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THOMAS CROMWELL: THE FORCE BEHIND THE HENRICIAN REFORMATION

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From the Henrician Reformation to the middle of the twentieth century, Thomas Cromwell, the man who made the Reformation possible by carefully guiding national legislation through Parliament, has been termed a "black legend" due to his ruthless ability to enact reforms at all costs. The asunder English Church fissioned from international Christendom with the King as supreme head was a price too high for some Englishmen and ineluctably doomed Cromwell's life and memory. However, England emerged from the Reformation a more efficiently organized nation ruled by the King-in-Parliament, and it can not be denied that the great achievements of Henry VIII's reign occurred during the years of Cromwell's ministry 1533-1540. G.R. Elton states:

Cromwell promoted a revolution in the kingdom from which the nation emerged transformed and altered in every aspect of its life. With singular tenacity he pursued his vision of a unitary realm reformed in body and soul, ordered better---and better pleasing to God---according to the best informed opinion of the day, under the protection of the law and ruled by the dynamic sovereignty of the King-in-Parliament. The vision cost him his life, but he laid foundations that did not crumble for centuries.

Historians have had mixed emotions concerning the man, Thomas Cromwell. John Foxe portrayed him to be a "valiant soldier and captain of Christ." However, to Roger Merriman, Cromwell was "a thoroughly unscrupulous, Machiavellian timesaver whose infamous deeds against religion and virtue sprang from contempt of both, as could be seen in the part Cromwell played in the entrapment and martyrdom of Thomas More." In this same train of conception, A.F. Pollard felt that Cromwell was anxious to make Henry despotic and rich by breaking with the Roman Catholic Church. H.A.L. Fisher said of the King's minister: "He sent men to die without trial; he made use of torture; he was cunning, unscrupulous, truculent in the hour of success, slavish and abject in the moment of danger." And finally, in a short, insufficient essay, Arthur D. Innes labeled him the "terrible minister" based on the Treason Act
of 1534 which he called, "the most terrific instrument of tyranny ever forged for an English monarch by a perfectly unscrupulous minister." 6

Since the 1950's Cromwell's role in the Reformation and long term effects upon England have been reevaluated by G.R. Elton and A.G. Dickens. To Elton, Cromwell stands as the "most remarkable revolutionary in English history," 7 whose conviction was not to kill men but to improve their conditions. 8 He credits the minister with the reforms in Tudor government.

The revolution which he guided had major constructive ends in view; the consolidation of the realm behind the legislative authority of the King-in-Parliament and the executive authority of the King-in-Council, and the promotion of reform. 9

Moreover, Dickens evaluates the anti-prelatical and religious reforms. He feels that during Cromwell's administration, the need to strengthen the state was immense, and his work succeeded in transferring ecclesiastical power to the King. He sees England emerging as a nation based "not merely upon administration and judicial reform, but upon a triangular relationship between Church, State, and Society." 10

In retrospect, history must not be a tally of men executed for resistance to change, and while Thomas Cromwell is not the man to look back upon and idolize, his achievements must be assessed for their constructive as well as destructive aspects and effects upon the English nation.

It is undisputed truth that Henry VIII's main concern was to provide a secure male issue for succession to the throne. C.J. Kitching states:

The most fervent wish of every prince, and his most formidable duty to his people was that he should be succeeded by a mature undisputed male heir, preferably his first-born son. Failure would open the way to faction and civil war. And for all the pomp and pageantry, prowess and battle-honors which we associate with the Tudors, there were few moments when the dynasty had an assured future. 11

This objective inevitably led to the King's "Great Matter," for by 1525 Catherine of Aragon was past child bearing years and the only product of the marriage was a girl child, Mary. Therefore, at some point during 1526, Henry began to ponder a more radical idea that the papal dispensation allowing him
to marry Catherine in 1509 had been invalid, and, therefore, his marriage to her was unlawful. If the Pope would dissolve this "incestuous" marriage, Henry would be free to take a second wife and produce a male heir.

Henry's entire case was dubious in canon law. He based the necessity for the divorce on a text from Leviticus which established an obstruction to the legality of the marriage by asserting that the marriage of a brother to his dead brother's wife was incestuous. Henry claimed that because of this God had condemned their marriage, and, thus, they had no son. However, the impediment hung on the condition that the first marriage had been consummated. Aside from the fact that the Leviticus text was contradicted by one in Deuteronomy, Catherine, an extremely religious Queen, declared that the consumption of her marriage to Arthur never transpired.

Other consequences negated Henry's divorce effort. Henry did not have the power base of Charles V, and in May of 1527 when Henry was about to open negotiations, Charles' troops captured Rome and the Pope, Clement VII. Without troops, Henry was no threat to Charles V, Catherine's nephew, who obviously opposed the divorce. Moreover, as Conrad Russel points out, the English diplomatic representation at the Vatican was minute. Cardinal Campeggio, the English Protector had worked in Curia for Charles V, and in addition, there were no English cardinals in Rome. Finally, negotiations in Rome required a knowledge of Roman politics, and in this area Wolsey lacked.

Supporting Francis, in January 1528, Henry declared war on Charles, and in February, he sent an embassy headed by Stephen Gardiner to the papal court at Orvieto. After many threats made to Clement to the effects of casting off allegiance to the Holy See, Wolsey and Campeggio were authorized to hear the case as papal legates in England. However, by the time the Blackfriars court opened in June 1529, Catherine had petitioned the Pope to revoke the case to Rome. Finally, Francis and Charles made peace, the Blackfriars court closed, and the Pope revoked the divorce case back to Rome. Henry, quite put out, replaced Cardinal Wolsey with Sir Thomas More and called Parliament in
the autumn of 1529. 13

All this has been said to make two points. Cromwell did not initiate
the divorce situation, he inherited it and resolved it. Secondly, he has
often been accused of putting into Henry's mind the idea of rejecting Rome.
This is false. J.J. Scarisbrick has shown that by late 1530 Henry was con-
templating his own royal authority and the papal authority in Rome.

