

THOMAS CARDINAL WOLSEY AND HENRY VIII: A STUDY
OF POWER AND CONFLICT IN TUDOR ENGLAND

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PREFACE

English history has always been of great interest to me. Part of my ancestry comes from England and dates back to feudal times and earlier. The subject of Thomas Cardinal Wolsey intrigued me for many reasons. First, a man who held so much power in his hands was someone that I had to learn more about. Secondly, Wolsey lived during one of my favorite periods of English history; the Tudor period. Last and most important was that one of my ancestors in England was an Archbishop of York which was a post held by Wolsey. Thus, I could not pass up an opportunity to study about a man of such magnitude.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. H. E. Landry for all his encouragement and patience throughout my efforts. Dr. Belfiglio and Dr. Yarborough also deserve a vote of gratitude for their constructive advice on my paper.

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INTRODUCTION

The history of England has always been most intriguing; the Tudor period often appears more fascinating than any other. During the fifteenth century, England was emerging as a world power, one in which feudalism was fading, replaced by the gradual emergence of the English Renaissance. The invention of the printing press helped spread the new ideas and thoughts of Italy to the far corners of the world.

Thomas Wolsey was born into this English society. Destined to rise to the height of power he would fall from it in a spectacular disaster.¹

In that world to which Wolsey belonged there were four elements making England widely different from our time. These four elements were; its arrangement of wealth; its dual control by Church and State; its devotion to Princes; and its position in the international structure: that is, the form in which the various states of Christendom lay and their relations to one another.²

To grasp the elements of these four things is to understand the stage on which the drama of Wolsey's career was played out.

The career of Thomas Cardinal Wolsey is a fascinating story of a Lord High Chancellor of England at a time

¹Hilaire Belloc, Wolsey, (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott Company, 1930), p. 29.

²Ibid., p. 7.

when mistakes resulted in execution. It is also the story of an ambitious churchman and statesman who reached the very pinnacle of church affairs only to be denied his final ambition, his dream of reaching the Papal seat, because of his failure to act decisively either as a churchman or a statesman.

As Henry VIII's prime statesman, Wolsey had to obtain royal consent for all his actions. On the other hand, for Wolsey to achieve his highest ambition in the Church, his acts had to be acceptable to the Catholic Church. This clerical obligation often brought him into conflict with his king.

Thomas Cardinal Wolsey was the chief minister of Henry VIII, King of England; but he was also the foremost churchman in the kingdom as the royal personal representative of the Pope of Rome as well as the Archbishop of York. From this powerful dual position, how could Wolsey so completely fail in both matters of church and state? An examination of Wolsey's life will answer this question. Let us now take a look at the rise, fall, and impact of Thomas Cardinal Wolsey during the reign of Henry VIII.

CHAPTER I

BIRTH AND EARLY YEARS

The circumstances surrounding the birth of Thomas Wolsey were ordinary. His unpromising beginning offers an insight into Wolsey's character and perhaps explains, but not justifies, his actions in his most successful years as Henry VIII's advisor and friend.

To Robert and Joan Wolsey in the year 1471 a son was born. The day of his birth remains uncertain, for there were no parish registers then. Antiquaries who reckon such matters, however, set the month as March, and they believe that St. Thomas of Aquino, whose feast day is celebrated on March 7, may have marked the natal day and given the child his name of Thomas.¹ The year 1471 was a bad year for a child to be born. England was torn apart in a power struggle between the two most powerful noble families in the land, the families of Lancaster and York, in the War of the Roses. To make matters worse, the dreaded Black Death or bubonic plague stalked the countryside, taking a good portion of England's population as its prey. The plague took its toll

¹Charles W. Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, (Boston: Little Brown, 1958), p. 8.

from the nobility and lower classes alike. It was in these surroundings that Wolsey came into the world.

The stock of which Wolsey came was middle class, and what we should call today rather lower middle class, but not unsubstantial.² His father was probably a butcher, certainly also a grazier in cattle, who may have killed his own meat. The Wolsey house was in the parish of St. Nicholas, and Robert Wolsey was a member of this parish. The Wolsey family later left bequests to the town of Ipswich and owned property in two of its parishes, which shows it to have been not without some modest competence.³ It was in the shadow of the church, which was solid and substantial rather than imposing, that Thomas Wolsey lived as a boy.⁴

Not far from the Wolsey house stood the town shambles. Here customs made of iron held the merchants to rigid habits. There was a balcony around the shambles, and the town often used the arena of the shambles as a place for pageants and ceremonies.⁵ In the midst of the pealing of the bells of the fourteen churches of Ipswich and of the bellowing of harried bulls in the town shambles, young Thomas Wolsey played.⁶

²Hilaire Belloc, Wolsey, (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott Company, 1930), p. 109.

³Ibid., p. 109.

⁴Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, p. 22.

⁵Ibid., p. 22.

⁶Ibid.

