

**Bloody Mary:**  
**Catholic Crusader or Merciless Murderer?**

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## Thesis Statement

Mary I of England was known as a ruthless queen. This gave her the nickname “Bloody Mary.” Mary was a devout Catholic since birth, unlike her Protestant siblings and father, Henry VIII. Throughout her rule, Mary killed hundreds of Protestants. But Mary truly believed that she was doing the right thing. Her severity caused the rebellion of Sir Thomas Wyatt. He gathered a force of 4,000 men and marched on London, but was unsuccessful. Mary’s reign spread conflict throughout the nation, and ended without any compromise.

## Early Life

Queen Mary had a traditional childhood for the daughter of a king. The first child of her parents, King Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, to survive infancy, she was given a lot of attention. Mary had a beautiful singing voice and was an exceptional dancer. She was considered one of the most important European princesses and Henry used her to negotiate in political situations.<sup>1</sup> Mary received an excellent education courtesy of her mother, and was taught Spanish, French, and Latin. Catherine was dedicated to her daughter, and she was also loyal to Spain, her country of origin. Catherine raised Mary as a Catholic and made sure she knew where her mother’s loyalties stood, which would later affect Mary in life.

In 1525, King Henry declared Mary Princess of Wales, this was very important because she was the first ever *Princess* of Wales. Then, Mary’s life began to change. King Henry started obsessing over having a male heir, something that Catherine had not given him, and when he met

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<sup>1</sup> “Queen Mary I - Facts, Information, Biography & Portraits.” English History, 4 May 2015, englishhistory.net/tudor/monarchs/queen-mary-1/.

Anne Boleyn in 1526, he saw a chance to have one.<sup>2</sup> Anne was an intelligent and interesting woman who caught the attention of the king. Henry had been planning to divorce Catherine for a while, and now he had a new wife set in his sights.<sup>3</sup> Catherine was very much against the dissolution of their marriage because she didn't want it to hurt her daughter. The Church refused to abolish the union, so Henry decided to break away from it. In 1533, Henry had his marriage to Catherine annulled and declared it incestuous and invalid because she had previously been married to his brother.<sup>4</sup> King Henry married Anne Boleyn and sent Catherine of Aragon away. When Anne had a child, Elizabeth, he declared Mary illegitimate, stripped her of her princess title, and forbade her to see her mother again.

### **Lady Mary**

Mary was a stubborn child, and refused to accept that she was no longer the Princess. She would claim that she was “born in true matrimony” and signed her letters to Henry as “your humble daughter, Mary, Princess.”<sup>5</sup> Henry was furious with Mary, and of course, punished her. Mary was sent to live with the Sheltons, who treated her terribly. They were instructed to beat her anytime she used the title “Princess.” Mary was also forced to join the court of her infant half sister, Elizabeth, as a lady-in-waiting. The harsh treatment Mary suffered made her physically and mentally ill. There would be constant reports of her headaches, insomnia, and depression.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Simkin, John. “Mary I of England” Spartacus Educational, Spartacus Educational, [spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm).

<sup>3</sup> Simkin, “Mary I of England,” [spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm).

<sup>4</sup> “Mary Tudor.” Biography.com, A&E Networks Television, 17 Oct. 2017, [www.biography.com/people/mary-tudor-9401296](http://www.biography.com/people/mary-tudor-9401296).

<sup>5</sup> Slavicek, Louise Chipley. *Bloody Mary*. Blackbirch Press, 2005, 33.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 35.

In 1534, not long after Mary joined the court of Elizabeth, Henry created the Act of Supremacy which made the monarch the head of the Church, not the pope.<sup>7</sup> The king made all his subjects swear on this, and those who dared to refuse were killed. Mary and her mother, being strict Catholics refused to accept this, but Henry spared their lives. Two years later, in January 1536, Mary's beloved mother, Catherine of Aragon died.

After two miscarriages and a baby born deformed, it seemed as if Anne was unable to bear a male heir. A deformed child, in those days, was said to be God punishing the parents.<sup>8</sup> Anne Boleyn was arrested and taken to the Tower of London. On May 19th, 1536 she was killed. Later that same month, Henry married his third wife, Jane Seymour. Mary still refused to submit to her father. She didn't want to admit her illegitimacy and accept King Henry as head of the Church of England. King Henry continued to pressure her, he warned that if she refused to sign a letter of submission, she would be found guilty of treason and possibly face death.<sup>9</sup> Mary eventually gave in, and on June 22, 1536 wrote a letter to King Henry in which she said,

*"I do recognize, accept, take, repute and acknowledge the king's highness to be supreme head on earth, under Christ, of the church of England; and do utterly refuse the bishop of Rome's pretended authority, power and jurisdiction within this realm, formerly usurped, according to the laws and statutes made on that behalf, and by all the king's true subjects humbly received, admitted, obeyed, kept and observed."*<sup>10</sup>

After she wrote the letter, Mary was accepted back into the royal court. She became friends with her new stepmother and was even made godmother to Jane and Henry's child, Edward.<sup>11</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> Slavicek, *Bloody Mary*, 36.

