still fresh in their minds, the new parliament (which would become known as the Long Parliament) would not be as conciliatory towards the king as its predecessor.

The war in Scotland had highlighted the unprecedented extent to which Charles had failed as king. A wiser king would have yielded to such a vociferous expression of national sentiment or certainly been more willing to negotiate. As Scottish Reverend and Covenanter James Kirkton pointed out, the king's major flaw was that 'he mistook wilfulness for constancy, granting unprofitability to his people today that which would have abundantly satisfied them yesterday... but all out of time'.⁵⁸ The loss of control in Scotland emboldened his English subjects and they began to demonstrate resistance against his policies beginning with the refusal of many to pay ship money. Probably for the first time in history, the majority of English people had welcomed an invading Scottish army as its liberators. The Scots however were well aware that they had caught the king at a moment of exceptional weakness and to maintain their position required the assistance of the English parliament. By the Scots' continuous occupation of England, there was a continuous need for parliament and destroyed any possibility for the king to dissolve it as he had done previously. The situation in Scotland exposed the king's complete political deficiency and marked the worst point, hitherto, in his relationship with his subjects as both Scotland and England rebelled against him.

⁵⁸ The Reverend James Kirkton, 'On the Character of King Charles' in James G. Fyfe (ed.) *Scottish Diaries and Memoirs 1550 -1746* (Stirling, 1938) p240

Ireland

After the Scottish issue was resolved the king's situation was gradually improving and men were shrinking back from parliamentary support as it became too radical. In October 1641 another crisis erupted, which plunged the king back into turmoil. This time it originated in Ireland. While Scotland was an entirely separate kingdom to England, Ireland was a colonial kingdom. It had its own council and legal system, but they were directly answerable to the English Privy Council, and its own parliament, but it could not legislate without approval from London. Ireland also had an established Protestant Church, though the majority of its population remained Catholic. As in Scotland, religion would be the main source of acrimony in Ireland. Unlike Scotland however, the antagonist to the Irish drama was not the king, although he would certainly be most the burdened by the consequences.

From the beginning of James' reign, the English government had been trying to enforce royal authority in Ireland through Anglicisation which it saw as an attempt to 'civilise' the Irish. The English government removed Irish cultural and legal systems, confiscated Irish land and tried to enforce Protestantism. The main beneficiaries of these procedures were the 'new English' Protestant landed class but it was to the detriment of the native Catholic and the 'old English' (who though aristocratic were also Catholic) classes whose position continued to decline.⁵⁹ Crown policy towards Ireland in the early 1620's followed two contradictory approaches which exacerbated the issue. The Duke of Buckingham and his friends in Ireland aligned themselves with the 'new English' and threatened the rights of the old English while at the same time the Lord Treasurer Lionel Cranfield pursued antithetical policies and sought to reverse the oppressive measures

⁵⁹ Ann Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (London, 1998)pp38-39

implemented by Buckingham.⁶⁰ The situation was complex and tensions were fraught, in truth Ireland was a tinderbox waiting to explode.

Ireland was a kingdom which Charles cared little about. As in Scotland he was largely unaware or unconcerned with Irish political and religious issues and on the very rare occasion he feigned interest it was usually out of Anglocentric concerns. This lack of interest left a vacuum in Irish politics which was filled by the Earl of Strafford. During his tenure as Lord Deputy, Strafford transformed Irish politics and raised the crown's power considerably. His goal for the state had parallels to Laud's goal for the church and both men ignored the opinions of any oppositionist groups in order to advance their own narrow policies. He built up a contingent of loyal followers, which held the balance of power, and sought to play the 'old' and 'new English' classes against one another. This worked well at first but by 1637 both groups had turned against him at the same time. This was compounded by events in Scotland, as Strafford mounted a campaign against the Ulster Presbyterians who sympathised with the Covenanters.⁶¹ Although his own position was secure, by doing this he was leaving an incredible problem for whoever was to succeed him. Ironically it was Strafford's fall rather than his rule which caused agitation in Ireland.

Strafford was an incredibly effective leader and as long as he remained in Ireland royal authority would remain intact. The situation changed entirely after Strafford's imprisonment in November 1640. For a short time both 'old' and 'new English' joined together in a mutual condemnation of the previous regime but that soon faded and old tensions resurfaced. Fierce rioting broke out in Ireland in October 1641 when the Catholic natives launched what they believed was a pre-emptive strike against the British settlers. The anti-Catholicism which permeated Westminster, Edinburgh and Ulster aroused fear amongst

⁶⁰ Richard Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life* (Harlow, 2007)p200

⁶¹ Aidan Clarke, 'The Government of Wentworth 1632-40' in T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin & F. J. Byrne(eds.), *A New History of Ireland: Volume III: Early Modern Ireland 1534-1691* (Oxford, 2009)pp267-268

the Irish Catholics that their religion would be forced out by parliament and the Covenanters who now seemed to have jurisdiction on all English and Scottish matters respectively. The natives launched a brutal attack against the landed class which sparked outrage in England and, although stories of the rebellion were often greatly exaggerated, nonetheless, the hatred of Catholicism and fear of a popish plot amongst the Protestants intensified. The queen was of course implicated as the *agent provocateur* and many believed that the king had instigated the rebellion, or was certainly sympathetic to the Catholic plight, pushing relations between king and parliament to breaking point.