Probably from late 1530 or early 1531 he was beginning to see
the Christian world, as he believed it had been in the first
centuries, as a federation of autonomous churches whose gov-
ernment was committed by God to princes, beyond whom lay no
appeal, from whom the local church depended; and this was how
the Church in England should be organized. He must restore
what had been usurped, rehabilitate what had been trampled
don. 14

Surely the ideas circulating through England in 1530 and 1531 laid the founda-
tions for the Royal Supremacy Cromwell directed through Parliament in 1534.
All through this period Henry leaned more towards disregarding Rome. Twice
in 1530 he called together notables and asked them if they would agree to
rejecting Rome and have the divorce settled in England. Both times they
disapproved; 15 Yet by 1531 Henry was known to say such things as:

Even if his holiness should do his worst by excommunicating me
and so forth, I shall not mind it, for I care not a fig for all
his excommunications. Let him follow his own at Rome, I will do
here what I think best. 16

G.R. Elton sees the period 1530 to 1532 as years of "bluster and bombast,
bankrupt ideas, without a policy." 17 J.J. Scarisbrick views the same period
with more direction.

Beneath the bluster and buff there was already a hard kernel of
conviction which, despite hesitations and setbacks, would grow
steadily until it achieved its fullness in the breach with Rome
and the Act of Supremacy in 1534. 18

Yet, conviction was not enough. Time stood still waiting for the one man
who could turn much monumental policies as the severance with Rome and the
Royal Supremacy into reality. The man was Thomas Cromwell who was actively
drafting legislation in the third session of Parliament.
The opening of the third session of the Reformation Parliament which began 15 January, 1532 witnessed the threats made against the papal supremacy transformed into directive legislation, and the directive would culminate in much more revolutionary ideas than the solution to Henry's marriage. Anti-clericalism permeated this session of Parliament with aunts concerning the power of the ecclesiastical courts. On 18 March, final draft of the "Supplication Against the Ordinaries" was presented, which innumerable grievances such as: 1) the power of Convocation make laws without royal assent; 2) the delays of the Canterbury courts; giving benefices to minors unable to serve any such benefice; 4) the excessive number of holy days kept with very small devotion; and 5) in cases heresy the ordinaries trapped the accused with confusing questions of faith. Elton feels that the "Supplication Against the Ordinaries" originated in earlier sessions possibly even in 1529 although there is no substantial proof. He also feels sure that Cromwell had his hand in these drafts, for by 1532 he had drawn the King's close attention.

On 12 April, Parliament resumed after Easter, and the Supplication was given to Convocation. Convocation returned a document which Henry and the Commons regarded as insufficient. On 10 May, Convocation received a royal demand to submit to the three articles as follows: 1) to make no new canons without royal assent; 2) to submit existing canons to a committee of thirty-two for review; and 3) that the canons which the committee approved would stand by the King's royal assent and those not approved would be disregarded. The next day Henry retorted further by giving Convocation a copy of the oath sworn to the Pope and a copy of the oath bishops swore to kings. He said: "For all the prelates at their consecration make an oath to the Pope clean contrary to the oath they make to us, so they seem his subjects and not ours." Following this, on 15 May the upper house of the Southern Convocation gave Henry the "Submission of the Clergy"
signed by three bishops. This stands as Henry's first success in gaining the obedience of the clergy, but at the same time, it threatened long standing institutions. The entire realm was by no means in accordance with the King's Great Matter if the divorce was to affect the unified state of Christendom. Therefore, following the Submission of the Clergy, Thomas More resigned. Moreover, increasing the attack on the Church, the first "Act of Annates" passed which threatened to halt payments of annates to Rome and advocated appointing bishops to English sees without Rome's provision. This bill would expand in the following year, by being put into law through letters patent.

These two pieces of legislation were monumental steps aimed at the severence with Rome, and they set the Henrician Reformation in full force. Elton states:

The events of this third session---the passage of the first "Act of Annates" and the enforced Submission of the Clergy---ended the period of temporizing and hesitation, and ushered in the full revolution which dominated the history of the 1530's.

If the third session ended the period of hesitation it also brought to the floor the man who was to become the motivating force behind the entire Henrician Reformation.

Thomas Cromwell was born around the year 1485. He was not born into wealth or nobility, but his father was a clothworker, brewer, and blacksmith of Putney in Surrey---a fact for which he was chided about all his life. However, not much is known concerning his early life. Reginald Pole said that as a young man he traveled about Italy as a soldier. In December 1503, he served with the French army at the Battle of the Garigliano. He later worked for a rich banker in Florence, after which, he was an accountant for a Venetian firm. He spent some time in the great commercial city, Antwerp. It has been said that in his youth he was a "ruffian," but in 1512, he married a girl from gentry background with money, Elizabeth Wykys. Much later, he practiced law in England and was admitted to Gray's Inn in 1524, although, he had little formal training in law, if any.
By 1516, he had joined Cardinal Wolsey's household. Through Wolsey he was introduced to the middle-rank administrators who ran affairs under the cardinal. He learned the way of the House of Commons by 1523. 

However, he also encountered a wide variety of clergy men which only enhanced his anti-clerical attitude.