One strong characteristic among adults has not changed from the pre-Tudor era to now. Robert Wolsey wanted life to be better for his son Thomas than it had been for him. The only means to achieve this goal was to give his son an education. Wolsey attended Magdalen College, Oxford, where he received his Bachelor of Arts degree at the early age of fifteen. Proof of record of study, given to students at Magdalen after three years', was called the Bachelor of Arts.⁷ This did not mean that they had achieved their full University training, but rather that they were beginning it, for they were made Bachelors long before they were grown up. This accounts for the nickname of "Boy Bachelor" bestowed on Wolsey during his youth. The students then passed some four years in the more serious studies proper to the higher learning, and after the full seven years were given the certificates of learning in the Degree of Mastership--they were Masters of Arts.⁸ This left them ready for the priesthood, if they would be clerics, and they could be elected by the corporate body of the college to membership therein. They were henceforward, if so elected, called Fellows of the corporation. And this position came before the canonical age for ordainment to the priesthood, usually in a young man's twenty-fourth year.⁹ Wolsey touched all of

⁷Belloc, Wolsey, p. 110.

⁸Ibid., p. 111.

⁹Ibid.

these bases. In fact, Wolsey was ordained a priest a little earlier than most as he was twenty-two when he took his vows.

Thomas Wolsey never progressed beyond the Master's degree and the somewhat lowly positions of bursar of Magdalen College and master of its school. One wonders why he did not continue the conventional preparation for a public career by studying civil law.¹⁰ When eventually he became a bishop he was almost the only member of the bench without a doctorate.¹¹

Indeed, at this stage of his life, Thomas Wolsey seemed set and destined for the life of a schoolmaster.

The degree of Master of Arts at Oxford disposed him strongly to that career--practically committed him. . . . It was presumed in the very nature of things, and written into the college requirements besides, that a man who learned enough to be a Master would relay his learning to others. . . . Furthermore, the university would not recognize as a Master anyone who had not already actually undertaken the duties of a teacher in the schools.¹²

Great importance was accordingly attached to the occasion on which the instructor began to teach with authority or in technical terms, to his commencement. A teacher who omitted to incept within the year prescribed by his oath was required to pay a heavy fine, and the fine was doubled if he held any

¹⁰G. R. Elton, *Reform and Reformation England, 1509-1558*, (Massachusetts: ~~Harvard University Press~~, 1977), p. 47.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹²*Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies*, p. 50.

lucrative post at the time. His license to teach was also cancelled.

Thus, while Henry Tudor was establishing himself on the throne of England, as Henry VII, Wolsey had earned his Master's degree and was teaching. But Thomas Wolsey was a man with his eye on the future, and he saw no future in teaching. He was intelligent, articulate, and had an amazing capacity for details. He would go far, if he found the right route. The route, however, was chosen for him; he was dismissed for employing college funds for building purposes without bothering to get the necessary authority, and Magdalen College ended his career as bursar of the college. One might mention here that ignoring rules was one of Thomas Wolsey's major character flaws which would cause him much anguish in later years. And so, the route Wolsey took was that of the church and Rome.¹³

The Church in Catholic England offered hope to young men of low birth and high ambition. The church had nothing to do with Wolsey's decision, for both church and churchmen had forfeited God for material possessions.¹⁴ Many reforming preachers, one being John Colet, denounced the church as "foul and deformed."¹⁵ He further accused the magnates of

¹³Roberta Strauss Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, (New York: Crowell-Collier Press, 1970), p. 22.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁵Ibid.

the church of having more interest in vile and earthly things than in reform. But vile and earthly things were precisely what attracted Wolsey. The church could lead to money and power, for high churchmen were among the chief councillors of the king.¹⁶ So, Thomas Wolsey set his sights on the church and once his mind was set on something, nothing could change or interfere with his reaching his desires. This ambition and yearning for position drove him to much hard work until he was noticed by the first of the Tudor lineage, Henry VII of England.

During the first twenty years of Henry VIII's reign the dominating figure in English public life was Thomas Wolsey. His career is typical of Tudor statesmen, though he rose higher than any of the rest of them. He had no pedigree. There is no tracing of his line behind his father and we know little of his father except that he was of Ipswich and a grazier.¹⁷

His course of advancement lay through the church, the most promising avenue for a man of energy, brains and no connections. Henry VII recognized his ability and used him.¹⁸

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Conyers Read, The Tudors, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1936), p. 55.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 55.

CHAPTER II

THE ASCENDANCY OF WOLSEY

In feudal times there were not many opportunities for young men to rise above their stations. The law of primogeniture, or the right of the oldest son to inherit all possessions from his father, was in effect and left any younger sons with the need to find another occupation. Some men decided to teach while others perhaps went into an apprenticeship to learn a trade. Others entered the clergy. The latter course was the path chosen by Wolsey.

The first real appearance of Thomas Wolsey was in 1498 when he was ordained a priest and given his first parish. It was customary at the time for a priest of promise to take the revenues of his parish and tend to temporal matters, while assigning the spiritual duties to a curate.¹ Wolsey was rewarded with more parishes over the next few years from which he pocketed the money. He never saw most of these parishes.²

Wolsey's first major step in his ascent was his assignment, in 1501, as chaplain to Henry Deane, Archbishop of Canterbury, the singlemost important churchman in England.³

¹Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 23.

²Ibid., p. 23.

³Ibid.

By slow stages, he brought himself to the notice of Henry VII who appointed him one of the royal chaplains in 1507, a promotion which most clerical careerists would have expected to gain at an earlier age.⁴

"A royal chaplaincy enabled Wolsey to cast anchor in the port of promotion, compared with which all earlier patronage seemed slight."⁵ The duties of a chaplain were not specifically confined to the chapel royal. Any cleric worth his salt would find himself involved in all kinds of extra-official tasks, for the household of Henry VII, like those of his medieval predecessors, was still of fundamental importance in the government of the realm as a whole and was the normal source from which trained officials could be found for all kinds of administrative duties. Herein lay Thomas Wolsey's opportunities.