The Irish rebellion raised the issue which would eventually make war in England inescapable: who should control the armed forces. If someone was to crush the rebellion they would need the army, but the question remained if the king was trustworthy enough to control it. The Puritans and Covenanters believed (or perhaps merely professed to believe) that Charles had sanctioned the Catholic rebellion and therefore if they were to grant him the army he was likely to use it against them rather than the Irish. Pym and his fellow MP's sent a letter to Charles advising him that until he dismissed his present advisers (who were responsible for the king's misdeeds), and replaced them with ones of the Common's choosing, they would be forced to take charge of the Irish problem themselves. Charles was vexed; he saw it as a direct attack on the royal prerogative and argued that only the king should control the army.⁶² The issue highlighted the complete lack of trust parliament had for Charles. Unfortunately there were many who by this point agreed with Charles that parliament had exceeded its rights and the fact that Charles now had popular support (which prior to this he did not) made war possible.

The Irish rebellion was perhaps the prime cause of civil war in England as it manifested all the problems associated with Charles' reign and made facing them

⁶² Christopher Hibbert, *Charles I* (London, 1970)pp159-160

unavoidable.⁶³ Perhaps Charles' main failing when dealing with the problem of Ireland and Scotland was that he could not understand them from a British perspective, unlike Strafford who was successful because he had the capacity to appreciate both the British dimension to his policies and the extent to which affairs in the three kingdoms were interconnected. Conrad Russell describes the relationship between the three nations as a 'billiard ball effect' one which the king with his political blindness could not comprehend. The English reaction to the Scottish rebellion had a massive impact on discontent in Ireland, and the Irish rising caused issues in England to reach boiling point.⁶⁴ Charles also failed to realise that the only similarity between the three kingdoms was that he was their monarch, and by failing to consider the divergent political and religious issues of each country, he sparked a series of events which would ultimately lead to his demise.

⁶³ Allan Massie, *The Royal Stuarts* (London, 2010)p198

⁶⁴ Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford, 1990)p27

**THE KINGS OF ENGLAND ARE NEVER IN THEIR MAJESTIC
SOVEREIGNTY BUT IN PARLIAMENT**

(George Digby Speech in Commons 19th January 1641)

Charles and the Long parliament

Now that parliament was secure, its members sought to rectify some of the policies put in place during the personal rule. The two main assets of the long parliament were its unity and the diplomacy and resolution of its leadership. Pym did not want to starve the country of funds but knew the institution of parliament would not survive unless Charles had a need to call it. He therefore maintained his alliance with the Covenanters, in order to keep them occupying northern England, and essentially held the king to ransom. Once parliament focused on the issue of the king's misrule, it would have almost unanimous backing, and Charles, politically isolated, would be forced to acquiesce to its demands. The long parliament abolished Star Chamber and the High Commission, outlawed unjust taxes such as ship money and passed a triennial bill. Through Pym's incredible political finesse he also managed to pass a bill which forbade the dissolution of the long parliament without its own consent. After achieving these reforms Pym and the Commons then turned their attention to the 'evil advisers' of the king whom they found responsible for the oppression of the last decade: Laud and Strafford.⁶⁵

Laud was impeached and locked in the Tower of London (where he would remain for four years before being executed) but the urgent target was Strafford. The Commons believed that killing Strafford would demonstrate the king's weakness and also 'reduce him to a necessity of granting'.⁶⁶ The king's leading minister was impeached and then brought to trial in February 1641 on a charge of treason. Strafford defended himself with great skill. As his judges were fellow members of the House of Lords, he cleverly played on the divide between

⁶⁵ Blair Worden, *The English Civil Wars 1640-1660* (London, 2009)pp30-32

⁶⁶ Conrad Russell, *The Fall of the British Monarchies* (Oxford, 1995)p275

the houses and presciently warned his fellow peers that ‘the shedding of my blood may make way for the tracing out of yours’.⁶⁷ Ultimately the judges could not find Strafford guilty and the process of impeachment was therefore abandoned in favour of a bill of attainder- a Tudor contrivance which dispensed with the necessity of proof- declaring his guilt. The bill was passed and now all that was required was the royal assent. Charles did everything in his power to save Strafford including orchestrating the so called ‘army plot’ to rescue him from the tower. Rather than helping Strafford’s cause, this angered the commons further and once again highlighted the untrustworthiness of the king. Almost all of Charles’ council pressured the king to acquiesce. Even Strafford advised the king to sign away his life rather than lose the kingdom but Charles refused. It was not until the wellbeing of his wife and children came under threat from an angry mob at Whitehall that Charles finally gave in to parliament’s demands and signed the bill. The king would never forgive himself for signing Strafford’s death warrant, often citing it as the one dishonourable act of his life, and when the he made his final speech on the scaffold at Whitehall he acknowledged that it was God’s punishment for his part in it.⁶⁸

