

CHAPTER I

THE TURNING-POINT

In order to see the rebellion of 1536-7 in its true perspective it is necessary to make a preliminary survey of the political position in England before the first rising took place. At the end of July 1536 Henry VIII's domestic relations were more settled than they had been for the last ten years. The execution of Anne Boleyn on 19 May had been followed by his marriage with Jane Seymour, who was indisputably his lawful wife. The parliament which met on 8 June declared the two children of the King's former wives, Mary and Elizabeth, illegitimate, and settled the succession to the crown upon the issue of the King's latest marriage: that failing, the King was empowered to determine his heir himself either by will or by letters patent¹. It was believed that the object of this statute was to bring into the succession Henry's illegitimate son, Henry Duke of Richmond, who, however, died on 23 July². After his death the situation with regard to the succession was practically the same as it had been before the divorce of Katherine of Arragon was proposed. The King was legally married, but it was considered unlikely that Queen Jane would have a child, and unless he acknowledged Mary, his heir by blood was the King of Scotland, whose claim was exceedingly unpopular in England. If the King died it was certain that Mary would be chosen by the nation as their queen, whether she was legitimate or illegitimate. Moreover the power to offer her hand in marriage might be useful to her father in foreign affairs.

A reconciliation between the King and his daughter was effected in July³, and the greater part of England would have rejoiced if the matter had gone still further⁴,—if Henry had acknowledged Mary, beheaded Cromwell, burnt Latimer and the heretic bishops, and reconciled himself with the Pope, who in return would certainly have

¹ 28 Hen. VIII, c. 7.

² L. and P. Hen. VIII, xi, 148.

³ *Ibid.* preface, p. iv, and No. 6.

⁴ *Ibid.* x, 1134, 1150.

been willing to recognise Queen Jane and her possible children. Apart from all other objections to this change of policy, however, there was one fatal obstacle; the King could not afford it.

The characters of the Tudor Kings have made so deep an impression on English history that it is easy to explain the events of their reigns by attributing everything to their personal traits, but Henry's need of money was due to something that lay deeper than his own extravagance and rapacity. The whole of Europe was undergoing great economic changes, in consequence of the discovery of new trade routes and the importation of gold and silver from America, which depreciated the value of the coinage. Prices rose and the spending power of any fixed sum of money diminished. As the royal revenues were almost entirely customary and therefore fixed, it followed that the King was growing poorer while the expenses of government were constantly increasing as the nation emerged from feudal into modern life¹.

One of the most deeply-rooted feudal theories was that "the King should live of his own," that is, that the ordinary revenues derived from the crown lands, the customs and feudal dues, should serve for the ordinary needs of the government, and that taxes should be levied only in time of war, or to meet extraordinary need. This theory had seldom corresponded to facts, and it was now quite untenable, but the tax-payer naturally cherished it. Henry's taxation had already aroused great discontent, but the need for a sufficient revenue did not grow less, and the King could not afford to give up the money which, as supreme head of the Church of England, he diverted from the Pope, or the still more considerable sum that he hoped to derive from the suppression of the monasteries. But while the great mass of the nation desired nothing so much as the remission of all taxes, the educated classes were beginning to realise that this would not be such a very desirable state of affairs. The idea was just beginning to emerge that if the King did not need money he would never call a parliament, and that the liberties of the nation depended on its control of taxation. When the King declared that if only the wealth of the monasteries were in his hands he would never ask his people for money again, there were a few who saw that the King's wealth was a much more serious danger than the King's poverty².

The state of affairs on the continent permitted Henry to do as he pleased, for Francis I had again attacked Charles V, and the Pope

¹ Cunningham, *The Growth of Eng. Ind. and Com.* I, chap. v, sections 1 and 6.

² L. and P. VIII, 121.

could do nothing while his two champions were cutting each other's throats. Henry therefore continued to carry out the policy expressed in the acts of his two last parliaments, the long parliament which met in December 1529 and was dissolved in March 1536, and its brief successor which met in June and was dissolved in July 1536.

