

The persecution of the Catholics under Elizabeth was part of the great reformation in the 16th century, which effected not only religion but also the political and economic conditions in Western and Northern Europe. Up to that time Europe had been a confederacy of nations under the headship of the Pope and Emperor. Now princes, who became champions of the reformation, broke away from the old order, strengthened their personal rule and ~~besides~~ ~~obtained~~ increased their property by obtaining church lands and endowments. The 16th century world became in the words of Leopold von Ranke^x "hostile to the Papal dominion".

In order to understand what happened in Elizabeth's reign, we have to go back to Henry VIII, ^{who} ~~he~~ burned protestants for heresy and hung catholics for high treason. At first he had opposed Luther and defended the authority of the Holy See. But he broke with the Papacy when he failed to secure annulment of his marriage and declared himself Supreme Head of the Church of England. He reduced the church to a mere department of the state directed by his "Vicar General" Thomas Cromwell. A subservient parliament decreed that ~~to deny the king~~ ~~not~~ not to acknowledge the king as supreme head was an act of high treason. This policy paved the way for similar methods under Queen Elizabeth.

Edward VI, his son and successor, took the next step by eliminating the Mass and instituting a new service with the Book of Common Prayer in 1549, followed three years later by the second prayer book. Under Mary Tudor, a catholic reaction set in - first moderate, then with terribly rigor. During her short reign, 300 protestants were put to death, which earned her the name of "bloody Mary". Her

^x Leopold von Ranke, History of the Popes, 1847