Although the king felt it his darkest hour, with Strafford’s death Charles’ position gradually improved. Most moderate members of the Church of England were satisfied with the end of personal rule and did not wish to see the crown weakened further, the Scottish army had been paid and was returning home and Charles had acquiesced to the demands of the Covenanters (hoping that through this he had won their loyalty). The king however was filled with a desire for revenge over the execution of Strafford; his vitriol was aimed at the Commons and Pym and the other MP’s knew that if Charles regained enough power to do so,

⁶⁷ Thomas Wentworth Earl of Strafford, ‘In his own Defence’ in William Jennings Bryan (ed.), *The World’s Famous Orations Volume III Great Britain* (<http://www.bartleby.com/268/3/8.html>) (19th April 2013)

⁶⁸ Clive Holmes, *Why was Charles I Executed?* (London, 2007)p93

they would be fiercely punished.⁶⁹ As previously discussed, the relative calm of the period succeeding Strafford's death was disrupted by the Irish rebellion in October and this was followed a month later by the Grand Remonstrance.

The remonstrance lists the present situation within England and 'the various distempers and disorders which had... extinguished the liberty, peace and prosperity of this kingdom'.⁷⁰ It begins in 1625 when Charles came to power, though it is careful not to blame the king himself and, as with any previous grievances presented to the king, instead blames his advisors. The document has over two hundred clauses outlining the problems parliament was faced with and the causes of these problems. It is important to note that the Grand Remonstrance objects, not to the power of kingship but, what had happened under a single king. In all parliament's legislation and dealings with the king (not only before but also after the war) there had never been any indication that the people were unhappy with the system of government; their disgruntlement lay with the man who was atop that system. Parliament did not believe that England's constitution or government were flawed and they still believed in the divinity of monarchy. It seems unthinkable that in less than ten years they would establish a republic in place of the structure they valued so highly and as such there is reasonable cause to hold the king largely accountable.

On 22nd November the Grand Remonstrance was passed in the commons by only eleven votes winning 159 to 148. The small margin was highly indicative of the growing schism between not only parliament, but the entire country, regarding allegiance to the king. The strength of the long parliament (and the stability of the kingdom) lay in its being united against Charles now this was beginning to collapse. In parliament's first year there was scarcely a dissenting voice however as the Commons became more extreme, a number of its

⁶⁹ Allan Massie, *The Royal Stuarts* (London, 2010)pp195-196

⁷⁰ 'The Grand Remonstrance' (<http://www.constitution.org/eng/conpur043.htm>) (18th May 2013)

more moderate members switched their allegiance to the king. Charles merely had to bide his time and, judging by the growing number of dissenters, it was highly possible parliament would destroy itself. The king however, a political dilettante, could not see the benefits of waiting instead he followed a characteristically rash and ill-conceived plan which ignited the civil war. Now fully convinced that parliament was exceeding its limits, on 4th January 1642 Charles marched into the Commons with a number of guards in order to arrest MP's Pym, John Hampden, Denzil Holles, William Strode and Sir Arthur Haselrig. The recklessness he displayed in doing so was imprudent and the members, having been forewarned, were not at Westminster upon his arrival. War was now imminent. Charles had shown himself to be breaking the law again and relations between king and parliament were now irreconcilable. The king had finally done what his oppressive policies and political mismanagement had threatened to do since the beginning of his reign. Eight months later he would raise the royal standard at Nottingham and declare his intention to overturn the perceived injustices committed against him by force.

GIVE CAESAR HIS DUE

(Motto on the royal standard as cited by John Rushworth in *Mr. Rushworth's Historical Collections*)

Charles and the English Civil Wars

At the beginning of the war the royalist cavalry were superior to their opponents but Charles was as incapable an army general as he had been a politician. His nephew Rupert managed the army and war would probably have gone better had Charles entrusted Rupert to run the entire campaign rather than interfering. Charles did not issue orders, but instead made suggestions which were often ambiguous or unclear and hampered the royalist side. The main goal of the royalists during the war had been to reclaim London and several times throughout the early stages of the war this seemed achievable but was thwarted by the inaction of the king.⁷¹ As the war continued, the two sides seemed at a stalemate and both sought an alliance with Scotland as they knew it would tip the scales in their favour. Unfortunately for Charles (due to his earlier religious campaign) he had already isolated himself from the Scots and, as parliament had more to offer, they signed the Solemn League and Covenant in 1643. The treaty pledged Scottish assistance to parliament in the war in return for 'the preservation of the reformed religion in the Church of Scotland, in doctrine... against our common enemies; the reformation of religion in the kingdoms of England and Ireland'.⁷² In July 1644 at the battle of Marsden Moor (in which Oliver Cromwell's Ironsides first showed their credentials) the royalist army was roundly defeated. The advantage had now swung firmly in favour of the parliamentarians, and at Naseby in June the following year, the royalists suffered another crushing defeat essentially ending the war in England. Although there was a brief period when it seemed the war could be won in Scotland it was eventually put down by the Scottish forces and Charles surrendered at Newark in May 1646.