Bishop Fox, who held the office of Lord Privy Seal or Chancellor, early recognized the young clergyman's abilities and steered him into government service.⁷ Soon Wolsey was performing various minor services directly for

⁴Elton, Reform and Reformation England, 1509-1558, p. 48.

⁵Neville Williams, The Cardinal and the Secretary, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1975), p. 9.

⁶Ibid., p. 9.

⁷John Van Duyn Southworth, Monarch and Conspirators, The Wives and Woes of Henry VIII, (New York: Crown Publishing Company, 1973), p. 39.

King Henry VII. The activity which particularly brought the young priest to the King's attention was his adroit handling of King Henry's suit for the hand of Margaret of Savoy in 1506. Wolsey created for the King a clever campaign, then adroitly maneuvered his position when King Henry suddenly changed his mind and began grasping, instead, for the hand of Juana the Mad.⁸

Wolsey was prompt in carrying out any orders that the King might give him. It once became his task to go on a mission of great importance. King Henry wanted a trade agreement and peace treaty with Maximilian of the Netherlands. To Henry's complete surprise and satisfaction, Wolsey returned with both within seventy hours after being sent.⁹

It became increasingly apparent that Henry Tudor cared more for a job well done than for a man well born. At Henry VII's court, even the son of a butcher could make his mark.¹⁰

By November 1509 he was King's almoner and as such a member of the Council, for at that time the post was always held by one of the councillors specializing in hearing the pleas of those allegedly too poor or weak to get justice in the ordinary courts. Wolsey, who had no training in law

⁸Ibid., p. 39.

⁹Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 24.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 23.

of any sort, performed these judicial duties with a zest that never left him.¹¹

He now also began to accumulate preferments, but it was the war with France that opened the dazzling doors of opportunity for him. Here his immense capacity for work and his clearheaded talent for organizing details had full play in the management of the King's armies.¹²

It was a glittering prospect for a young man not five years on the throne of England--being given the French crown. Yet it came to nothing. There were all sorts of circumstantial difficulties, and certain very obvious practical obstacles to the realization of the dream. But the principal reason why, in 1514, the story of Henry VIII and English history swung in another direction was because of the personal intervention of a man who had been Henry's almoner during the French campaign. Ambitious, vain, and greedy, but inordinately hard-working and intelligent, this cleric had organized the complex logistics of keeping the English army fed, healthy and disciplined with remarkable skill and efficiency. He had won Henry's affection with a basic, earthy humour and boisterous tastes that contrasted strangely with his administrative competence, and he had been rewarded with the bishopric of the fine double-ringed and turreted town of Tournai. He was within months to become the effective ruler of Henry VIII's England.¹³

During 1513 Wolsey began to outrun his seniors on the Council until even his Master Foxe found his pupil too much for him; early in 1514 he at last achieved promotion to the episcopate (Lincoln), then obtained Tournai, and,

¹¹Elton, Reform and Reformation England, 1509-1558, p. 48.

¹²Ibid., p. 48.

¹³Robert Lacey, The Life and Times of Henry VIII, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 37.

when Cardinal Bainbridge died at Rome exchanged Lincoln for York, the second see in the Kingdom.¹⁴ "Such a rise was possible only to a king's favorite, and from 1513 it is indeed clear that he had seized the coat-tails that mattered."¹⁵

The King conceived a most loving disposition towards him especially as he was most earnest and readiest among all the council to advance the King's mere will and pleasure, without any respect to the case in question.¹⁶

As almoner, Wolsey had the knack of quickly sensing the king's "mere will and pleasure" and moving to accomplish it. Quietly and quickly he catered to the royal comfort, reassuring him that he should not need to spare any time from his pleasure for any business that should necessarily happen in the council. So long as the almoner was there, and had the King's authority and commandment, Wolsey did not doubt but that his efficiency and administrative skill would handle any problem.¹⁷

Wolsey's servant, and his first biographer, admired his skill; "This Almoner climbed so hastily up fortune's wheel that no man was of such estimation with the King as he was, for his wisdom and other witty qualities."¹⁸ The

¹⁴Elton, Reform and Reformation England, 1509-1558, p. 48.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁶George Cavendish, A Life of Wolsey, (London: Folio Press, 1962), p. 39.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 40-41.

whole business of kingship was tedious and painful to Henry, who was still only in his twenties.¹⁹ Wolsey was twenty years older than the young monarch, or old enough to seem fatherly without being so old as to seem forbidding.²⁰ Wolsey rose rapidly not only because he was more capable than the other councillors, but because he understood Henry better. While the others begged the king to spend less time in tourneys and more time in ruling, Wolsey did the opposite.

So fast as the other councillors advised the king to leave his pleasure, and to attend to the affairs of his realm, so busily did the almoner persuade him to the contrary; which delighted him much, and caused him to have the greater affection to the almoner.²¹

Wolsey's dogged devotion enthralled the king. In 1517 influenza or the sweating sickness spread through London killing hundreds of people. Henry moved from palace to palace to avoid the epidemic. He left one man in charge of the government in London during his absence. This man was Thomas Wolsey.²²

One of his aides marveled that Wolsey could write letters from four in the morning until four in the afternoon without once leaving his table.²³

¹⁹Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 45.