<sup>8</sup> Simkin, "Mary I of England," [spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm).

<sup>9</sup> Slavicek, *Bloody Mary*, 43.

<sup>10</sup> "Letter of Princess Mary to King Henry"

<sup>11</sup> Slavicek, *Bloody Mary*, 44.

new baby was a boy, which satisfied the king, since he now had a male heir. Sadly, not long after the birth of Prince Edward, Jane died.

## **Obtaining The Crown**

After multiple wives succeeding Jane Seymour, Henry married his sixth wife, Catherine Parr. Mary and Catherine were close in age, and became good friends. They had a lot in common as they both valued education and were both Christians.<sup>12</sup> In 1544, Catherine convinced King Henry to put Mary and Elizabeth back into the line of succession after Edward. The years following the new decree, King Henry's health began to worsen and on January 28, 1547, he died.

About a month later, Edward was crowned king. He was given a council of sixteen men to advise him, as he was only nine.<sup>13</sup> Edward's advisors were Protestants and wanted the English people to follow their religion, too. In 1549, Parliament passed the Act of Uniformity which stated that all clergymen had to accept Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer, and use the Lutheran communion service, instead of the traditional, Catholic, Latin Mass. Anyone who didn't comply with the rules would be found guilty of treason and possibly sentenced to death.

Edward's council were not fond of Mary and she didn't care for them, either. They advised the young king to stay away from his sister. This hurt Mary since she and Edward were very close before he became king. When John Dudley became Edward's main advisor, Dudley seemed to manipulate Edward's power and use him for his own personal gain.<sup>14</sup> This showed when Edward's health began to decline in 1553. Dudley was worried of Mary taking the throne

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<sup>12</sup> Slavicek, *Bloody Mary*, 49.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 51

<sup>14</sup> Simkin, "Mary I of England," [spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm).

since Edward had been too young to marry and had no children. He started to tell Edward of how he was worried that if Mary became queen, she would bring Catholicism back to England. Dudley reminded Edward of how Mary and Elizabeth were still considered illegitimate, so how could either of them be fit to be queen? Lady Jane Grey was John Dudley's prime candidate for the Crown. Dudley had Grey marry his son, so his own descendants would have the chance to rule England.<sup>15</sup> He managed to get Edward to put her into the line of succession. On July 10, 1553, four days after Edward died, Lady Jane Grey was crowned queen.

Mary had been notified of what Dudley was planning. Luckily, she had many supporters who wanted her to become queen. Mary's supporters felt like they were still Catholics, since it was in their roots and thought it would only be fair if King Henry's daughter became queen.<sup>16</sup> Mary quickly regained power leaving Jane with nothing but a reputation as "the Nine Days Queen."

## **Reign**

On July 19, 1553, Mary Tudor was declared Queen Mary I. From the start, Mary believed that God Himself had made her queen to bring back the Catholic faith to England.<sup>17</sup> So, began five years of religious reform. Queen Mary's plan, it seemed, was to get rid of all the laws that Edward had made during his rule. Parliament surprisingly approved her new order that England go back to using the Catholic, Latin Mass and validate her parents' marriage, declaring herself a legitimate child.

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<sup>15</sup> Simkin, "Mary I of England," [spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Slavicek, *Bloody Mary*, 75.

Mary then set out to find a husband, so that a Catholic heir would be secured. Instead of listen to her advisors and let them select her future husband, Queen Mary left the decision up to her cousin, Charles V the Holy Roman Emperor of Spain. Charles saw this as an opportunity to have power in England. He offered his own son, Philip II as Mary's prospective spouse.<sup>18</sup> Philip was over a decade younger than the queen, and she did not really want to marry, but Queen Mary was going to do everything in her power to make sure she had a child. Many people disliked Philip, he was a foreigner and that worried them.<sup>19</sup> Mary's decision to wed an outsider sparked the rebellion of Sir Thomas Wyatt, also known as Wyatt's rebellion. Wyatt and his men were unsuccessful, but the rebellion angered the queen. Mary began hanging Wyatt's followers and eventually, over a hundred people were killed.

