The Parliament Convened by the Queen, and How She Made it Decide as She Desired

But because the queen could not undo the statutes parliament had passed in favor of Catholicism in her sister’s reign by her own authority, nor alter them or warp them as she wished without the power of parliament, she arranged for it to convene in London soon afterwards. This makes sense only if one understands that in that kingdom they do not handle religious matters through rebellions and uprisings, by fire and blood, as has happened in the kingdoms of France and Scotland and in the provinces of Flanders, but rather propagate and establish their heresies under the cover of laws, royal edicts, decrees, and parliamentary statutes. This has been their subtle, cunning scheme, bolstered by the power of queen and crown, the better to ingrain their wickedness and their sects of perdition. The parliament of the realm is divided into two chambers: in one are gathered the bishops, prelates, lords, and noblemen of the kingdom, and this is called the upper chamber; into the other, which is the lower chamber, enter private gentlemen (usually delegates of the counties) and other men of rank and prominent citizens, who come as advocates for the cities and major towns and who have a vote. Therefore, to realize in this parliament her plots against the Catholic faith, the queen arranged for the cities and provinces to send representatives and delegates who, being tainted with heresy, favored changes to religion. Thus it was that few difficulties were encountered in getting the second, lower chamber to approve all the queen’s proposals. But since all the bishops, deeply learned and utterly steadfast, and many of the lords (Catholics bound to Queen Mary) opposed the queen’s will, both for the sake of truth and because it seemed a shocking lightness to reverse everything done only a few years ago, sworn to in the kingdom’s reconciliation and affirmed by the ambassadors sent to Rome, and she was unable to get away with her scheme, the queen decided to hoodwink a few of the more

2 2 Pet. 2:1.
3 The religious leanings of Elizabeth’s first House of Commons have been variously interpreted. Christopher Haigh argues that the strength of its Protestant sentiment has been greatly exaggerated: as he points out, only nineteen Marian exiles were elected, several of whom were still abroad when parliament met. Haigh, English Reformations, 241.
influential lords, and get the rest through them. And so she dangled before the earl of Arundel the hope that she might marry him, and before the duke of Norfolk that she would get him the papal dispensation he had been unable to attain, and with these, and other promises and bribes to others, she acquired a majority of the votes and so got her way. Notwithstanding all her determination, cunning, and trickery, there were only three more votes to alter the Catholic faith than to preserve it. As soon as she had won, she spurned the earl of Arundel, just as to this day she has spurned many others who thought to marry her, saying that she wishes to remain a virgin, so that over her tomb it might be written, Here lies Elizabeth, who was queen so many years, and all her life a maiden. And she repaid the duke of Norfolk for his service in this way: after many travails, troubles, and slanders, she took his life. However, we may

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4 Suárez de Figueroa wrote on February 12, 1559, “The Queen has entire disposal of the upper Chamber in a way never seen before in previous Parliaments, as in this there are several who have hopes of getting her to marry them, and they are careful to please her in all things and persuade the others to do the same, besides which there are a great number whom she has made barons to strengthen her party, and that accursed cardinal left twelve bishoprics to be filled which will now be given to as many ministers of Lucifer instead of being worthily bestowed.” CSPSE, 1:15.

5 Henry Fitzalan entertained hopes of marrying Elizabeth soon after her accession; Suárez de Figueroa wrote home that Elizabeth “joked with me about what had been said of her marriage to the earl of Arundel. She does not get on with him.” Lock, “Fitzalan, Henry,” in ODNB, 19:762.

6 At Elizabeth’s accession, Thomas Howard had been negotiating at Rome for months, seeking a dispensation to marry his cousin, Margaret Audley (1540–64). After Mary’s death, Thomas broke off his suit at Rome and married Audley; the match received parliamentary sanction in 1559. Graves, “Howard, Thomas,” in ODNB, 28:430.

7 The first acts passed by Elizabeth’s parliament included one reviving the royal supremacy and abolishing papal authority (1 Eliz. 1. c. 1), another undoing the Marian religious settlement and reinstating Edwardian policies, such as the Book of Common Prayer (1 Eliz. 1. c. 2), and another reclaiming first fruits, tithes, and rents for the Crown (1 Eliz. 1. c. 4). See SR, 4:1350–64.

     The second of these, the Act of Uniformity, passed through the house of lords by a vote of twenty-one to eighteen; as Christopher Haigh colorfully puts it, “The Church of England was established by the merest whisker, a margin of three votes: a margin achieved by political chicanery, and by keeping the Church rather more Catholic than had been planned.” Haigh, English Reformations, 241.

8 Pressed by her first parliament to marry, Elizabeth is said to have replied, “And for me it shall be sufficient, that a marble stone declare that a queene, hauing reigned such a time, liued and died a virgine.” Holinshed, Chronicles, 4:179.

9 Norfolk was executed for treason on June 2, 1572, for his participation in the Ridolfi Plot and his proposed marriage to Mary Queen of Scots. Haigh, Elizabeth I, 61, 149.