²⁰Ibid., p. 24.

²¹Ibid., p. 25.

²²Ibid., p. 40.

²³Ibid., p. 34.

But, if Henry was not eager with the pen, this fact should not be used in evidence against him. No man of consequence--let alone a king--either wrote, or was expected to write, his own letters. However, a king could be expected to pay more attention to routine business than he did.²⁴

"Unlike his father, Henry VIII wanted the glory of being king without the burden. The burden he would leave to men like Thomas Wolsey."²⁵

Wolsey's driving force was ambition. Ambition drove him to try to control the destiny of England and influence the fortunes of Europe. Ambition urged him to enjoy pomp and luxury and to be treated with a worshipful respect akin to that of a king or pope.²⁶ Wolsey was to become England's supreme religious power under the Pope and supreme civil power under the King--thus grasping in his thick hands more combined authority than any man before in the history of his country.²⁷

By 1518 Wolsey was able to write to Rome: "Never has the kingdom been in greater harmony and repose than now; such is the effect of my administration of justice and equity."²⁸ He might even have eventually achieved his

²⁴J. J. Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 45.

²⁵Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 25.

²⁶Marvin H. Albert, The Divorce, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 67.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 67.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 67.

ultimate ambition to become pope, if he had not fallen into the pit dug for him by the determination of Anne Boleyn and the stubbornness of Queen Catherine.²⁹

Wolsey's position was a powerful one, for he was attendant on the king and had ready access to everyone and everything of moment. Three things explain his swift rise to power and his long enjoyment of it. First, he undoubtedly possessed an enormous appetite for hard work, swift judgment, a most acute eye for detail and an overflowing confidence--qualities that had commended him to Henry VII and made his claim to power in the next reign irresistible.

Secondly, he had the right patronage. It was Bishop Fox, above all, who nursed him to prominence, and Warham, who willingly made way for him by retirement. It has sometimes been implied that these two men were thrust aside by the aggressive ambition of Wolsey and more or less forcibly sent home by him to the quiet obscurity of their dioceses. But the truth is that both were anxious to escape from secular affairs and turn to other things.

Finally, Wolsey was bound to the king because he relieved him of work. More over, he and Henry had a good deal in common: both were vigorous, extroverted men, both intelligent, both greedy for the flamboyant and vainglorious;

²⁹Ibid.

indeed, so akin were they that the envious and imaginative could attribute Wolsey's intimacy with the king to witchcraft.

But more than these factors, the one main reason for Wolsey's rise to supremacy was his personal power. The one main attribute Wolsey possessed was his own character. He wanted to get things done: he genuinely believed in improving the condition of England and promoting her outward glory, and he held a conveniently high opinion of her monarch.³⁰

He had all the energy and much of the competence required, though he lacked intellectual foundations, larger beliefs and bureaucratic expertise; simply and enthusiastically, he always ran at whatever things he wanted to do, regardless of the systems, of other people, and of too many realities.³¹

He was a eupeptic man, full of simple cheer, ready wit, and charm; he was good company, and more rarely ill than most people at the time. He liked to be friends all round, finding it extremely difficult to refuse the promise of favor even when he knew that he could not perform it. At the same time he never forgot a slight and paid off all scores, real or imagined.³²

It was because of these qualities that others of importance turned to Wolsey instead of the king. Even those members of Henry's family who were closest to the King now

³⁰Elton, Reform and Reformation England, 1509-1558, p. 48.

³¹Ibid., p. 49.

³²Ibid.

turned to Wolsey when they themselves could not influence Henry. Queen Catherine worried about Henry's safety and health and wrote most of her letters to Wolsey asking him to watch over the King. Henry's older sister Margaret, widow of the Scottish King slain at the Battle of Flodden Field, wrote and told Wolsey that she trusted him most after Henry. Henry's younger sister Mary, fearing Henry's wrath when she hastily married the Duke of Suffolk after the death of Louis XII of France, placed her future in Wolsey's hands.³³ Even the heads of government came to realize that in order to influence England they must influence Wolsey first. And Wolsey was quick to use this trust, in turn, to influence the rest of Europe to England's advantage.³⁴

Like many men in important positions who try to do good for the multitudes, Wolsey was to have many enemies, most notably among the highborn gentlemen who resented his place of prominence above them. The nobility hated him because his influence excluded them from positions of power which they felt should belong to them. The heads of other nations resented the highhanded manner in which he dealt with them. Members of Parliament hated Wolsey for his contemptuous way of issuing orders to them. The people had come to hate him because it was Wolsey who raised money for the King by extortion and heavy taxes.³⁵

³³Albert, The Divorce, p. 70.

³⁴Ibid., p. 72.

³⁵Ibid., p. 97.

Wolsey's rise was of the nature of a personal fight for power and glory. His hatred of the nobility was just as great as theirs for him. "He treated the lay nobles and gentlemen like dirt beneath his feet, thereby helping to prepare the anti-clerical revolution that accompanied his fall."³⁶ Wolsey became proud and arrogant to an intolerable degree. Defferential and subservient to his master, he was careless of all the rest of England besides. He successfully antagonized the nobility by his attacks upon their special liberties or privileges.³⁷

We do know that the man whose most distinguishing mark was that he came from the common people did upon his accession to power surround himself with all the paraphernalia of success and did sever in his daily manner of living all connections with the commonalty and did cushion himself extravagantly against the abrasive cares that made up the life of the average Englishman. He who was a rebel and in revolt against the nobility took on all the manners of the nobility as if eager to establish his worth beyond dispute by the outward station of living.³⁸

However, his enemies had long memories and nurtured them with bitter patience while they awaited their time of vengeance.