A word must be said about the composition of these parliaments. A Tudor House of Commons was not, of course, representative in the modern sense of the word, for it consisted exclusively of country gentlemen and wealthy merchants, who were in most cases appointed by a small close body rather than popularly elected. The influence of the crown, exercised through the sheriff or through some local magnate, was paramount at the nomination of members, and it does not seem to have been resented, so long as the chosen candidate was a well-known man in the district for which he was appointed. The electors were willing that the King should choose the man most pleasing to himself among perhaps a dozen equally eligible persons, but gentlemen and burgesses alike resented the "carpet-bagger," the stranger sent down from the court, who knew nothing of the place and despised the provincials whom he nominally represented¹. They also objected to members who held government posts, and, curiously enough, bye-elections were considered an abuse, as it was maintained that when a member died his seat ought to remain vacant until the next general election².

The parliament of 1529-36 violated even these elementary conditions of representation; Cromwell, who came into power during these seven years, gradually developed the art of managing the House of Commons to an extent which had never been known before, and the electors were powerless in his hands, because they could not understand what was happening³. It must also be noticed that the electors in 1529 had very little means of knowing what measures would be brought before the parliament. They knew of course that the King would want money, and they knew also that the question of the divorce would be dealt with, but even the best-informed can hardly have foreseen the act for the dissolution of the smaller monasteries. It must, therefore, be borne in mind that the acts of this parliament were not passed with the consent, or even with the knowledge, of the nation. Their true originator was believed to be Thomas Cromwell. Whether his rise had been slow or rapid, this remarkable man was now (1536) at the height of his

¹ L. and P. xi, 1244.² Ibid. 1182.³ Porritt, *The Unreformed House of Commons*, i, pt iii, chap. xvii.

power¹, and the greater number of this parliament's acts were stages in the progress of his policy. By birth Cromwell came of the English lower middle class, but part of his early manhood was spent in Italy², and his character was an illustration of the proverb "An Englishman Italianate is a devil incarnate." He belonged to the new school of political thought which had for its exponents Philip de Commynes and Machiavelli, and for its heroes Louis XI and Caesar Borgia. Thomas Cromwell, clothier, solicitor and moneylender, seems genuinely to have believed that it was the duty of any man who by birth, luck or skill became a prince, to make himself absolute, and to guard against any breath of opposition at home as carefully as he did against any hint of attack from abroad. He was really convinced that an absolute autocracy was the best form of government for any country, and that it was the duty of a good subject to do everything in his power to strengthen the hand of the King. Religion meant nothing at all to him. He conformed to the existing usages, whatever they might be, but distinctions between creeds only interested him in so far as they might be used politically. Honour, mercy, conscience, were simply the prevailing weaknesses of mankind, which might be employed for his advantage, just as he might take advantage of drunkenness or stupidity. It was not so much that he disregarded as that he never felt them. With all this moral insensibility he was a singularly efficient administrator. Instead of fearing and slighting the houses of parliament, he manipulated them for his own ends, while his spy system was unrivalled. But this was the darker side of his labours; it was also part of his policy to promote trade, to put the kingdom in a state of defence, to repress crime and violence as well as rebellion. His faults as a statesman were rapacity and a too great desire to interfere in every department of life. It was now six years since his celebrated promise "to make Henry the richest king that ever was in England"³; at last the treasures of the monasteries were within his grasp, and his promise seemed on the point of fulfilment.

Cromwell's low birth exposed him to the scorn of his contemporaries, and has been brought up against him even by modern historians; nevertheless if it were necessary to make a choice between his moral character and that of his high-born opponent, Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, it could scarcely be denied that Norfolk was the greater scoundrel of the two. He was simply a courtier and

¹ Dictionary of National Biography; Merriman, *Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell*, I, chap. vi.

² *Ibid.* I, chap. I.

³ *Ibid.* I, chap. iv.

politician, with not a tenth of Cromwell's ability. By inclination he was conservative and favoured the Old Learning, but if he could advance himself by denying his politics or his faith he was quite ready to abandon either. Cromwell at least had a political end in view; Norfolk merely wished to aggrandise himself and had no other object.