⁷¹ Allan Massie, *The Royal Stuarts* (London, 2010)pp200-204

⁷² 'The Solemn League and Covenant September 25th 1643' (<http://www.constitution.org/eng/conpur058.htm>) (20th May 2013)

Charles was held prisoner for six months in the Scottish camp at Newark before being handed over to parliamentarians and moved to Holdenby House in Northamptonshire. Although he had lost the war, Charles injudiciously continued to believe in his divinity and that no settlement could be reached without him. The fact that both the parliamentarians and Scots continued to stipulate that no harm should come to him and the throngs of cheering fans which greeted him as he was being transported from Scotland confirmed this to him and he resolved to continue to assert his authority. An unexpected event, which Charles had no part in, put his position in further jeopardy: the New Model Army turned against parliament. The New Model Army, led by Oliver Cromwell, had been growing in power since the outbreak of the war. It consisted mainly of Independents and parliament contained mainly Presbyterians and this led to a hostile divide. Parliament believed that as it had the king in its possession it had the advantage. It tried to coerce the king into agreeing to a trial period of Presbyterianism in England. This idea was anathema to both the Scots, who objected to the idea of a trial, and the independents, who objected to any type of enforced religion, and meant that even if Charles was to agree (which he was genuinely considering at the behest of his wife) a solution would not be reached. In May 1647 Charles was seized by Cromwell and brought to Hampden Court where he was presented with a new proposal in which all three religions, Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Independents would be allowed to follow their respective faith with no compulsion. Charles was obliged to agree though he lacked any real conviction on the matter. He recommended the document to parliament but it was quickly shot down which greatly angered Cromwell. It was at this point that Charles decided negotiations with the army were futile as they could not deliver on an agreement which he would find acceptable. He escaped from Hampden Court and moved to the Isle of Wight; although he

could have fled to France at this point he stayed for if nothing else he was a man of honour and dignity.⁷³

The king was now more convinced than ever of his position and that, because of the division amongst his enemies, no settlement was achievable without him, and when that settlement was reached he believed it would be in his favour. He believed that if he were to procrastinate in decision making and barter with one group then the other he might aggravate the divide and renew hostilities to the extent that he might resume his war effort.⁷⁴ In another imprudent move, he wrote a letter to the remnants of the House of Lords insulting Cromwell in which he asked ‘if I have not just cause to free myself from the hands of those who change their principles with their condition and with whom the Leveller’s doctrine is rather countenanced than punished’.⁷⁵ He had now alienated the most powerful man in the country but the king was to make a far more critical error shortly thereafter. In what was the most precipitous decision of his reign, Charles entered into talks with a party led by Hamilton in Scotland which favoured the Covenant and monarchy and was opposed to Cromwell and his New Model Army. According to the document drafted, Charles agreed to a three year trial of Presbyterianism in England in return for which the Scottish government would raise an army to rescue him. The king was no longer even keeping up the pretence of negotiation and was brazenly preparing for war. The Second Civil War broke out in May 1648 and the royalist forces were once again defeated by August.⁷⁶

The second war was brief but had a startling death toll and was seen by most as completely unnecessary. A mere product of Charles’ political ineptitude, he cost thousands of lives and now ensured that Cromwell and the army would be much harsher in dealing with

⁷³ Allan Massie, *The Royal Stuarts* (London, 2010)p208-209

⁷⁴ Clive Holmes, *Why was Charles Executed?* (London, 2007)p97

⁷⁵ George Young, *Charles I & Cromwell* (<http://www.gutenberg.ca/ebooks/younggm-charlesiandcromwell/younggm-charlesiandcromwell-00-h.html>) (24th May 2013)

⁷⁶ Christopher Hibbert, *Charles I* (London, 1970)pp248-251

him. Many historians tend to assume that Charles was aiming for a settlement which he did not have the political finesse to accomplish, however all evidence points to the fact that he was intent on restarting the war now that he had Scottish assistance. Charles felt that he was the wronged party and his enemies should be punished and, if possible, humiliated. As in Scotland ten years earlier he had used negotiation as a means of buying time rather than ever actually intending to comply with his concessions.⁷⁷ In doing this Charles once again showed that he was devious and untrustworthy and many believed this treachery could not go unpunished.

The destruction of the second civil war and the treachery of the king infuriated Cromwell. He now agreed with the extremists members of the army that the king could not be negotiated with, and should be put on trial for his life, proclaiming ‘we’ll cut his head with the crown on it’.⁷⁸ In spite of Charles being complicit in the outbreak of the second war, the majority of parliament still wanted to negotiate with him but Cromwell’s patience was exhausted. Before he could try the king it would be necessary to remove the members of the Commons who would object. On December 6th 1648, the Commons was denuded of any members who appeared to have royalist sympathies in an act known as Pride’s Purge. The civil war, which had begun because of an attempt by the Commons to transfer the royal prerogative from crown to parliament, had resulted in the destruction of the institution of parliament.⁷⁹ The institution of monarchy was about to suffer the same fate.