A self-made layman who had risen by the hard road, he was now in daily contact and rivalry with the most ambitious and pampered clerics of the day... Inevitably he developed a resentment towards their pretensions and their easy success; doubtless to a businessman's desire to rationalize the hoary anomalies, inefficiencies and inequities of ecclesiastical life.

Nevertheless, Cromwell was intensely loyal to Wolsey and learned and experienced a wealth of information that would inevitably profit the rest of his career. This career rose fast. In 1529, he entered the Reformation Parliament and by 1530 had joined the King's Council. On 14 April 1532, Cromwell obtained the office of mastership of the King's Jewels. Yet, the tide was turning. The King's ministers could not arrive at an acceptable plan to end the King's marriage, and from May onward, the plan advocated by Cromwell came before Parliament. By 1533 he was the King's chief minister. Appointed principal secretary in 1534, he also became Master of the Rolls, and in July 1536, he was made Lord Privy Seal.

By early 1533, Anne was known to be pregnant, and although this pregnancy was not the cause of the breach with Rome, the condition certainly necessitated quick action if the child was to be legitimate. Archbishop Warham had died in August 1532, yet Henry left the see of Canterbury vacant and pondered possible candidates until January 1533 when he appointed Thomas Cranmer. Cranmer's appointment was confirmed by the Church and Henry married Anne secretly on 25 January 1533. Following this, in May Cranmer declared Henry's marriage to Catherine null and void. However, it was felt that Catherine would appeal to Rome, and this expectation called for immediate action which culminated in the Act in Restraint of Appeals.

The Act would henceforth negate all appeals to Rome so that cases of testament, matrimony and divorce, rights of tithes, and possessions would
be adjudged within the realm. Cromwell was the motivating force behind this Act and its drafting. His excellence in drafting can be seen in the preamble, in which, he eliminated moral platitudes that had been debated for so long and named concrete abuses. In the preamble, he defended the break with Rome and stressed a state where one head would rule one body of clergy and laity alike.

Where by divers sundry old authentic histories and chronicles it is manifestly declared and expressed that this realm of England is an Empire, and so hath dignity and royal estate of the imperial crown of the same, unto whom a body politic, compact of all sort and degrees of people, divided in terms and by name of spirituality and temporality, be bounded and sworn to bear next to God a natural humble obedience; he being also instituted and furnished by the goodness and sufferance of Almighty God with plenary, whole, and entire power, pereminence, authority, prorogative, and jurisdiction to render and yield justice and final determination of all manner of folk residents or subjects within this realm, in all causes, matter, and contention happening to occur, insurge, or begin within the limits thereof, without restraints or provocation to any foreign princes.27

Thus the Act fortified Henry's divorce nullification. Furthermore, after its passage, Cromwell became the King's chief minister and moved in the direction Henry advocated. His limelight was to come in 1534.

For all the forced direction of the Restraint of Appeals, it immediately ran into cumbersome difficulty. The Act restricted all future appeals to Rome, yet Catherine had appealed in 1529. Scarisbrick cites Hall in acknowledging that the question was much debated in Parliament until it was finally decided that the Act damned all appeals. Yet, the bill left more loopholes, for it failed to settle Catherine's future or the succession matter. In addition, the list of prohibited appeals did not include the case of heresy; therefore, while the Act stated that the King of England submitted to no foreign jurisdiction, it failed to assert total control perhaps because Henry really did fear excommunication.

This excommunication fear led Henry to express conflicting views in terms of the divorce. In fact, Henry's inability to stand firm on one side manifested itself all through 1533 and did not subside until Cromwell's brilliant legislation of 1534. Henry hoped that his threat of severance
would bring Clement around to his side, and while Henry insisted that the Pope had no jurisdiction in England, he also wanted the excusator to terminate his obligation of answering Catherine's appeal in Rome. Henry was still trying to secure Clement's submission, yet Clement was becoming impatient and in July condemned Henry's divorce. He proclaimed that Henry had until September to remedy his wrong or excommunication would follow.29

However, Henry had sometime before drawn up a document for appeal to a General Council against papal excommunication. On 7 November, Bishop Bonner met with Clement to plead the King's cause, but Bonner had little negotiating power. The meeting was interrupted by Francis, the French King who had neglected to assert the English cause at his meeting with Clement at Marseilles, the meeting Henry was supposed to but did not attend. Following the interruption, Clement refused Henry's appeal.30 This refusal bewildered Henry who arrogantly blamed it on Francis' lack of action at Marseilles and denounced him as traitor.

In 1534 all this was put behind. Cromwell's vision took hold, and his actions were aimed not merely in freeing England from Roman jurisdiction but settling once and for all the royal supremacy.

The 1534 sessions of Parliament witnessed a mass of Cromwellian legislation transformed into statutes. The Act in Absolute Restraint of Annates forbade all payments to Rome and provided that bishops would be appointed by the king alone. The Dispensations Act cut off all payments to Rome including Peter's Pence and transferred the authority to issue dispensing licenses to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Furthermore, Cromwell wanted to ensure that the Canterbury registry would never possess the power of the Papal Curia, and asserted that should the Archbishop not issue a dispensing license for a reasonable claim, by order of the Lord Chancellor with a king's writ, he must explain his refusal and could be forced to grant the dispensation under penalty.31 In addition, the Act of Submission of the Clergy transformed Convocation's surrender in 1532 into statute form.
And, finally, the First Act of Succession settled, for the time, (two other Succession Acts would follow in 1537 and 1543), the succession matter and not only acknowledged the issues of Henry and Anne as true heirs, but was accompanied by an oath to confirm national acceptance of the invalidity of the marriage to Catherine and the validity of the marriage to Anne. These Acts all revealed Cromwell's resentment of clericalism which expanded in the legislation of the following years.