It goes without saying that the two regarded each other with the bitterest hatred. After the fall of Anne Boleyn Cromwell managed to procure Norfolk's banishment from the court, but they were in constant correspondence with each other. Among all the records of misery, crime and brutality in the Letters and Papers of the time there is perhaps nothing more horrible than Norfolk's letters to Cromwell; the sickly expressions of goodwill, the filthy jokes, the grimaces of thankfulness, make them vile reading. But not many letters were written in the summer of 1536, for Norfolk had just been worsted, and Cromwell was completely master of the situation.

The general course of Cromwell's systematic attack on the Church is so well known that it is necessary only to recapitulate those features which chiefly aroused popular indignation.

In 1529, the first year of Henry's long parliament, a very sweeping measure was passed to regulate the clergy. They were prohibited from holding any land by lease. All leases held by ecclesiastics must be transferred to laymen before the next Michaelmas. Spiritual persons were prohibited from trading, except in the case of monasteries selling the produce of their own lands for their own needs. No priest was henceforth to hold more than one benefice of value above £8 yearly, but existing pluralists might retain four; members of the King's Council, chaplains of the royal family or of peers, and brothers of peers and knights, were permitted to hold three, and Doctors of Divinity might hold two. Every priest was required to reside on one of his benefices, but exceptions were made in favour of pilgrims, persons on the King's service, scholars at universities, and royal chaplains. Spiritual persons were prohibited from keeping breweries and tan-yards¹. The chief object of this statute was probably to facilitate the transference of ecclesiastical property to laymen². It must have caused great indignation among the clergy. They may have hoped at first that it would not be strictly enforced, but in 1536 it was re-enacted with still more stringent residuary clauses³.

¹ 21 Hen. VIII, c. 13.

² Dixon, *Hist. of the Ch. of Eng.* i, chap. i.

³ 28 Hen. VIII, c. 13.

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In 1530 the clergy of England were called upon to face the overwhelming charge that they had all offended against the Statute of Praemunire by acknowledging Wolsey's legatine authority. In order to buy their pardon from the King they were compelled to pay a heavy fine. In addition to this the King demanded that they should acknowledge him "the only Protector and Supreme Head of the Church and clergy of England," and that cure of souls was committed to him, "curæ animarum ejus majestati commissæ et populo sibi commissio debite inservire possimus." He made other demands, but these were the most important points. The clergy would only accept the title qualified by the phrase "quantum per Christi leges licet," "as far as the laws of Christ will allow."¹ They applied the same qualifications to the phrase about the cure of souls "ut et curæ animarum populi ejus majestati commissi *dehinc* servire possimus," "and so far (as the laws of Christ will allow) we are able to agree that the cure of the souls of his people has been committed to his Majesty." This acknowledgment was made, as far as can be discovered, only by the southern convocation. The questions were not put to the northern convocation, and it seems that at least three of the northern bishops, Tunstall being one, protested against the new title, even with the modification². However the King was satisfied for the moment by the compromise, and the clergy were solemnly pardoned³.

It is not necessary to go into the complicated questions of the Petition of the Commons, the Answer of the Ordinaries, and the Submission of the Clergy in 1532, as they were not understood by the people at large⁴. Passing over the anti-papal legislation of the following years, those acts which were protested against by the rebels are the only ones which need be mentioned. The first of these was the Act which conditionally restrained the payment of Annates or First Fruits to Rome in 1532⁵, a prohibition which was made absolute in 1534⁶. The fault found with this statute was not that the payments were no longer made to Rome, but that they were still levied by the King.

In 1534 Henry attacked the Church of Rome at a vital point. On 31 March of that year the question was put to the Convocation of Canterbury, "Whether the Roman pontiff has any greater

¹ Dixon, *op. cit.* i, chap. i.

² *Ibid.*

³ 22 Hen. VIII, c. 15.

⁴ Gee and Hardy, *Doc. illas. of Eng. Ch. Hist.* nos. XLVI, XLVII, XLVIII.

⁵ 23 Hen. VIII, c. 20.

⁶ 25 Hen. VIII, c. 20.

jurisdiction bestowed on him by God in the Holy Scripture in this realm of England than any other foreign bishop?" Only four of those present voted for the Pope's authority, and it was consequently resolved by a large majority that he had no such power¹. On 5 May the same resolution was passed by the Convocation of York without a dissenting vote². Following on this, Henry caused the Supremacy Act to be passed in November 1534. This measure conferred upon the King and his heirs for ever the title of "Only supreme head on earth of the Church of England." The saving clause "quantum per Christi leges licet" was quietly ignored³.