⁷⁷ Richard Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life* (Harlow, 2007)p438

⁷⁸ Jane Lane, *The Severed Crown* (Cornwall, 2002) p209

⁷⁹ Allan Massie, *The Royal Stuarts* (London, 2010)p210

TYRANT, TRAITOR, MURDERER AND PUBLIC ENEMY

(Charges brought against Charles I 1st January 1649)

The Trial and Execution of Charles I

On January 1st 1649 the Commons, now under the *de facto* rule of Cromwell's New Model Army, passed an act which allowed it to set up a high court of justice to try and execute the king who 'hath had a wicked design totally to subvert the ancient and fundamental laws and liberties of this nation and in their place to introduce an arbitrary and tyrannical government'.⁸⁰ In truth, the courts purpose was to validate the sentence of death which Cromwell had already decided upon and bring some form of legitimacy to the obviously unlawful act. The Commons bypassed the Lords who refused to accept the act, ignored the Scottish parliament and abrogated the rule of law in order to achieve their aims. Many of the appointed judges, seeing the illegitimacy of the trial, refused to attend, some with vocal opposition others silent defection. Army general Sir Thomas Fairfax was one notable non-attende at court and republican ideologist Algernon Sydney also refused noting the illegality of proceedings 'I did positively oppose Cromwell...First, the King could be tried by no court; secondly, that no man could be tried by that court'.⁸¹ Of the one hundred and thirty-five commissioners appointed only eighty of them ever sat and twenty-one of these did not sign Charles' death warrant. Many of the commissioners who did attend were uncertain of their position and wary of the legality of killing a king.⁸²

There appeared to be one last route for Charles to escape execution and this would depend on how he conducted himself at his trial, more specifically if he would recognise the court that was to try him. The charges brought against Charles stated that he was 'the

⁸⁰ '1st January 1649: An Act of the Commons of England Assembled in Parliament, for Erecting of a High Court of Justice, for the Trying and Judging of Charles Stuart, King of England' in Charles H. Firth & Robert S. Rait (eds.) *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum: 1642-1660* (London, 1911)pp1253-1255

⁸¹ Algernon Sydney, 'Letter XII: From Mr Lambard's Collection' October 12th 1660 in R.W. Blencowe (ed.), *Sydney Papers* (London, 1825)pp235-240

⁸² C.V. Wedgwood, *A King Condemned: The Trial and Execution of Charles I* (London, 2011) pp93-108

occasioner, author, and continuer of the said unnatural, cruel and bloody wars; and therein guilty of all the treasons, murders, rapines, burnings, spoils, desolations, damages and mischiefs to this nation, acted and committed in the said wars, or occasioned thereby'.⁸³ This was something which would have been impossible to prove, and may have been constructed in an attempt to get the king to plead thereby acknowledging the court's right to try him and the view of the constitution which the trial signified (a view which ran contrary to the that of his entire reign). Had the king accepted the court's legitimacy it is very possible that he could have remained on the throne (though with severely restricted power) or been deposed in favour of his youngest son Henry. Certainly a death sentence would no longer be necessary as Charles would have been seen to yield to parliament's argument and the sovereignty of the people could be established.⁸⁴ Charles refused. As the king pointed out he wasn't being tried by a legitimate parliament but an illegal *ad hoc* assembly declaring 'let me see a legal authority warranted by the constitutions of the kingdom and I will answer'.⁸⁵ To plead would be an affront to everything that he believed in and he was also aware of the growing support for him amongst his subjects. President of court proceedings John Bradshaw resolved that since Charles would not enter a plea, he was guilty. No maudlin appeal would be made by Charles to overturn this, he remained dogged in his opposition and, convinced of his divine right, continued to refuse to acknowledge the court each day until sentence was passed. In doing this the king was spurning his last possible route to salvation.

During his trial Charles portrayed a steadfastness and conviction not seen in him before. The notoriously shy king who backed away from public interaction put on a remarkable performance and his arguments were masterfully designed to cause the utmost

⁸³ 'The Charges Against the King' in Victor L. Stater(ed.), *The Political History of Tudor and Stuart England: A Sourcebook* (London 2002)pp144-145

⁸⁴ Allan Massie, *The Royal Stuarts* (London, 2010)pp211-212

⁸⁵ Charles I, 'The trial of King Charles I January 20th 1649' in Walter Scott (ed.), *A Collection of Scarce and Valuable Tracts: Volume 5* (London, 1811) p199

embarrassment to his judges and those in control of the state. Had Charles approached the civil war (or his earlier reign) with such authority the outcome may have been very different.⁸⁶ Charles' political mismanagement and error strewn reign had been one of the major causes of the outbreak of the first civil war, his complete lack of political competence had been the singular cause of the second and now his unwavering conviction to his divine right would be the cause of his death. In spite of all his terrible misdeeds, right up until the trial (and even during) there was a possibility of redemption but Charles would not acquiesce. The king would remain true to his principles as he would rather die a martyr than live as an apostate. Throughout his reign Charles' words and actions had outraged his subjects but a reprieve always seemed more likely than execution. His conduct at his trial however was, quite literally, the final nail in his coffin. In his speech upon the scaffold at Whitehall the king once again defended his actions and asserted 'truly I desire (the people's) liberty and freedom' and that he was willing to sacrifice himself in the name of 'those laws, by which their life and their goods may be most their own'.⁸⁷ Charles concluded his speech and the executioner's axe fell. Throughout his tumultuous reign, the king could not understand just how powerful an institution parliament was, and the story of the civil war is not one of parliament rebelling against a king but rather the reverse. Ultimately Charles refusal to accept parliament's power or renounce his own inviolable divinity made his execution unavoidable.

