



## THE RESTORATION

**The reign of Charles II.** Restored to the English throne, Charles II (1660-1685) was king by permission of the Merchants and Landowners in Parliament. The Crown and the Church regained the lands confiscated during the Commonwealth, and as a consequence, the landowners freed themselves from the last remainder of feudal dues; under this aspect the Restoration was rather a completion of the Revolution.

The first evident effect of the king's return was the relaxation of the severe Puritan regime. Deeply interested in arts and literature, Charles transformed his court into a centre of culture, but soon his frivolous and licentious conduct and the excesses of his courtiers disappointed the majority of his subjects. Moreover, Charles' intention to adopt a tolerant and moderate policy in religious questions, was opposed by a Parliament composed almost entirely of cavaliers.

A series of restrictive measures, known as The Code of Clarendon after the name of Charles' chief minister, the Earl of Clarendon, were passed in 1661. They aimed at re-establishing the Church of England and at giving it a privileged status, excluding other forms of worship, above all Puritan beliefs.

In 1664 a new commercial war broke out with Holland. The English won a great naval victory in the Battle of Lowestoft (1665), and in an expedition to America they conquered New Amsterdam whose name was changed into New York, in honour of James, Duke of York, Charles' brother and heir to the throne.

Between the years 1665 and 1666 two disasters befell England: the burst of a terrible Plague (it killed some 70000 people in London) and the Great Fire which raged for four days and destroyed a large part of London.

The Dutch, taking advantage of these two calamities, destroyed a large number of English warships and became masters of the Channel.

Negotiations were immediately opened to conclude a peace, and by the Treaty of Breda (1667) the English revoked all the discriminating laws against the Dutch sea trade. Clarendon, responsible for having pushed the king into a ruinous war, took shelter in France, and a Council of five members was appointed as the king's new advisers.

The Council made a Triple Alliance with Holland and Sweden against France. But Charles, educated in France and still a Catholic at heart, hoping to re-establish Catholicism, made a secret agreement with the French King Louis XIV (Treaty of Dover, 1670). By this treaty he undertook to help France against Holland, in return of a sum of money enabling him to keep an army and to be independent of Parliament. At this time, in order to create the premises to re-establish Catholicism, Charles issued the Declaration of Indulgence (1672), suspending all religious restrictions, including the Code of Clarendon. But his plans failed because of the defeat of the French army by the Dutch leader William of Orange (1650-1702), and he was compelled to withdraw the Declaration. The war ended with the Treaty of Nijmegen (1678). At this point Parliament made a direct attack on the king by voting the Exclusion Bill (the Exclusion Bill crisis ran from 1678 till 1681) declaring that James, being a Catholic, could not succeed him to the English throne. All Charles' proposals to reach a compromise were rejected by Parliament.

The controversy which followed created two political parties: the Whigs and the Tories. «Whig» was the name originally given to the most radical Scottish Puritans, and the term was now referred to those who wanted to exclude James from the English throne. «Tory» was originally the nickname of Irish outlaws now applied to those who supported the king.

A plan of the most fanatical Protestants to assassinate the king and his brother, to set the Protestant prince William of Orange on the English throne, was discovered in 1683 (the Rye House Plot). After that Charles exerted an almost absolute power till his death.

The Habeas Corpus Act of 1679, passed during Charles' reign, was of great importance, for it constituted a safeguard of the civil rights and of personal freedom. It stated that no person could be committed to prison without a regular trial.

**The reign of James II.** Unlike his brother, James II (1685-1688) did not possess any political skills. Since the beginning of his reign, he aroused his subjects' discontent by openly favouring the Catholics and appointing them to the most prestigious offices. This defiant conduct provoked a series of attempts to overthrow him. The first rebellion, led by the Marquis of Argyll (1629-1685), broke out in Scotland in the same year of James' accession to the throne, but it was soon crushed and its leaders were captured and executed.

Shortly afterwards, the Duke of Monmouth (1649-1685), the illegitimate son of Charles II, landed in Dorset at the head of an army mostly composed of peasants and miners. The royal army dispersed them in the Battle of Sedgemoor (1685). The rebels were captured and treated with extreme cruelty; the Duke of Monmouth was condemned to death.

In November 1688 William landed at Torbay and found no opposition; James, deserted by all his supporters, fled to France. Parliament that had won supremacy over the monarchy offered the Crown of England to William and Mary: this was called the Glorious or Bloodless Revolution.

In 1690 the new English monarchy was threatened by James' attempt to recover the throne. James had gathered a certain number of supporters, who opposed Protestantism in Scotland and Ireland, but his army was defeated in the Battle of the Boyne by William of Orange. The victory marked the final triumph of the «Glorious Revolution» and consolidated it.

In 1694 Queen Mary died prematurely. As the royal couple had no children, Parliament passed the Act of Settlement in 1701, by which all the Catholic descendants of James I were excluded from the throne of England and the crown was to go to Sophia (James I's granddaughter), electress of Hanover, the nearest protestant descendant of James II, in case Anne (Mary's sister), who was to succeed William, should die leaving no children. Anne had been brought up on strict Protestant principles in spite of her parents' Catholic faith.

**1689-1702 Reign of William III and Mary II:** 1689 → Bill of Rights; 1690 → Battle of the Boyne; 1694 → Queen Mary's death; 1697 → Peace of Ryswick; 1701 → Act of Settlement.