It must always be remembered that behind this brief summary the great drama of the rival queens, Katherine of Arragon and Anne Boleyn, had been running its course. The anti-papal acts so far had been diplomatic moves. In the more remote country districts they were probably hardly known and not at all understood. But at this point Henry resolved to make the whole nation realise their altered relation to Rome.

In April 1535 Henry issued a mandate which declared that "sundry persons both religious and secular, priests and curates, daily set forth and extol the jurisdiction and authority of the Bishop of Rome, otherwise called Pope, sowing their pestilential and false doctrine, praying for him in the pulpit, making him a god, illuding and seducing our subjects, and bringing them into great errors, sedition and evil opinions, more preserving the power, laws and jurisdiction of the said bishop than the most holy laws and precepts of Almighty God." Any person offending in this way was to be apprehended at once and committed to prison without bail until the King's pleasure in his case was known⁴. Royal letters were sent out on 1 June 1535 to all the bishops to command them to declare the King's new title in their sermons every Sunday, and to cause their clergy to do the same. The name of the Bishop of Rome was to be erased from all services and mass books. This was followed on the 3rd by an "Order for preaching and bidding of the beads in all sermons to be made within the realm." The Pope and the Cardinals of Rome were no longer to be named in the bidding of the beads. The prayers were to be "for the whole Catholic Church and for the Catholic Church of the realm; for the King, only Supreme Head of the Catholic Church of England, for Queen Anne and the Lady Elizabeth, for the whole clergy and temporality, and especially for

¹ Gee and Hardy, *op. cit.* no. LVIII.

³ 26 Hen. VIII, c. 1.

² *Ibid.* no. LIX.

⁴ L. and P. VIII, 623.

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such as the preacher might name of devotion; for the souls of the dead, and specially of such as it might please the preacher to name." Every preacher was ordered to preach against the usurped power of the Bishop of Rome, and they were to abstain for one year from any reference to purgatory, honouring of saints, marriage of priests, pilgrimages, miracles¹. The shock which this measure gave to the nation will be to some extent illustrated in the following chapters. It struck at the very foundations of the existing creed. The papal authority was not always popular in England,—men grumbled at the Pope, sneered at him, criticised him,—but that he was the only supreme head of Christianity was as firmly believed and as confidently accepted as that the sun rose in the east. When simple country priests were called upon to deny weekly a proposition which they had never before dreamed of questioning, they and their congregations might well think that the foundations of society were giving way, and their worst fears seemed to be realised by the Act for the Suppression of the Smaller Monasteries, passed in the following year². It is not necessary to repeat the well-known story of Henry's dealings with the monasteries, and the whole of the following work is a commentary on it.

In the same year the privileges of the palatinate of Durham and other exempted districts were abolished³.

In the short parliament of June—July 1536 two Acts were passed of considerable importance. By one all bulls, breves, dispensations and faculties from the Pope now within the realm were declared void⁴. In 1534 the clergy had been prohibited from obtaining dispensations, etc. from Rome⁵, but those obtained before 12 March 1533 had been expressly declared valid. Now, however, they were required to surrender their papal licences, etc. to the Archbishop of Canterbury before Michaelmas 1537⁶. The Imperial ambassador, Chapuys, reported that this was the statute which the parliament was most reluctant to pass, as it involved serious questions of legitimacy, "but in the end everything must go as the King wishes."⁷ The other statute dealt with the question of sanctuary and benefit of clergy. Already several statutes had been passed limiting this much abused privilege⁸. In this statute benefit of clergy was denied to any ecclesiastic who committed the crimes

¹ Dixon, *op. cit.* i, chap. iv.

³ 27 Hen. VIII, c. 14.

⁵ 25 Hen. VIII, c. 21.

⁷ L. and P. xi, 148.

² 27 Hen. VIII, c. 28.

⁴ 28 Hen. VIII, c. 10.

⁶ 28 Hen. VIII, c. 16.

⁸ 21 Hen. VIII, c. 2; 23 Hen. VIII, c. 1.

specified in former statutes as those for which no layman might claim benefit. The offending priest was to be punished like a layman, without degradation from his holy orders¹.