⁸⁶ Tristram Hunt, *The English Civil War at First Hand* (London, 2002)p221

⁸⁷ Charles I, 'Speech from the Scaffold January 30th 1649' in Suzanne McIntire(ed.), *Speeches in World History* (New York, 2009)pp148-150

**HE WAS A PRINCE THAT HAD NOTHING OF FAITH OR TRUST,
JUSTICE OR GENEROSITY**

(Lucy Hutchinson in *Memoirs of Colonel Hutchinson*)

The Character of King Charles

In the twentieth century, there has been much debate about the role of the individual in history. Certain historians are of the view that history is made by a few powerful men while others (particularly Marxists) believe in the predominance of impersonal social forces that circumstances impose narrow limits on what the individual can achieve and that 'the individuals who influenced historical events gave expression to their time and were always representative of wider historical forces'.⁸⁸ No historian of the English Civil War however, could deny the significance of Charles' I place among its causes. The king's role in precipitating the civil war lay in a combination of poor decisions and character flaws. Few would ascribe the war entirely to Charles, although his role is substantial, but in examining the reasons for his execution, he is almost exclusively the architect of his own downfall.⁸⁹

As the second child of King James I, Charles was not intended to become king. Charles was a weak and feeble baby and many believed he would not live past infancy. Charles' older brother Henry was handsome, athletic, charming and had all the qualities desired of a king. Henry was not to be king however as he fell ill with a mysterious fever (probably the then unknown disease porphyria) and died in 1612. There is an interesting argument that Henry would have been able to manage the chaos of the 1620's better than Charles. Henry was a staunch Calvinist, firmly committed to the crusade against the Habsburgs in Europe, and certain historians argue that, had he survived, he could have united England behind his aggressive Protestant policies, particularly as many of the young nobles attached to his court would become opponents of Charles during the civil war. Charles on the

⁸⁸ Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London, 1997)pp161-165

⁸⁹ Norah Carlin, *The Causes of the Civil War* (Oxford, 1999)pp135-137

other hand was not capable of dealing with the crises in the 1620's as he did not have the same fortitude as his brother.⁹⁰

After the death of his brother Charles, now heir apparent, began spending more time at court. He looked at his life in court as a duty rather than a pleasure as it was not the least to his liking. By the time Charles succeeded his father in 1625 he had become more- though not entirely- qualified for the role of a king. Unlike his father he was no scholar and many (particularly Whig) historians are quick to the fact that Charles was a rather unintelligent man and was far more concerned with aesthetics than academia. Charles could not have been more different to his predecessor. James was loquacious and emotional, Charles taciturn and reserved. James loved an argument and was willing to debate with anyone on almost any topic whereas Charles detested discussion and would usually reply to something to which he disagreed with a simple statement such as 'sir I am not of your opinion' or 'by your favour I think otherwise'.⁹¹ James wrote extensively on political ideas whereas Charles it seemed had no cognizance of politics or monarchy. He based his policy on a simplistic assumption: the task of kings was to rule, the duty of subjects was to obey, and thought only in terms of simple polarities, good or bad, right or wrong, loyal or disloyal. James was not altogether concerned with dignity and virtue whereas to Charles this was the very foundation of kingship and he would preserve it with his life. The dignity and majesty of his position were always in his upper most thoughts as were his fears that he couldn't uphold those kingly duties.⁹² Charles put an end to the moral laxity which was a defining feature of court under his father's reign. The Caroline court was polite, decorous and well ordered.⁹³

⁹⁰ William Hunt, 'Special Origins in the English Revolution: A Legitimation Crisis in Early Stuart England' in Geoff Eley and William Hunt (eds.), *Reviving the English Revolution: Reflections and Elaborations on the work of Christopher Hill* (London, 1988)

⁹¹ Hester Chapman, *The Tragedy of Charles II in the years 1630-1660* (London, 1964)p18