They were like a gathering pack of hungry wolves and jackals warily circling a bear. So long as the bear remained strong and healthy they feared to attack him;

³⁶G. M. Trevelyan, Illustrated English Social History, Vol. 1 (New York: David McKay Company, Incorporated, 1942), p. 89.

³⁷Read, The Tudors, p. 57.

³⁸Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, p. 122.

they even paid homage. But all the while they watched for any sign that he was losing his strength.³⁹

When that time came, they would pounce on him with all their might and destroy this man who had preyed upon them.

³⁹Albert, The Divorce, p. 98.

CHAPTER III

PINNACLE OF THE CHURCH

Once an egotistical man has experienced his first position of power, he often reaches out and grasps for more. Thomas Wolsey was such a man. He was typical of the self-made men whom the Tudors chose to serve them.

He rose to power and responsibility because he was able; he was promoted in the Church because in this economical way the Tudors rewarded those who served them faithfully in the state. The Tudors were not afraid of ambition, for men with their way to make are good servants to those who hold the keys of power.¹

When Henry VIII had succeeded his father, Wolsey remained at court as a royal almoner and had soon become an important advisor. "From the very moment of his ascendancy, Wolsey began to press for honors beyond those that the King had the power to bestow."² "His latest bishopric, Tournai, was his third, and there was every prospect of gaining more, each yielding valuable income."³ Still Wolsey was dissatisfied, for William Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury, still outranked him as the highest

¹M. M. Reese, The Tudors and Stuarts, (London: Edward Arnold and Company, 1940), p. 29.

²Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), p. 119.

³Southworth, Monarch and Conspirators: The Wives and Woes of Henry VIII, p. 54.

churchman in the land.⁴ Wolsey soon remedied this situation.

Shortly after he had become Bishop of Lincoln, Wolsey sent Polydore Vergil to Rome. "The ostensible purpose of the trip was to let a man who had been a resident in England for twelve years visit his old home and kiss the feet of the new pope, Leo X."⁵ But the real mission was confidential.

Wolsey had already set in motion the forces which were designed to make a cardinal, not unmindful that the word derives from the Latin word meaning 'hinge,' on which the door of the Church and other important matters turn."⁶

Wolsey now put his plan into action. Vergil was to pay his respects to a Cardinal Hadrian, a man Wolsey had in 1511 recommended for the papacy at a time when to all appearances Julius II might die. However, Julius lived two more years. But Wolsey, through Vergil, was quick to remind Hadrian of the past favor. Thus the subject of having Wolsey made a cardinal was discussed. Hadrian brought the matter to the attention of Leo X who thought it might be an excellent idea knowing how close the King and Wolsey were. After papal approval, Wolsey had to obtain royal consent.⁷

⁴Ibid., p. 54.

⁵Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, p. 119.

⁶Ibid., p. 119.

⁷Ibid., p. 120.

However, becoming a cardinal was not sufficient for Wolsey. An archbishop might be made a cardinal but still not have enough power befitting the right arm of the King.

If Wolsey was to succeed, he would have to be named a papal legate in England. And he could not simply be named a legate either, for Warham by virtue of his rank was already legate natus--by nature. What Wolsey would have to become was a legate a latere--and for life.⁸

This position would make him the Pope's permanent representative in the kingdom of England, invest him with the right to reform the Church, which obviously needed attention in view of the undercurrent of criticism that had been mounting for the past fifty years, and give him the right to make judicial decisions on religious matters without forever referring these matters by tedious correspondence and slow messenger to Rome.⁹

Wolsey did not trust the legateship request to Vergil. Instead, he routed it through Sylvester de Giglis. DeGiglis had written that the matter was under favorable advisement and that, with certain conditions accepted by the Archbishop of York, he might be made a legate a latere--if not for life, at least a legate a latere for successive periods, the matter to be renewed each few years.¹⁰

This was not exactly what Wolsey wanted, but he would accept this scheme for now. First he had to obtain the cardinalship; then he would work on achieving the legate position for life.

⁸Ibid., p. 120.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

One must remember that Wolsey was a servant to a king, and a very unpredictable king at that. Therefore, it was imperative to seek Henry's permission before moving ahead any further with this plan. As stated before, the head of the church in England was normally the archbishop of Canterbury.

Since the incumbent showed some reluctance to make way for Wolsey by dying, King Henry solved the problem by asking the Pope to name Wolsey his papal legate in England, with powers that took precedence over those of Canterbury.¹¹

The royal request was sent to Pope Leo X. This letter of request was an eloquent one stating that Henry did nothing of importance without first consulting with Wolsey.¹²

This letter was a secular request made by a secular power. There was no reference in it to the spiritual qualifications of Wolsey for the high office in store. These were either assumed or ignored. The King wanted his "counselor" honored and supported by the Church.¹³

And if it was true that the King could do nothing of the least importance without Wolsey, it was doubly true that Wolsey could do nothing without both the King and the Pope. His advancement and maintenance under the system of his time depended upon their joint will and approval. With the power vested in him by them both he could do what he chose.¹⁴

¹¹Albert, The Divorce, p. 71.