By the time that this mass of legislation was completed there were very few people in England who knew what they were really intended by the government to believe. In order that the new state of things might be understood, the King as Supreme Head of the Church of England, with the advice and assent of Convocation, published Ten Articles about Religion. They were issued in June 1536, when the year's prohibition of controversy about purgatory, pilgrimages, etc. was at an end². The first five articles stated those points in belief which were necessary to salvation. They were the grounds of faith, as set forth in the Bible, the Creeds as interpreted by the patristic traditions not contrary to Scripture, and by the Acts of the Four Councils; Justification; Baptism; Penance, which included confession and good works; and the Sacrament of the Altar. Thus only three of the seven sacraments were named as essential. The other five Articles dealt with such points "as have been of a long continuance for a decent order and honest policy, prudently instituted and used in the churches of our realm, and be for that same purpose and end to be observed and kept accordingly, although they be not expressly commanded of God, nor necessary to our salvation." These were paying honour to saints, placing their images in churches and praying to them; the rites and ceremonies of the Church; and the belief in purgatory, which involved prayers for the dead³.

The Ten Articles received the assent of the southern, but not of the northern convocation, although they were signed by the Archbishop of York and the Bishop of Durham⁴. They were supplemented in July by an order of the Supreme Head and Convocation that no holy days should be observed in harvest time, 1 July—29 September, except the feasts of the Apostles, the Virgin Mary, and St George; or in the law terms, except Ascension Day, the Nativity of St John the Baptist, All Hallows and Candlemas; all feasts of the Dedication should be observed on the first Sunday in October, and no "church holidays," which were the feasts of the patron saints of churches, should be observed unless they fell on an authorised holy day⁵.

¹ 28 Hen. VIII, b. xiii, 1.

² Hardwick, *Hist. of the Articles*, chap. iii.

³ *Ibid.* App. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.* chap. iii.

⁵ Frere and Kennedy, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions*, ii, 5, n. 3.

In the same month these new regulations were enforced by the first Royal Injunctions of Henry VIII¹. The publication of these injunctions “was the first act of pure supremacy done by the King, for in all that had gone before he had acted with the concurrence of Convocation.”² The Ten Articles were a compromise between the Old and the New Learning, but the Injunctions, which were issued in Cromwell’s name, went further in the way of innovations. The clergy were ordered to preach every Sunday for the next quarter, and afterwards twice a quarter, on the subject of the King’s Supremacy, setting forth the abolition of the Bishop of Rome’s pretended authority. They were also to expound and enforce the Ten Articles and to declare the new order for holy days. They were to discourage superstitious ceremonies, and to exhort all men to “apply themselves to the keeping of God’s commandments and fulfilling of His works of charity, rather than to make pilgrimages or bestow money on saints and relics.” In this the Injunctions went further than the Articles, in which pilgrimages were not mentioned. Another innovation was the order that all servants and young people must be taught the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed and the Ten Commandments in English. The remaining injunctions directed the clergy to study, give alms, lead sober lives, etc.

In addition to these measures, any one of which was sufficient to arm all the forces of tradition and religious conservatism against the King, several important political Acts had been passed, which were scarcely more likely to be popular. Among these the three Succession Acts were the most important. The first declared the Princess Mary illegitimate and entailed the succession on the heirs male of the King and Anne Boleyn, or failing heirs male, on the Princess Elizabeth. All were to swear to maintain this act, under penalty of high treason³. The second Succession Act confirmed the first and supplied a form of oath to be taken⁴, but this was superseded by the third, which has been described above. The Treason Act gave a new definition of high treason. It was declared to be high treason “if any person.....do *maliciously* wish, will or desire by words or writing, or by craft imagine, invent, practise, or attempt any bodily harm to be done or committed to the King’s most royal person, the queen’s or their heir’s apparent, or to deprive them of their dignity, title or name of their royal estates, or *slanderosly and maliciously*

¹ Frère and Kennedy, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions*, II, 1 et seq.

² Wriothesley, *Chronicle* (Camden Soc.), I, 55, n.

³ 25 Hen. VIII, c. 22.

⁴ 26 Hen. VIII, c. 2.