⁹² Tristram Hunt, *The English Civil War at First Hand* (London, 2002)p3

⁹³ Allan Massie, *The Royal Stuarts* (London, 2010)pp181-182

In truth the only similarities Charles shared with his father were arguably James' worst qualities: both believed in the divine right of kings and both were a poor judge of character. It was these two aspects of Charles reign which are perhaps the most influential in leading to his demise. James believed in his supreme divinity but it was little more than an ideology to him, Charles on the other hand saw it not as just a political theory but a way of life. His unwavering self-assurance that God was the only person to whom he was answerable made him incredibly difficult to deal with and hugely untrustworthy. Deception of others and renegeing on deals was permissible because as king he was free from moral scruples. Charles would enforce his policies without compunction as he was thoroughly confident in his divine right and this invoked the ire of his subjects. The key problem which ran throughout Charles' reign, as one MP of the House of Commons pointed out, was 'whether the king was above the law or subject to it' and Charles' refusal to accept the validity of that question would be his downfall.⁹⁴ His belief in the divinity of kings was also perhaps why Charles refused to allow his 'evil advisers' take the blame for his policies. Charles did not accept that he had two separate bodies, his natural one as an individual and his political one as king, and while this may have been his one truly modern attitude, ultimately, it cost the king his life.⁹⁵

The man who most demonstrates Charles' poor judge of character is the Duke of Buckingham. Originally James' favourite and detested by Charles, Buckingham managed to charm the young prince and eventually won his favour. By the time Charles claimed the throne the two were inseparable and the early years of Charles' reign was dominated by Buckingham. The Duke's guidance was disastrous and it was on his advice- though parliament was in favour- that Charles declared war with Spain and France (the latter incongruously following Buckingham's arranging Charles' marriage to a French princess). Both wars were disastrous for Charles and, as previously highlighted, the army's failure in

⁹⁴ Allan Massie, *The Royal Stuarts* (London, 2010)p185

⁹⁵ Conrad Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics* (Oxford, 1979)PP402-403

Europe led to a crisis between king and parliament. Parliament understood Buckingham's deleterious effect on the king and tried to have him impeached but the king remained resolutely loyal to the Duke until he was assassinated in 1628. The king's favouritism towards Buckingham damaged his reputation considerably. Buckingham was reviled at court and was believed to be responsible for Charles' poor decisions, the favour which the king bestowed upon him disgruntled the people and the issue of Buckingham's impeachment would mark the beginning of Charles' enmity with parliament. It was hoped that Buckingham's death would ameliorate the situation however Charles, though inconsolable at first, surrounded himself with other advisers who were equally detested.

Generally there is consensus among most historians regarding Charles' character. The king is often described as stubborn, self-righteous and confrontational. Most also agree that his main underlying problem was a deep personal insecurity and fear of failure. Shy beneath a cold demeanour, he shrank away from encounters with common people even though he sought to regulate their conduct. Charles avoidance of public celebrations and displays, his refusal to allow crowds follow his progresses around the country and his expectation of strict domestic privacy (which was unusual for an English king) was associated with a renewed emphasis on formality and distance. This did little to endear the king to his subjects as such detachment was not expected of a monarch.⁹⁶ Conrad Russell puts great importance on the character of Charles and suggests that, in analysing why the king was so unsuccessful, it is crucial to understand his ability to 'rub people up the wrong way'. He asserts that this was most likely caused by characteristics of Charles, which a present day historian does not quite grasp as that is something which is not recorded, and this certainly played a major role in his demise.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Kevin Sharpe, *Politics and Ideas in Early Stuart England* (London, 1989)p160

⁹⁷ Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford, 1990)p185

Charles was an inept politician and was not prepared to recognise that his government rested upon consent. His declaration in 1629 that he would call another parliament only when his subjects have ‘come to a better understanding of themselves’ is typical, the king, so sure of his own rectitude, would not for one moment consider that perhaps it was he who needed to understand them better.⁹⁸ Convinced of his divine right, when explaining his reasons for dissolving parliament, he stated ‘princes are not bound to give account of their actions but to God alone’.⁹⁹ Charles was incredibly indecisive and easily led by those around him. The indecision with which he pursued domestic policy was often aggravated when he received conflicting advice from his ministers. Charles consistently chose to listen to the most strong-minded advice rather than the most rational and this often led to catastrophe.¹⁰⁰ The king could not understand how to deal with issues on a long term basis instead preferring the most rapid solution. In many of his political dealings (particularly concerning Pym and the Grand Remonstrance) had he not acted so quickly or impetuously the tide may have turned in his favour. Furthermore the king was incapable of reading danger signals; he believed it was the duty of his subjects to obey him and therefore he would be obeyed. He also lacked the capacity to understand the position of anyone but himself and was alarmingly ignorant of how his actions appeared to others. He could not understand why he seemed untrustworthy and found it beneath his royal dignity to examine the merits of opinions that ran counter to his own. His political frailty is most readily apparent however in his dealing with others, notably the Earl of Strafford. Strafford was Charles most competent advisor but a personal dislike for him meant that he was exiled to Ireland, a territory Charles had no real interest in, and by the time he was recalled in 1639 was confined to damage limitation. A more astute

⁹⁸ L.J. Reeve, *Charles I and the Road to Personal Rule* (Cambridge, 1989)p111

⁹⁹ Charles I, ‘The King's Declaration showing the causes of the late Dissolution’ (<http://www.constitution.org/eng/conpur016.htm>) (25th May 2013)

¹⁰⁰ Norah Carlin, *The Causes of the Civil War* (Oxford, 1999)p138

king would have overlooked personal feelings to ensure political stability but this was not something Charles was prepared to do.¹⁰¹