Anti-clericalism was not new to Reformation England. The church men's great power and wealth had greatly augmented anti-clerical feelings not only in Henry and Cromwell, but in men like Fisher and More who were committed to Erasmian social and religious reform. These men were well aware of the failures of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, the heady wealth of church men which increased with tactics such as pluralism, and the Church's growing corruption and worldliness. However, while Cromwell embarked upon building a reformed lay dominated society ruled by the sovereignty of the King-in-Parliament, he left men such as Fisher and More behind who could not renounce the Pope's authority to their sovereign Henry VIII. Thus, the second session of Parliament in 1534 culminated in two great acts, the Act of Supremacy, and the Treason Act which supplanted all allegiance in Rome to the King and created an instrument of enforcement to ensure compliance. Subsequently, this legislation increased the alienation many Englishmen had in regards of the Succession oath.

The Act of Supremacy created a new Christian kingship based in the sovereign's land, England. A very short statute, it defined in law what Henry had been saying for years. Henry was the supreme head on earth of the Church of England. Furthermore, he was vested with the power to attend to offences that fell under spiritual jurisdiction or his new authority expanded to what was before totally within the papal sphere. Finally, he was given the power of ecclesiastical visitation. 32 Elton states:
While the act's main purpose, therefore, was to ratify, by way of declaration, the transformation of the "Anglicana Ecclesia" from the English part of the papal Church into the National Church of England, its second part prevented the pleading of customary immunities or exemptions against all exercises of the royal supremacy. 33

Following this, in November of 1534, the Treason Act was passed which stands as Cromwell's most brilliant maneuver in securing the Gath of Succession and, at the same time, his most brutal tool in weeding out resistance.

Controversy had arisen in November of 1533 after the arrest of Elizabeth Barton, the Nun of Kent. Barton was a deluded, epileptic servant girl who with the assistance of Dr. Edward Bocking, a monk of Canterbury, became quite popular for her prophesies and attacks upon Henry's marriage to Anne. Ultimately, the government could not allow such accusations and in April 1534, she and five of her followers were executed. However, the only instrument available to use against the nun was the Act of Attainder which indeed repressed her but was cumbersome, wasteful, and lacked the air of legality which was of vast importance in Cromwell's views to change.34 Therefore, a more forceful instrument was devised to easily eliminate all negative activities aimed at the royal supremacy.

The Treason Act of 1532 listed five specific treasons: 1) to compass or imagine the death of the king, his consort or his eldest son and heir; 2) to violate the king's consort of his eldest daughter, being unmarried, or the consort of the king's heir; 3) to levy war against the king in his realm or adhere to the king's enemies within the realm; 4) to forge the king's great or privy seal, or counterfeit his coin; and 5) to kill the chancellor, treasurer, or justice of either Bench, or byne, of Assize, or of Oyer and Terminer in the execution of their duties. However, with regards to the Nun of Kent's activities, Henry and Cromwell were dealing with words aimed against the king, which in their eyes, if allowed could easily breed violence. The Treason Act of 1534, therefore, elaborated upon the existing treasons, but its real core damned words spoken against
the king as treasonable. From February 1535, any person or persons who maliciously wish, will, or desire by words or writing, or by craft imagine, invent, practice, or attempt any bodily harm to be done or committed to the King's most royal person, the Queen's or their heirs apparent, or to deprive them or any of them of the dignity, title, or name of their royal estates, or slanderously and maliciously publish and pronounce, by express writing or words that the King our sovereign lord should be heretic, schismatic, tyrant, infidel, or usurper of the Crown...shall be adjudged traitors...and shall have and suffer such pains of death and other penalties as is limited and accustomed in cases of high treason.

Furthermore, while the Treason Act was highly effective in dealing with outright resistance as exemplified in the Pilgrimage of Grace, it has been greatly attacked as an instrument of despotism with regards to the treatment of Sir Thomas More.

The execution of Sir Thomas More on 6 July 1535 was the darkest day in Thomas Cromwell's career, and yet, at the same time, it was: an act upon which Henry insisted, not Cromwell. Certainly More was the greatest humanist of his day and had been Henry's first minister up until 1532. However, while he could acknowledge the wrong doings withing the Church, he would not relinquish his allegiance to the papal supremacy. To Henry, More posed a serious threat, and regardless of his popularity, the impatient king called for his execution.

More was sent to the Tower on 17 May 1535 after having refused, four days before, to take the oath of Succession which was condemned under the act as misprison of treason and punishable by prolonged imprisonment. Ultimately, it was hoped that More would change his mind. When it was finally accepted that he would not take the oath, More was then attained, his property was confiscated and his imprisonment was viewed as permanent.

More was left alone until 7 May 1535 when he was examined by Cromwell, the attorney-general Christopher Hales, and the solicitor-general Richard Riche. Again More refused to take the oath of Succession. Furthermore, he employed a fantastic tactic, he refused to discuss the issue, and, for all
the malicious words the Treason Act condemned, it was ineffective in regards to silence.\textsuperscript{38} Cromwell sought compliance with the supremacy, yet More remained silent possibly not realizing the full consequences.