After learning that Jane's father had aided and abetted Wyatt's rebellion, Queen Mary lost all her earlier sympathy for Lady Jane Grey and decided to sentence her to death. Jane wrote a letter to Mary trying to explain how she came to be queen. In the letter she claims that she was poisoned, clearly trying to avoid any punishment:

*"And therefore, before his death, he gave order to the Council, that for the honour they owed to him...they should obey his last will...As to the rest, for my part, I know not what the Council had determined to do, but I know for certain that twice during this time, poison was given to me, first in the house of the Duchess of Northumberland and afterwards here in the Tower.... All these I have wished for the witness of my innocence and the disburdening of my conscience."*<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Simkin, "Mary I of England," [spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm).

<sup>19</sup> "History - Historic Figures: Mary I (1516 - 1558)." BBC, BBC, [www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/mary\\_i\\_queen.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/mary_i_queen.shtml).

<sup>20</sup> "Letter of Lady Jane Grey to Queen Mary I, 1554."

Lady Jane Grey was executed on February 12, 1554.

Queen Mary was already thirty-seven when she became queen. That was very old for sixteenth century England, also Mary had poor health. She needed a child fast, and to do that she had to have a husband, of course. On July 19, 1554, Philip arrived in England and he and Mary were wed on July 25. Philip could only speak Spanish, but it was said that Mary taught him one phrase in English: "Good night my lords and ladies."<sup>21</sup> Philip spent most of his time in Spain, not liking the English monarchs. Now that she had a husband, Queen Mary focused on having a child. Her doctors told Mary that she was pregnant so she kept away from the public, as was the practice of an expectant woman. There was even an official announcement made that the queen was having a child, but a baby never came. Mary also had another false pregnancy some time after. Doctors now think that she might have had a rare condition, pseudocyesis, which causes pregnancy symptoms in women who are not pregnant. Queen Mary eventually died childless.

Instead of listening to her advisors and slowly reintroducing Catholicism to England, Queen Mary wanted to make quick, permanent changes. After her and Philip's wedding, Queen Mary had Parliament abolish the Act of Supremacy made during King Henry's reign. Now, England and Rome were connected once again and the Pope was the official head of the Church. Mary also persuaded Parliament to bring back heresy laws.<sup>22</sup> People accused of not being Catholic and having different religious beliefs could be tried and burned at the stake. The first few so called *heretics* to be sentenced to death were three widely recognized Protestant preachers. Mary also had two Protestant bishops killed. The people the queen had killed in the first few months were Protestant leaders. She perhaps hoped that getting rid of the main figures

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<sup>21</sup> Simkin, "Mary I of England," [spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm).

<sup>22</sup> Slavicek, *Bloody Mary*, 88.



and heads of the religion would deplete the amount of Protestants in the kingdom, but the executions continued. The people seemed to be motivated by their leaders' faith and decided to not give up their religion and become martyrs too.

The people of England were not at all happy with the burnings going on. Even the Catholics who were very against Protestant teachings thought that what was going on was horrible. Mary did not understand why her subjects were so opposed to what she was doing. Queen Mary believed this was what God wanted her to do, that this was what He made her queen for. Even her Lord Chancellor and her husband Philip, who didn't care much to interfere with her laws and persecuted heretics himself in Spain, warned her to stop. But this only made Queen Mary want to continue.<sup>23</sup> From then on, she was much harsher with the people.

In 1557, Philip came to England after being gone for eighteen months. He came with news of war for Mary. Spain had entered a war with France, and now that Spain and England were allies, England had to join, too. Spain and England appeared to be losing the war and in January 1558, France took control of England's last territory in France, the small port town—Calais. Queen Mary's subjects were devastated and felt disgraced. They blamed their queen for marrying a man from Spain and therefore forming ties with an untrustworthy nation.<sup>24</sup>

In mid 1558, Queen Mary's health began to decline. She had suffered from a false pregnancy and was getting sicker by the minute. She felt ashamed that she had lost Calais and reportedly said, "When I am dead and opened you shall find 'Calais' lying in my heart."<sup>25</sup> Mary at first refused to name her sister as her heir because she knew that Elizabeth was a Protestant,

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<sup>23</sup> Slavicek, *Bloody Mary*, 95.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 97.

<sup>25</sup> "Mary I 1516–58 English monarch, Queen from 1553 ." Mary I - Oxford Reference, 31 Oct. 2016, [www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191826719.001.0001/q-oro-ed4-00007159](http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191826719.001.0001/q-oro-ed4-00007159).

but eventually succumbed to the pressure from her attendants. On November 17, 1558, Queen Mary I of England died.

