

Peter R. Roberts

Henry VIII, Francis I and the Reformation Parliament

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Extrait de l'article

In many respects the year 1533 marked a climacteric in the making of the English Reformation. On 25 January Henry VIII contracted a secret marriage with Anne Boleyn, and by Easter the Act in Restraint of Appeals had been passed in parliament to abolish Roman jurisdiction in England. This has been described by one modern historian as « doubtless the most important single piece of legislation » to be enacted by the Reformation Parliament. But historians do not agree on what was the pivotal event in the transformation ; there is no consensus on whether it was Anne's pregnancy or the appointment of Thomas Cranmer as Primate that precipitated the break with Rome and the emergence of the unitary state in England. It is generally recognized that the negotiations with Rome, which finally came to nought, were facilitated by Henry's alliance with Francis I in the early 1530s. In the event, the timing of his divorce from Catherine of Aragon and the breach with the papacy were crucially influenced by that alliance, but the interplay of the French connection with the constitutional developments of these years is an aspect of the crisis that has been comparatively neglected in historical accounts. Henry revealed a growing awareness that parliament could provide a viable alternative solution to the problems of the royal divorce and remarriage. His understanding of what could be achieved through statute law was nowhere more explicitly stated than in the briefing instructions he gave to the duke of Norfolk as his envoy to France in a little known letter of 8 August 1533. While this affirmation of the role of parliament in resolving « the king's great matter » has to be understood in its immediate context, it expressed a belief that Henry had held and acted on for some time. Between 1532 and 1536, in the process of realizing his own conception of what historians have called « the sovereignty of the crown in parliament », Henry gained unprecedented authority over the Church in his realm and dominions.

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