Bloody Mary Essay, Research Paper

In his book, W.F.M. Prescott makes it quite clear that Mary I has come down in history with the unpleasant name of “Bloody Mary” because of the religious persecutions of her reign. Also called Mary Tudor (well-evidenced by the book’s title), she was the daughter of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon. I must ass that Prescott does a bit more to honor Mary and begins well in part by writing how one of her first benevolent” priorities was the return of the ceremonies and physical beauties of the old faith.

I learned from the book that years before the first parliament of the reign overturned all the Edwardian religious legislation, white-washed churches, decorated only with the royal arms and scriptural texts, were (apparently for the first time in quite a while–) flooded with color and movement as “altars, statues and painted windows were replaced, and processions and ceremonies restored; some of the confiscated church plate was turned round as soon as it reached the royal

coffers, and restored to the churches and chapels from which

it had come.” And yes indeed– Mary’s first acts were all apparently quite good-willed. In accordance with the Articles of March 1554, which ordered observance of ‘all manner of processions’ and ‘laudable and honest ceremonies’, Palm

Sunday in London was marked by ‘bearing of palms’, and Good

Friday by ‘creeping to the cross … with the cryptic lights

and the Resurrection on Easter Day’. Soon, anniversaries

such as St Catherine’s Day and St Andrew’s Day were being observed with great solemnity, and craft processions, Corpus

Christi plays and the old traditions forbidden by Protestants, such as May games and morris dancing, re-appeared. Prescott writes how during the summer of 1554, when Mary’s marriage to Philip of Spain was solemnized at Winchester, the church exterior and the choir were lavishly hung with tapestries and cloth of gold, and the queen’s chapel joined the Winchester choir in ’such sweet proportion of music and harmony as … was never before heard or invented.’ By the time of the formal reconciliation with Rome in November 1554, it would seem that the magnificence of polyphony and the old high treble style were to be heard once more in many cathedrals and in the Chapel Royal, where the choir was occasionally supplemented by Philip’s Low Country choristers, the “capilla flamenca.” In one of the

more artistic sections of the book, Prescott describes how

organs, silenced by reformers such as Holgate at York and

Ridley in London, were tuned and restored — that in the

Chapel Royal was in use by September 1553 — and song-books

written out again. The demand of the reformers of the

previous reign for musical settings which did not obscure

the words of the confirmation had created some difficulties

for church musicians, while composers such as Thomas Tallis

and John Sheppard seem to have relaxed in the more congenial

atmosphere of Marian England, producing various pieces with

special emphasis on the word ‘Maria’ in tribute to the queen. — At this, I can not help but balk slightly–wondering about the support that someone so crudely remembered might have once received… It was; of course, not possible to restore the church to its former glory overnight, and the authorities concentrated their efforts accordingly on improving the appearance of cathedrals and parish churches. They were especially determined that rood-screens should be re-erected and that the patron saint of individual churches should be adequately represented. While some shrines were restored — for

instance, Prescott offers in the book that of Edward the onfessor was set up again at Westminster in March 1557, with ‘a hundred

lights’ — no great official effort was made to revive places of pilgrimage. Equally, although a few monasteries were restored, Prescott’s book does make it clear that neither Mary nor the church authorities appear to have given them very high priority: only the return of the Benedictines to Westminster, where the installation of the new abbot, John Feckenham, in November 1556, was marked by numerous ceremonies ‘after the old fashion’, received much publicity. In retrospect, I realize that this is not really that surprising since monasticism had a bad reputation probably from as far back as the days of Erasmus, while Thomas Cromwell’s propaganda efforts in the 1530’s had undoubtedly increased English mistrust of what Prescott refers to as ‘baldpated abbots’. In any case, neither shrines nor

monasteries were usually the result of ‘official’ patronage,

depending rather upon the inspiration of private individuals.

Similarly, no concerted official effort seems to have been made to restore the fraternal groups, or “lay associations” providing members with a good funeral and regular masses for their souls, which had been so characteristic of late medieval English Catholicism. According to Prescott, this depended upon private initiative. One or two associations, like the Holy Ghost guild and confraternity at Guildford, were indeed refounded, while others, such as the Jesus Guild at St Paul’s, were restored in a different form. But there was no great rush to recreate such institutions, because in Prescott’s opinion– two decades’ experience of state confiscation of church property had produced great wariness amongst the laity. Prescott tells in his book that the queen, like all Henry VIII’s well-educated children, had been brought up to respect learning, and she showed in her numerous gifts to the church — she was the only Tudor after Henry VII not to exploit the church for the benefit of the royal coffers — that what she cared about was the quality, and particularly the intellectual quality, of her clergy. In addition to restoring the traditional dues, the ‘first fruits’ and ‘tenths’ to the church, and properties to the sees of York,

Bath and Wells, and Gloucester, Mary also forgave many dioceses the debts that they owed in taxation. She was generous to both the universities during her life-time, and left in her will the substantial sum of pounds1,000 for poor scholars. In choosing bishops, the queen seems to have deliberately avoided men of primarily administrative or political experience, looking instead for those with a strong academic background or considerable pastoral experience. So Robert Aldrich, Bishop of Carlisle, was a former pupil of Erasmus, William Glyn, Bishop of Bangor, had been Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in Cambridge until he was driven into exile by the Edwardian

reforms, while another Edwardian exile, Ralph Baines, who was appointed to Coventry and Lichfield, had been Professor of Hebrew in Paris. But as Prescott writes, these were not just academic people, they were also men of decision and energy: so it is ironic that we have so much evidence about the material and moral weaknesses of the Marian church simply because the

Marian bishops were so assiduous in their visitations. The

most populated areas of Lancashire, for example, were

visited in Mary’s reign with a much greater frequency than

they were in the reigns of Edward and Elizabeth. Bishop

Bonner carried out a visitation of the diocese of London

between September 1554 and October 1555, the diocese of Bath

and Wells was visited twice, that of Chester three times.

Ecclesiastical courts revived; in the diocese of Norwich,

for instance, in which there had been only one prosecution

for simony in the whole period between 1519 and 1553,

nineteen cases were heard in Mary’s reign. According to W.F.M. Prescott, the court of Chester heard forty-three varied cases between 1547 and 1550, and 133 between 1555 and 1558. From the book I learned that the most significant of these academic and energetic bishops was the queen’s cousin, Reginald Pole. Pole’s ideas had been deeply influenced by the long years that he had spent as an exile in Italy amongst a circle of intimates that included almost all the prominent ‘advanced’ Catholics of the time — Gasparo Contarini, who had urged the doctrine of ‘double justification’ on the converse at Ratisbon in 1541; Girolamo Seripando, who repeated these arguments at the first session of the Council of Trent; the humanist poet, Marcantonio Flaminio, the noble patroness, Vittoria Colonna, and her protege and

correspondent, Michaelangelo. Prescott tells that a number of these early associates of Pole were subsequently to fall foul of the church authorities — Giovanni Morone was arrested on a heresy charge, for example, while Pietro Carnesecchi, who had been a member of Pole’s household at Viterbo in the early 1540’s, was actually noted to have been executed on the same charge.

A retrospective and overall assessment of the book would clearly suggest to me that the queen’s main intentions were vainly that she could win England back to the Catholic church. Despite Prescott’s occasional literary/artistic “affection” for her, I am convinced that Mary’s rule was worthy of the criticism that he writes historians have given it. Still, however, I found the book “Mary Tudor” to be markedly insightful, exceptionally intriguing, and conclude that it has inspired me to consider further relevant study…