

Cranmer and the English Reformation.

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Summary:

Thomas Cranmer was a relatively obscure and unambitious Cambridge don when he became involved (largely by accident) in the dispute over the king's marriage. His ideas appealed to Henry, and he was appointed Archdeacon of Taunton. When Wareham died in August 1532 he was unexpectedly nominated to the See of Canterbury. This was the King's doing, and for the rest of Henry's life his confidence in his Archbishop remained unshaken – even when they disagreed, and even when the latter got married. Cranmer consistently steered the king in a reforming direction, particularly over the Great Bible, but never overstepped the limits which Henry set. He emerged as a committed protestant only after the King's death, and then set out (in collaboration with the council) to convert the English Church into a protestant mode. His Prayer Books remain landmarks of liturgical writing. England's conversion, however, was superficial, and was formally reversed by Queen Mary, who succeeded in 1553. Cranmer was imprisoned and subsequently deprived of his see. In 1554 he was paraded at a disputation in Oxford, where his performance was unimpressive, and at the end of 1555, having seen several of his colleagues burned, he submitted. The Queen, however, was determined to execute him anyway, and at the end he renounced his recantation, dying in March 1556 as a protestant martyr. The church which had struggled to build, and for which he died, was restored by Elizabeth.