On 3 June, there was another interrogation composed of Cromwell and other leading councillors. More again utilized the silence tactic. However, by this time More was in more grave danger than he thought for also in the Tower was Fisher who had much more treasonable evidence surrounding him, and when Henry heard that Paul III had elevated Fisher to a cardinal position, he decided to do away with them both.\textsuperscript{39} Instructed to draw up an indictment against More, Cromwell found it difficult to prove treason. The indictment read that by remaining silent, he had denied the Supremacy and that on 12 June he had specifically spoken treason to Sir Richard Riche.\textsuperscript{40}

It has been asserted that Riche invented the words of Sir Thomas More, an assertion which can not be proven; however, Elton feels that in the series of hypothetical situations, Riche put to More the day Riche was sent to confiscate his books, More perhaps went too far and at his trial the jury damned his words as treason. He was accused of saying:

A king may be made by Parliament and a king deprived by Parliament, 'and to such an act a subject being of the Parliament' may give his consent; but with respect to the supremacy, 'a subject can not be bound because he can not give his consent of himself to the Parliament.'\textsuperscript{41}

The Treason Act and subsequent martyrdom of Thomas More can not be considered one of Cromwell's achievements. The Act has been damned an instrument of despotism, in which, Cromwell could do away with all resistance easily and ruthlessly. Despotism maybe it was; however, Cromwell and Henry did not possess historical hindsight and fears and threats of disloyalty to the King's supremacy had to be combated by punishment and threat of punishment. However, Cromwell did not want More's execution. In one of More's own letters he said that Cromwell:

said and swore a great oath that he had liever that his own son (which is of truth a goodly young gentlemen, and shall I trust come to much worship) had lost his head, than that I should thus have refused the oath.\textsuperscript{42}
Furthermore, the words of Thomas More on the scaffold "The King's good servant, but God's first," can also add light to Cromwell's position. If he must be condemned of anything, he was committed in loyalty first to his King and the new order. However, unforgivable, Henry called for the execution, and as in all things, Cromwell complied.

With the Treason Act curtailing outward animosity towards the new order, the Reformation moved on to firmly establish the National Church of England. The new Church with Henry as the head could hardly possess substantial authority while monasteries stood all over England as a vivid remembrance of the papal power Henry had usurped. Thus in 1535, Cromwell was made vice-gerent and began to organize the whole Church of England under a single control.

As already acknowledged, under the Act of Supremacy, Henry was vested with the power of ecclesiastical visitation. In 1535 Cromwell had carried out a general visitation to all monastic lands which led to the compiling of the "Valor Ecclesiasticus." The visitations surveyed every spiritual preferment by a rather hasty means. The commissioners, armed with questionnaires, queried the inmates with regards to the number of inhabitants and the property of the house. Injunctions were read to the inmates asserting the strict monastic ideal which possibly aimed at voluntary dissolution. The conclusions drawn from the visitations and the "Valor" confirmed long acknowledged assumptions of monastic life. Overlooking true Godly men, the reports centered on the corruption, lust, worldliness, and infidelity which existed in many houses.

The laity had no respect left for monasticism and quite a number of the monks themselves were interested only in getting out of vows they had taken before they were old enough to understand their meaning.

Furthermore, the property of the Church amounted to nearly one third of the land in England, and consequently, the outcome of the visitations resulted in the government uniting behind the landed aristocracy and gentry to suppress the last remnants of feudalism.
The Act of Dissolution of the Smaller Monasteries passed in 1536 closed all houses worth less than 200 pounds a year, and the Crown received their properties. Many inmates transferred to the larger houses, and since it was supposed that only the smaller houses were to be closed, many felt sufficiently secure. However, in 1536 Cromwell established the Court of Augmentations to administer the transfer of wealth which ultimately focused on a larger scale of dissolution. The crucial moment came in December 1537: the large priory of Lewes in Sussex surrendered its property to the King. This established a model, and between 1538-1540, all monastic lands relinquished their properties to the Court of Augmentations. The Act of Dissolution of the Larger Monasteries, 1539 confirmed the surrender, and by 1540 monasticism no longer existed in England. Eight hundred institutions passed out of existence which added 90,000 pounds a year to the Crown. To this figure must be added the sale of jewels and gold from the shrines and the liabilities, debts, and pensions of the monasteries and monks.

The most surprising facet of the dissolution is that it occurred with such speed. A four year span of time saw the age old institution of monasticism destroyed. For years historians have felt that Cromwell had had his eyes on the monastic lands as early as 1532, and this view inevitably added another black mark to his record. Elton, negates these beliefs. He shows that the Act of 1536 was drafted with great haste, and if Cromwell did intend to make Henry rich, the Act certainly failed to do so. Also he asserts that originally Cromwell did not favor the dissolution, and the Act of 1536 itself appears to be the work of Thomas Audley. Yet, when the laymen of society cried for the land, Cromwell oversaw the creation of the Court of Augmentations to transfer property efficiently whether coming by surrender, escheat, or purchase.

Finally to conclude on the terms of the disposal, one must realize that in regards to the notion that Cromwell intended to increase Henry's wealth more research is required. However, in the 1950's Joyce A. Younings
undertook an intense study on the disposal of monastic lands in Devon. Younings asserts that too readily historians have believed that Henry VIII quickly dispersed the lands to his friends as gifts or sold them at low prices. The research on Devon shows that the grants made the first few years after the dissolution were confined to vacant sites, and the number of grants of manorial estates went to members of Henry’s household such as Queen Catherine Howard and Queen Catherine Parr. More importantly, the provisions of 1536 related to future profits of alienation of land which might occur and such alienation of land, Younings feels was not in Cromwell’s eyes who had in 1535 suggested that the property be used for endowment of education.

At this early stage nothing was stated officially about a purchase price and it is fairly certain that systematic and large scale alienation by sale was not envisaged---in fact it ran counter to all Cromwell’s plans.