¹²Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, p. 121.

¹³Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁴Ibid.

The Pope in his deliberations delayed a full year, and if there was any doubt in Wolsey's mind as to whether the King or the Pope was the greater in power to grant his wishes, this year, a very sobering one, must have resolved the doubt.¹⁵ With all the King's approval, he could not win the hat.

The deliberation period was too long and unsettling for the impatient Wolsey. He wanted this office and he wanted it immediately. Wolsey was noted for using force to have his way. Maybe he could bully the Pope, but he must do so diplomatically. He would make the Pope aware that England and Rome were as one.

To A. F. Pollard, the meaning of Wolsey's diplomacy was clear: it entirely hitched England to the Holy See. If Rome sought peace, so too did England; if Rome made war on France, so too did England; if Rome made war on the emperor, so too did England. Anywhere that Leo X or Clement VII sent, England, thanks to Wolsey, was sure to go.¹⁶

Furthermore, England was tied to the papacy not out of any loyalty to a divine institution but because Wolsey was always wanting something from it--now a red hat, now a legacy, now a more fulsome legacy--and even hoped to become pope himself, and above all because his own precious authority as legate a latere was sustained by Rome.¹⁷

Such a policy changed England's foreign policies. "Thus England was cast into the vortex of papal, and hence often

¹⁵Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁶J. J. Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 46.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 47.

merely local Italian politics, without regard for her true interests and in response only to his own devouring ambition."¹⁸

Historians have debated many facets of Wolsey's life and ambitions. His reasoning and scheming to become a legate are no different. There are difficulties in Pollard's thesis. Pollard's view assumes that English foreign policy was wholly Wolsey's and never Henry's, which is not true. "Secondly, one of the striking facts about at least the early years of Wolsey's career is the way in which he persistently failed to show even a modicum of solicitude, indeed, of mere good manners toward Rome."¹⁹

A close look at Wolsey, the priest, reveals that time and again there came complaints from Pope Leo X and Sylvestro Giglis, the English agent at Rome, that Henry and Wolsey were failing miserably in their filial duties. They did not write regularly, as did other princes, it was said, except for their own personal advancement or appointments to English sees; they left Rome uninformed about their policies; urgent letters to them were not answered; they promised money and it never came.²⁰

If Wolsey was so obsessed with Rome, it is strange that he should have been chided for silence so often by an

¹⁸Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

exasperated pope or, for example, begged by Giglis to send a letter once a month, even if he had nothing to say. "If Rome was the key to his career, would he have failed so conspicuously to ingratiate himself with the Curia or to build up the English presence there?"²¹ Moreover, as discussed later, it is questionable whether Wolsey seriously aspired to the papacy, and if he did not, an important part of Pollard's thesis must be discarded. Lastly, there is certainly a coincidence between English and papal policy when they are seen from a distance; at closer range, this similarity often disappears. England and Rome were frequently out of step, sometimes seriously so; and when there was an identity of purpose, the identity was often accidental.

If there was any power stronger than that derived from a Pope, it was the power to influence a Pope and make him do one's bidding.

The year of waiting and maneuvering for the hat, whatever else its effect, fixed his mind more than ever on Rome as the primal center of his authority; and certainly his success in wresting the hat from the obstinate Leo left in his thinking the lingering impression that by proper blandishments and stratagems he could do all things through the Holy Father.²²

²¹Ibid., p. 47.

²²Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, p. 121.

During the deliberation period, Wolsey still had to face problems in England. The fact that Wolsey was involved in a much publicized scandal did not help his cause.

On the early morning of December 4, 1514, the body of a well-to-do merchant-tailor, by the name of Richard Hunne, was found hanging from a beam in the prison of the Bishop of London, a place known as the Lollard's Tower in St. Paul's. The death was announced jointly by Richard FitzJames, Bishop of London, and by his chancellor Dr. Horsey; they stated that Hunne had died by his own hand while being detained in the prison to stand trial for heresy.

The announcement of Hunne's suicide met with no favor or credence among the laity, for the deceased was known as a man who held strong views on the privileges and pretensions of the clergy; who had read the New Testament in English and had referred to priests and bishops as Scribes and Pharisees.²²

Stories began to spread rapidly and to gather flame as they went. It was said that Hunne had refused to give the priest Thomas Dryffeld, who buried his infant son, the child's bearing sheet as a mortuary.²⁴ Under the custom of monasteries the Church claimed the best article belonging to the deceased as a burial fee. Hunne had resisted on the ground

²³Ibid., p. 123.

²⁴Elton, Reform and Reformation England, 1509-1558, p. 52.

that his son, being only a few weeks old, had no property in the bearing-sheet which the parson claimed.²⁵

It was further rumored where men congregated and reviewed the case, which gained daily in common interest, that the priest had sued Hunne for the fee in a spiritual court and that Hunne had countered with a suit in the Court of the King's Bench, charging that the spiritual court in which the priest's suit had been entered was a foreign tribunal and that those who sat in it were guilty of a breach of praemunire.²⁶

The clergy was sensitive and touchy on any charge that hinted an action of praemunire, and it was said bitterly in London that Hunne had been haled into prison for his audacity and arrogance in charging the spiritual court with foreign origins and thus invoking praemunire. Popular rumors repeated that the Bishop of London and his officials had examined Hunne for heresy and imprisoned him on the basis of preliminary evidence and, once he was jailed, had killed him.²⁷

Fuel was added to the fire when the coroner's jury examined Hunne's body and ruled out suicide. They then charged Dr. Horsey and two of his servants with murder and ordered them to stand trial.