In examining the causes of Charles' execution, there are three key events in which the character and judgement of the king ultimately resulted in his death: the Bishops War, the Second Civil War and the trial. It is undeniable that Charles' character and decision making were the main cause behind the Bishops War; the decision to implement the Prayer Book in Scotland was entirely Charles' and followed naturally from his own convictions about the nature of authority, Britain and the church. To deny that he is responsible would amount to, as Conrad Russell puts it, 'a wholesale rejection of the evidence'.¹⁰² This decision taken by the king is effectively what initiated the move to civil war. The renewal of hostilities by Charles in 1648 showed the king to be treacherous and incapable of negotiation and it was at the point the New Model Army decided there was no alternative but to try him. Finally at his trial, the possibility of redemption was still attainable but his own personal convictions, and an obstinate belief in his divinity, would not allow it.

Whig historians have tended to be highly critical of Charles and blame him as the predominant cause behind the civil war. Recent studies however, have tended to be slightly more favourable and see Charles as a man whose good qualities were counteracted by certain character flaws and misjudgements of particular situations. In time his virtues may have endeared him to his people but unfortunately his narrow-mindedness and constant meddling made this impossible.¹⁰³ Indeed Charles had several positive attributes; his dignity and self-control won him the respect of many but unfortunately did little to veil his complete political ineptitude. Had he been king in a later era (when the monarch was essentially a figurehead)

¹⁰¹ Richard Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life* (Harlow, 2007)p172

¹⁰² Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (New York, 1990)p186

¹⁰³ Graham Goodlad, 'Charles I: Author of his own Downfall?' in *History Review* (Issue 63, March 2009)pp19-21

his sense of decorum and love of the aesthetic could have made him ‘the most splendid of kings’, but in seventeenth century England it was the character of the king which destroyed him.¹⁰⁴

Many of the things Charles said and did with regard parliament and Puritans have parallels in the reign of his father and even the Tudors. Religious and political issues were as contentious under Oliver Cromwell and the later Stuarts as they had been during Charles’ reign yet they did not antagonise the people to the point of civil war. Considering this, there is vindication in the argument that the king’s character (and decision making because of this character) played a large part in causing the civil war but more specifically it is perhaps the sole reason that the New Model Army took the decision to execute him. Charles’ ability to ‘rub people up the wrong way’ meant that his subjects were less inclined to easily forgive him when he committed the crippling political blunders he was prone to. Blair Worden highlights three qualities of Charles’ which he asserts would not have been completely disastrous separately but proved fatal in combination. Firstly there were the ‘alarming policies’ which he pursued through equally alarming measures. Second was his total lack of political judgement and finally and perhaps most importantly was the fact that he did not trust his subjects nor did they trust him.¹⁰⁵ Although there has been much debate about the role of the individual in history, Charles’ importance is undeniable. This is mainly because in an age of absolutism, such as the seventeenth century was, the individual rulers’ character and decision making had a monumental impact on events. It was an age in which, as Charles Carlton asserts, ‘character was destiny’.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Allan Massie, *The Royal Stuarts* (London, 2010)p191

¹⁰⁵ Blair Worden, *The English Civil Wars: 1640-1660* (London, 2009)p7

¹⁰⁶ Charles Carlton, *Charles I: The Personal Monarch* (London, 1995)pxviii

CONCLUSION

The English Civil war was not fought to decide who would rule the country, but rather to determine how the country would be ruled, and yet the result was the removal of not just the monarch, but the entire institution of monarchy. The people of England arrived at a republic by default. Almost no one who had fought against the king in the civil war was aiming for a kingless nation but Charles' obstinate refusal to acquiesce left them no choice. The king's many poor decisions culminated in civil war and his subsequent execution. Obviously one naturally precipitated the other and if Charles could have avoided the war he would have avoided execution but even after the outbreak of war it was not a foregone conclusion that the king would be put to death, in truth it was not even a consideration of his opponents.

To lay the blame for the war solely on the king would be trivialising. The *casus belli* are complex and can trace their roots to long before Charles ascended the throne. England had a long history of standing up against perceived tyranny and the origins of the war could be seen to have stemmed from an enlightened age when people were beginning to question the status quo. A fear of absolutism also meant that the people were willing to challenge the monarch if he appeared to be overstressing the royal prerogative. To try and execute the king, however, was unprecedented. While the king is not entirely responsible for the outbreak of war (though he does share in a large proportion of culpability) there is a strong case to suggest he is solely responsible for his execution and the removal of the monarchical system. His reticence and authoritarian manner did not endear him to his subjects and his attitudes and policies over the years had angered them greatly. In spite of this, the thoroughly law abiding English provided Charles with ample opportunity to yield to their demands, but the king refused and thus sealed his fate. That fact that only ten years later England had reverted back to monarchy, and placed the son of the king that they had beheaded on the throne,

confirms that the English people did not want to abolish monarchy but had no alternative as they could no longer tolerate the tyranny of King Charles I.

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