In fact, of the seven grants made in Devon between 1536-1539, none brought substantial capital to the Crown but were subject to reserved rent and knight service tenure. The first actual sale in Devon occurred in February 1540, only seven months before Cromwell’s execution. Finally, Younings concludes that the swiftest of sales after 1540 went to landed aristocracy and gentry which along with land given as gifts were good political investments. However, these transfers of land came after Cromwell’s execution.

As can be seen Thomas Cromwell altered virtually every aspect of English life in his short term in power, 1533-40. No one would expect that a country would except such fundamental changes as the breach with Rome, the royal supremacy, or the dissolution of the monasteries without much discontent. Cromwell always feared revolt, and yet with the exception of the Pilgrimage of Grace, the realm saw no unified resistance. This does not mean the country was passive. Rumors and tales of prevalent fears
circulated throughout England.

John Woodword, a learned doctor of law in Staffordshire, bored his friends by frequently mourning the fact that 'we never had good world since the Lord Cromwell and his master (Wolsey) did rule!...He trusted that he should have as short an end as his said master had. 53

It was feared that such discontent could incite superstitions which might provoke violence between those who did and did not support the Reformation. Cromwell was well aware of such questioning and combated it not merely with an oath of Succession and a Treason Act, but he waged a nationwide propaganda campaign.

"The Glass of Truth" published in 1532 reaffirmed Henry's view on the divorce. A popularized text, it stressed the Leviticus conclusion and gave details as to the life of Queen Catherine of Aragon and Arthur. However, no mention was made against the Pope or his headship of the Church. By 1533, a pamphlet entitled "Articles Devised By The Whole Consent of the King's Most Honorable Council" not only attacked Clement VII but reduced his title to bishop of Rome. 54 Richard Morison produced in 1537 a pure propaganda piece entitled "Apomasis." Written in Latin for the European market, it not only praised Thomas Cromwell as the most loyal of all men, but recounted the occurrences of the past years such as the divorce, the actions of the Nun of Kent and the thoughts of Thomas More from the Crown's point of view. 55

These are only three examples from the many propagandist publications Cromwell directed, but they show how the government influenced its subjects. Furthermore, it must be added that after October 1535, Cromwell granted a commission to license and silence ministers within the realm. Men such as Cranmer, Tunstall, Shaxton, and Latimer who supported the government policy from the pulpit and especially at St. Paul's Cross formed another outlet in which the royal supremacy could be announced to the nation. By this, he gained a supervisory eye over the clergy, and this supervision increased with the use of circular letters ordering enforcement as the one issued to
bishops 3 April, 1535 ordering that the king's new title be stressed every Sunday. 56

This circular represents the foundation of the whole positive policy of persuasion and coercion, and it was clearly received in that sense by the bishops who hurriedly wrote to acknowledge receipt and promise action.57

And finally, Cromwell employed the local sheriffs and justices to check the bishops, so that, from the government printing office, to the pulpit and to the local governmental institutions, Cromwell exploited the royal supremacy over the entire realm.

However, for all Cromwell's propagandist activities, his rebellion fears became reality in 1536-37 with the Pilgrimage of Grace, the true crisis of his time. The revolt began early in October 1536 in Lincolnshire and spread north of the Humber. By the time the Lincolnshire revolt collapsed in late October, Yorkshire, Durham, Northumberland, Cumberland, and Westmoreland rose in revolt.

Three separate commissions were touring Lincolnshire at the time of the uprising, one dissolving the smaller monasteries, one assessing the Parliamentary subsidy granted in 1534, and one set up by the Bishop of Lincoln to examine the clergy. 58 These commissions added to the prevalent fear that the King was out to seize all church jewels and ornaments.

Stories circulated around Northern England that:

All the remaining abbeys except Westminster would be suppressed, that two or three parish churches would be amalgamated into one, that a special levy would be imposed on sheep, and that men would be taxed for marriage and funerals and for eating white bread, goose, or capon. 59

Thus, in Lincolnshire the clergy excited their local parishioners, and a few days later, the gentry took over the revolt. Men such as Thomas Moigne, a lawyer and landowner and the heads of landed households such as the Pymokes became involved. 60 Once this fell, Robert Aske, also a lawyer raised an army of 30,000 and took York and Pontefract Castle where Lord Darcy joined the movement. On 27 October, the Duke of Norfolk met Aske
at Doncaster Bridge. Not wanting an engagement, he tricked Aske into delay by promising to convey the rebels grievances to the King. At Pontefract on 2 December, Aske submitted the pilgrims terms of transferring the supremacy back to Rome. Norfolk promised to adhere to the terms, and also promised Aske a full pardon if he would end the Pilgrimage. However, following the Cumberland and Yorkshire rising in 1537 over two hundred executions occurred including those of Darcy and Aske.