The jailer, Charles Joseph, had fled the day after the coroner's jury met. He had first taken sanctuary in Westminster and then escaped to Essex. This action heightened the feeling of guilt.

²⁵Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, p. 124.

²⁶Ibid., p. 124.

²⁷Ibid.

Now came the question as to whether to give Hunne a Christian burial. To give him this privilege would be admitting that he was not a heretic and that he had been unjustly tried. A list of fresh charges were submitted against the deceased. The body was tried in the presence of the mayor and aldermen by an ecclesiastical court, the bishop of London presiding with three other bishops. The man was pronounced a heretic, and his body was handed over to the secular power to be burned at Smithfield, on December 20, to the grief and indignation of the people.

The Church had triumphed again. But the coroner's jury still sifted through evidence. The jailer was brought back. He sought to establish an alibi for himself, saying that he had spent that night in a house of prostitution. In support of his claim he brought two prostitutes with him. But other witnesses claimed they had seen him leave the Tower just before the body was discovered. He then confessed and accused Dr. Horsey, the bishop's chancellor, and Spalding, the bell-ringer, as his accomplices. The three were ordered to stand trial for murder.

It was at this point that Wolsey was consulted. FitzJames was only worried about Dr. Horsey who held some secular powers. It would not do for Dr. Horsey to be tried by a lay court. Even if he was convicted, he would not be hanged. He could claim benefit of clergy and be handed over

to Warham of Canterbury for custody. Benefit of clergy was the name given to the privilege enjoyed by persons able to prove that they were clerics who, if accused of felony in the King's courts, could demand to be handed over for trial and punishment to the bishop of the diocese.²⁸

Parliament met to decide exactly where the Crown's power reached.

The real significance of the Parliament did not for once lie in legislative achievement but in the fact that it provided the opportunity for revealing the precarious position of the Church's liberties when confronted with popular anticlericalism and the power of the Crown.²⁹

Parliament debated the issue of benefit of clergy, an idea vague and ill-defined. The House of Lords was composed mainly of high-ranking church officials, while the House of Commons had mostly laymen. The biggest argument was that the lay people did not have the privilege of benefit of clergy. They could not murder another human being without fear of certain execution. Also the Church could seize anyone at anytime and have him tried and convicted without consent of the Crown.

Besides, what was heresy? There was no concrete definition. The Church could use heresy as an excuse for

²⁸Elton, Reform and Reformation England, 1509-1558, p. 53.

²⁹Ibid., p. 51.

another purpose. Many believed this capriciousness was to blame for the Hunne case.³⁰

If Wolsey had the cardinal's hat, he could decide the matter to the satisfaction of all. He felt that public debate of church powers was in itself dangerous.

It was important that an institution as powerful and permeating as the Church, which owned one-fifth of all the land in England, should regulate questions pertaining to its rights and not have these questions the subject of irritating public discussion among civil authorities. The Church could look after itself. Interference by laymen in church matters must be resisted at all costs.³¹

Not all people, or for that matter, not all clergymen, believed as Wolsey. Some believed that all men were subject to the Crown and should be tried by the same law. One such clergyman was a Friar Standish, whose case had been tried in the Parliament of 1512. Henry himself had sat in as judge of this trial and he limited the right of benefit of clergy. Standish had supported the idea of criminous clerks being tried by secular courts. Henry VIII had supported this idea which was in direct conflict with Wolsey. Now, despite the Parliamentary debates, no concrete decision was ever made in the case of Richard Hunne. But the scandal and controversy made a cardinal's hat appear further away for Wolsey.

³⁰Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, pp. 127-28.

³¹Ibid., p. 126.

Oddly enough, it was Francis I of France and not Henry VIII who created the actual circumstances that made Thomas Wolsey Cardinal. Francis was always making threats about his intentions. Thus, when he stated that he would cross the Alps and invade Italy, no one believed him. Henry and Wolsey did not because they believed he would not want to raise the Tudor displeasure; they were wrong. Francis did cross the Alps, taking the most dangerous route. French troops took a passage over the Cottian Alps leading to the plains of Saluzzo. There was no road and the French lost numerous men, weapons, and horses. But the losses were well worth the advantages; the Swiss defenders of the Pope were caught entirely by surprise.

Now the hated French were in command of large areas of Italy. It was at this time that Leo X acted on the request that Wolsey had so long kept before him, a request he had resisted on moral grounds and against royal pressure. Events had come to his aid, but Wolsey left nothing to the course of events. He warned that he needed the cardinal's hat to plead the pope's cause to Henry. And if Henry forsook the Pope, Leo would be in more trouble than he bargained for. Wolsey also stated that being such close friends with Henry, he had royal consent to accept the hat.³²

³²Ibid., pp. 134-35.