## **Legacy**

Queen Mary's former subjects were surprisingly not mourning their former queen like they should. The people of England decided to instead celebrate the new queen. Queen Elizabeth put an end to the burnings of Protestants the day she became queen and she eventually made England a Protestant nation once again.<sup>26</sup> Most people didn't miss the days of Catholicism, since they tied that time to horrible killings. It appeared that all of Queen Mary's work was for nothing.

## **Conclusion**

In summarization, Queen Mary I appeared to be a violent and harsh queen, but she truly believed that she was doing the right thing. Although Mary had a good childhood, she had an unstable life since her father didn't care about her and she was separated from her mother for years. Mary tried to have a child to love and care for, but it never happened for her. The queen saw herself as a hero, even though millions of people saw her as a villain. Queen Mary was a murderer who caused conflict in her country, and the only compromise? Her death.

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<sup>26</sup> Slavicek, *Bloody Mary*, 101.

## Annotated Bibliography

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[englishhistory.net/tudor/letter-lady-jane-grey-queen-mary-1554/](http://englishhistory.net/tudor/letter-lady-jane-grey-queen-mary-1554/).

Lady Jane Grey felt ashamed about being crowned queen, but she blamed it on others and claimed to have been poisoned.

Hanson, Marilee. "Letter of Princess Mary to King Henry VIII, 1536." *English History*, 19 Mar. 2015, Accessed 7 Feb 2018.

[englishhistory.net/tudor/letter-of-princess-mary-to-king-henry-viii-1536/](http://englishhistory.net/tudor/letter-of-princess-mary-to-king-henry-viii-1536/).

After Anne Boleyn's execution and King Henry's marriage to Jane Seymour, Mary decided to finally write a letter to her father acknowledging her illegitimacy and recognizing him as head of the Church.

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History.com Staff. 2009. "The Reformation." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks.

Accessed 7 Feb 2018. <http://www.history.com/topics/reformation>.

Mary and her father had a big influence on the Protestant Reformation. Henry VIII separated from the Church when the Pope refused to give him an annulment. He declared that he was the head of the Church and would have the final say. Mary worked hard to reverse what her father did and make England Catholic again. When Mary's successor, her sister Elizabeth, became queen, she made the English Church a Protestant nation again.

"History - Historic Figures: Mary I (1516 - 1558)." BBC, BBC, Accessed 7 Feb 2018.

[www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/mary\\_i\\_queen.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/mary_i_queen.shtml).

In 1554, Mary married Phillip II of Spain. This was also the year that Sir Thomas Wyatt led his rebellion against Mary which failed.

"Mary I 1516–58 English monarch, Queen from 1553 ." *Mary I - Oxford Reference*, 31 Oct. 2016, Accessed 7 Feb 2018.

[www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191826719.001.0001/q-oro-ed4-00007159](http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780191826719.001.0001/q-oro-ed4-00007159).

Mary felt humiliated for losing Calais and had that shame even on her deathbed.

“Mary Tudor.” Biography.com, A&E Networks Television, 17 Oct. 2017, Accessed 7 Feb 2018.  
[www.biography.com/people/mary-tudor-9401296](http://www.biography.com/people/mary-tudor-9401296).

Queen Mary was born on February 18, 1516 and died on November 17, 1558. She earned the nickname “Bloody Mary” because of her violent persecution of Protestants.

Nix, Elizabeth. “8 Things You Might Not Know about Mary I.” History.com, A&E Television Networks, 16 Feb. 2016, Accessed 7 Feb 2018.  
[www.history.com/news/8-things-you-might-not-know-about-mary-i](http://www.history.com/news/8-things-you-might-not-know-about-mary-i).

Queen Mary desperately tried to have a child so she would have a Catholic heir. But she never had any children, but had multiple false pregnancies.

Queen Mary I - Facts, Information, Biography & Portraits.” English History, 4 May 2015, Accessed 7 Feb 2018. [englishhistory.net/tudor/monarchs/queen-mary-1/](http://englishhistory.net/tudor/monarchs/queen-mary-1/).

Queen Mary had a good childhood. She was educated well and raised Catholic.

Simkin, John. “Mary I of England” Spartacus Educational, Spartacus Educational, Accessed 7 Feb 2018. [spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm](http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDmary1.htm).

Many people were involved with Mary’s ascension, killings, and reign. Mary killed over 300 people during her reign.

Slavicek, Louise Chipley. *Bloody Mary*. Blackbirch Press, 2005.

Mary’s religion was arguably the most important thing to her, at a time where many rulers got to dictate their people’s religion. She made a big impact on her country.