Controversy is implicit over the cause of the revolts. Men like Pollard and Dickens attribute the Pilgrimage to economic revolt. Dickens stresses that in Cumberland and Westmoreland, the revolts were directed against enclosure and the bad harvest in 1534-6. He sites the dissolution of the monasteries as a potential economic grievance to Robert Aske. Furthermore, the North, he asserts, suffered from lack of coin and undeveloped resources. He sees the gentry angered by the Statute of Uses which prevented settling portions of their land upon their younger sons and crippled their power to borrow by making mortgages illegal. Finally, outraged by the Treason Law, they blamed all their woes on Cromwell. 61

Penry Williams, on the other hand, feels that the economic causes have been exaggerated. He points out that while the harvest of 1535 was poor, grain was abundantly reaped just before the Pilgrimage in 1535. 62 The rebellion, he insists sprang from rumor that Henry was moving towards seizure of church ornaments and the levying of new taxes. Finally, he claims that the articles at Pontefract were predominantly ecclesiastical and "there is no hint of the agrarian grievances that were agitating the peasantry elsewhere." 63

It must be concluded that while economic grievances did play a major part in the rebellion, the North was in a sense revolting against the new order, and this was Cromwell's main fear. It was the most backward of areas and change came slowly. The articles of the Reformation such as the Act of Supremacy and the Dissolution of the Monasteries bred misunderstand-
standing which led to rumors among the peasants. With fear itself a
key factor, it is easy to see how the rebellion arose and fell so quickly.
However, these rebels never renounced their loyalty to their King. They
pictured Cromwell as the chief villain and demanded his removal, not
Henry's. Therefore, while the revolt was a major crisis, it could never
be viewed as an all out revolution, yet it proves the force of widespread
rumor in sixteenth century England.

Concluding upon the Pilgrimage of Grace, the attention must by turned
to Cromwell and his reforms both in religion and law.

As is realized, Erasmian ideals of a religion in which the clergy had
no special status and practiced simple piety based on Christian love were
prevalent in men like More, and Colet in the years before the Reformation
who were committed to educational reform. Consequently, the age old mon­
astic tradition and the cults surrounding the sacraments came under attack.
The vehicle of reform they urged would be through education by which men
would learn the true meaning of the Scriptures available in their own
tongue.

Hence Erasmianism was an educational ideal leading toward true
love of God through popular instruction. But its social impli­
cation was a faith in a national human order, good in itself
though perhaps corrupted by Roman dogma and institutions. What
was required was the restoration of Christian conspirators
driven by love. And the remedies for disharmony lay ready at
hand to men moved by the vision of a Commonwealth not hierarchi­
cal and prelatical in character but horizontal and lay in spirit.

In such an atmosphere More wrote his "Utopia," Colet wrote "Statutes" and
refounded St Paul's school and based the curriculm on Erasmian ideals,
while Wolsey prepared to reform Oxford and Cambridge.

Henry's divorce supposedly shattered all peaceful Erasmian reform.
Actually, however, the reform was redefined, and this definition must be
attributed largely to Thomas Cromwell. Cromwell, it must be remembered
came from Wolsey's household and certainly accepted many humanist notions
of reform. One major step Cromwell took was to make texts available in the
vernacular. Between 1525-1547 over eight hundred religious works were printed in English with the majority coming from the years Cromwell held power. Thus, Cromwell utilized the pens of such men as Starkley, Tyndale, Morrison, Barnes, Coverdale, Becon, and Taverner in translating English version of Erasmus' work and creating other valuable material useful to the Reformation such as Starkley's "Dialoge."

John Foxe popularized a story that on a journey to Rome, Cromwell memorized the entire New Testament of Erasmus. The story may or may not be true; however, as a layman, he did possess a great knowledge of the Bible, and perhaps this knowledge led to Cromwell's greatest contribution to English religious history, the printing of the Bible in the English tongue.

In July 1535, Cromwell and Convocation defined the new faith for England in the Ten Articles which implied some Lutheran teaching. The Ten Articles expressed the traditional doctrine of the three sacraments, baptism, penance, and the Eucharist, but failed to mention the other four. Furthermore, the document advocated the goodness of saints days and prayers for the dead, but discouraged overemphasis. It also negated celibacy among the clergy. Cromwell backed the Ten Articles with the Injunctions issued in August which were to remedy such abuses as the use of images, and prayers and pilgrimages to buy salvation and thus degraded the beliefs of the later Middle Ages. The clergy were instructed to teach the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments in English and stress the competent administration of the sacraments. This was all too radical for Henry who oversaw the publication of the "Bishop's Book" which singled out the three sacraments mentioned in the Ten Articles as paramount but innumerated all seven. Nonetheless, this setback did not stop Cromwell, for in 1537, he licensed for sale Tyndale's and Roger's translation of the Bible, and at last had a vernacular edition ready to be placed in every English church. In 1539 Coverdale and others produced a superior translation known as the
Great Bible." 71

Cromwell's innovations in law reform are just as manifest. In 1536 he was able to put through the first Poor Law Act. Although the act passed suffered severe curtailments from the original proposal which advocated public works for the unemployed, it recognized the important distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor. Its extent of improvement, however, was limited to improving penal provisions. 72

Complaints concerning the jurisdiction of Church courts circled throughout England before the Reformation and expressed themselves quite early in the Supplication Against the Ordinaries. Specifically, the Church privileges of sanctuary and benefit of clergy which offered protection to criminal offenders brought many complaints. By 1536 Cromwell wanted to destroy the availability of sanctuary; however, as Elton points out, Henry wanted "to preserve ecclesiastical claims once they were declared to be derived from him."73 This problem receded until an act passed in 1540 in which the rights of sanctuary were abolished except in churches and churchyards. However, much agitation concerning this age old tradition took place in the House of Commons, and a clause creating eight sanctuaries within the realm where men could take refuge was added.74

In addition, other innovations transpired between 1536–1540 when the principles and abuses of land ownership came under debate. Henry wanted to stop tax evasion by uses, and in 1536 forced a rigorous bill called the Statute of Uses to be passed. The Statute suffered sufficient attack, for under its provisions enfeoffments of uses were to create a legal estate in the beneficiary, so that, the King was assured of revenue.75 This Statute was cited as one of the grievances during the Pilgrimage of Grace; however, Cromwell modified the confusion in the Statute of Wills which permitted a man to bequeath two thirds of his landed estate. 76 Finally, in terms of law reform, Cromwell set up the Court of Augmentations and the Court of Wards that offered an improved government machinery for swifter
justice by deleting such cases from the other courts of the realm.

Cromwell's reforms in law, however, had to wait until after the royal supremacy had become firmly fixed, and, yet, the length at which he may have wished to enact such reforms will never be known, for by 1540, his time had run short. Henry was growing old, and assured of his new power reverted back to conservative Catholic ideals. Henry wanted Parliament in 1539 to enact a provision to end religious disputes; therefore, the Lords nominated a committee of eight to fulfill his wishes, yet it was composed of Cromwell, three of his allies, and four conservative opponents. Thus any hope he might have had for settlement was neatly blocked. With Norfolk's pressure, the Ten Articles were reduced to the Six Articles which damned denial of transubstantiation as heresy, and restored celibacy at the same time. Thus as Elton states: "The Parliament which Cromwell had meant to use for the consolidation of the reform instead put an end to it."78

Cromwell's status fell at the same time Norfolk's rose in 1540. Jane Seymour had died in 1537 after fulfilling Henry's deepest wish by giving him a son and heir, Edward VI. Single once more, the marriage to Anne of Cleves Cromwell had carefully arranged ended in disaster, and Henry turned his attention to Norfolk's young niece, Catherine Howard. In the 1540 session of Parliament while Cromwell was able to enact the Statue of Wills, which as already stated, modified the Statute of Uses, Norfolk and Gardiner at the same time persuaded Henry to view Cromwell as a corrupt heretic and on 10 June, unable to break the conservative faction the man who had done so much for Henry was arrested. Condemned by an Act of Attainder, without trial, he was executed on July 28, 1540, and finally found guilty under the Treason Law.

In conclusion, history is often viewed in the light of the effects a man has upon a time period. Thomas Cromwell's effects upon England


24 Ibid., p. 170.

25 Dickens, p. 21.

26 Ibid., p. 56.


28 Scarisbrick, p. 315.

29 Ibid., p. 310.

30 Ibid., p. 319.

31 Dickens, p. 59.

32 Ibid., p. 68.


38 Ibid., p. 404.

39 Ibid., p. 407.

40 Ibid., p. 410.

41 Quoted in *Policy and Police*, p. 411.

42 Dickens, p. 66.


48 Ibid., pp. 236-37.
50 Ibid., p. 22.
51 Ibid., p. 22.
52 Ibid., p. 38.
54 Ibid., p. 181.
55 Ibid., p. 192.
56 Ibid., pp. 202-16.
57 Ibid., p. 232.
59 Ibid., p. 317.
60 Ibid., p. 318.
61 Dickens, p. 96.
63 Ibid., p. 324.
65 Ibid., p. xxv.
66 Ibid., p. xxviii.
68 Dickens, p. 109.
70 Ibid., p. 258.
71 Ibid., p. 275.
73 Elton, *Reform and Renewal*, p. 137.
74 Ibid., p. 137.
76 Ibid., p. 291.
77 Ibid., p. 284.
78 Ibid., p. 288.
79 Ibid., p. 294.
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Part of a twelve volume set of English historical documents. This volume is an excellent primary source when researching the Reformation period, for, it merges constitutional, ecclesiastical and social movements, and, thus, provides a wealth of fundamental documents.

Instructions of King Henry VIII For The General Visitation Of The Monasteries And Nunneries, in Ten Scarce Books In English Literature, Edinburgh: Privately Printed, 1886.

Extensive listing of questioning to be made during the visitations of the monasteries. The questions cover subjects such as: how many inmates reside within the monastery, the sum of money the house takes in from revenues and rents, if the monastery is indebted, and, if so, to whom and for what sum.


Queen Anne Boleyn's Last Letter to King Henry VIII, in Ten Scarce Books in English Literature, Edinburgh: Privately Printed, 1886.

A very touching letter written to Henry while Anne was in the Tower, in which, she calls on God to pardon Henry for her approaching execution and acknowledges that in the final judgement her innocence will be made known by God.


Covers the period 1080-1885. For its publishing date, it is a good collection of documents. Deals mostly with constitutional developments.


Excellent. The introductory comments asserts Cromwell's valuable role in Erasmian reform. The collection of Cromwell's letters allows the reader to assess Cromwell by his own thought.


Covers the period 1485–1603. A large majority of the documents come from the period of the Reformation. Tanner pre-empts the documents with necessary background material. The document excerpts are great for quick research. *


Excellent. After a brief introduction explaining each letter, Kitching compiles various letters written between the Tudor family members. Provides photocopies of the original letters.


Around two dozen proclamations actually deal with religion during the Henrician Reformation. Various others deal with reform as in Bible translation.

Secondary Sources


I feel the work provides the best overall view of Cromwell's role in the Reformation. It is presented in a very detailed manner, and at the same time, it is not too complicated. Excellent use of sources. At the time this work was written, Dickens was renovating Cromwell's overall image. Excellent
concluding comments.


This is Elton's very detailed analysis of the Commons' Supplication Against the Ordinaries passed in the third session of Parliament. Elton asserts the document probably was drafted in earlier sessions. The Commons' Supplication produced quick results in the Submission of the Clergy, and Elton stresses that by the end of the third session the period of hesitation had ended and the Reformation was in full force.


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* Indicates found at Boatwright Memorial Library, University of Richmond. All other research came from the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
THOMAS CROMWELL: THE FORCE BEHIND THE HENRICIAN REFORMATION

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