At last Leo X yielded. On September 10, 1515, Wolsey was notified that he had been made a Cardinal. Now, as the only English Cardinal, Wolsey outranked Warham.³³

There had not been a cardinal resident in the realm of England since the death of Morton fifteen years before. Meanwhile the color and pageantry of the court had been enhanced, and opportunities for display were increased a hundredfold. To less fortunate mortals the splendor of the court and nobility was one of the entertainments of the time.³⁴

Government, with all its exactions, was still a pageant, and a fully bedecked cardinal and his train would embellish the pageant and give the people a little more for their tax money in the way of a public show. . . . The arrival of the hat, then, was not to be treated casually. Here was an opportunity for drama. Wolsey sent at once to Rome for a pattern of the exact texture and shade of red of the cloth worn by the Cardinals in the Eternal City.³⁵

Wolsey was not one to overlook a detail.

There was still another reason why the arrival of the hat must be treated with the fullest dignity. The hat formally signified the promotion of this Ipswich fellow in rank above all the nobility of the realm; he was now a prince of the church. It was the position and not the man who

³³Southworth, Monarch and Conspirators: The Wives and Woes of Henry VIII, p. 54.

³⁴Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, p. 135.

³⁵Ibid., p. 135.

filled it that carried the honor. Wolsey did not create the system nor arrange the order of precedence; he simply benefited by it.

He saw that the same man who six years before had been a mere chaplain to the King was now, by virtue of the authoritative position he occupied, only slightly less than the King. Society stood on ceremony and by custom was compelled to acknowledge rank. By the good offices of the Church, the lad from Ipswich had bested the whole nobility.³⁶

The hat and a ring bearing the affection of the reluctant Pope was on its way in the care of Boniface Collis, secretary to Sylvester de Giglis. But Collis underestimated Wolsey and the importance of the hat's arrival.

As he arrived in Dover, the mayor and alderman of London on horseback and the city gilds on foot were turned out to do reverence as the hat was borne through the city on Thursday 15 November. There it reposed on the high altar until the following Sunday. Tapers were set about it so that the greatest duke in the land could bow before it.³⁷

On the Sunday morning after the hat had been placed on the high altar of Westminster Abbey and treated with proper deference by the world and church alike, a procession formed at Wolsey's palace, York Place. Mounted on horseback were knights, barons, bishops, earls, dukes, and archbishops. In due order, all proceeded from York Place to Westminster Abbey. All dismounted and entered the abbey for mass sung by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The ceremony was almost equal to the coronation of Henry VIII.

³⁶Ibid., p. 136.

³⁷Ibid.

The primary guest speaker was John Colet, an English priest. His speech dealt with the idea of Christian humility. He directed his speech to Wolsey saying that he was here to serve God and not himself. This subject was very touchy to Wolsey.

It was noted that at the end of the ceremony no cross of gold to herald his rank was borne before Warham. As Wolsey passed, two great crosses of gold were borne before him by comely priests, one cross signifying that he was Archbishop and the other that he was now Cardinal. These crosses would precede him hereafter wherever he went. None was ever borne again before Warham in the presence of Wolsey. One note about Wolsey's new title might be inserted here. Wolsey had been made a Cardinal, but not later as he desired.

In 1518, Pope Leo X wrote that he wanted to send a legate or representative, to England to discuss a papal plan wherein the princes would agree to a five-year truce during which they would fight the Turks instead of each other. Wolsey let the Pope's letter go unanswered.

Finally the Pope said he was sending Cardinal Lorenzo Campeggio to England as his legate. But Campeggio got no farther than Calais. At this point, Wolsey replied to the Pope that the papal legate would not be permitted to enter England unless Wolsey was made a legate for life. This worked.

Wolsey was named legate for life which made him the pope's permanent representative in England, with the right to decide certain religious matters without consulting Rome. It also gave Wolsey the right to reform the church, which he knew was necessary. What he ignored was the fact that he embodied almost all that was wrong with it.³⁸

The church cared more about worldly matters than spiritual ones, and no one illustrated this better than Cardinal Wolsey. "Priests and monks overlooked their vows of chastity; Wolsey had a mistress who bore him a son and a daughter."³⁹ Churchmen ignored their flocks and instead sought income and honor; Wolsey rarely said mass and rarely or never saw his bishoprics.

Monasteries and churchmen amassed enormous amounts of land and wealth to the detriment of the people, but no one surpassed Wolsey for greed. In addition to what he received from the bishoprics he never visited, he took fees for services to private individuals, as well as pensions and grants from both Francis I and Charles V.⁴⁰

Wolsey urged a simple and holy life upon the church, while he built himself a palace, Hampton Court, that was the largest building erected in England since the time of the Roman conquest. He ordered the monasteries to reject worldly comforts, but they largely ignored him. Wolsey then alienated many people of England by dissolving monasteries in order to found colleges and hospitals. There was opposition

³⁸Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 43.

³⁹Ibid., p. 43.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 43-44.

because those who lived near the monasteries benefited from their charity. In short, the church did not want reform.

To those who were familiar with Wolsey's ambition, it came as no surprise when the Cardinal set his sights on the Papal Seat. He never fully realized the fact that he was not seriously considered for that post.

One good aspect of Wolsey's legateship was that he had retained his interest in education from his school days. He bestowed many gifts on Cambridge and Oxford. He was considered more as a patron of the arts of learning rather than an overbearing cardinal.

"The cardinal was now, virtually, ruler of England, and in 1518, as Papal Legate a latere, he was confirmed as a European prince of the universal Church."⁴¹ "So long as Wolsey and the clerical statesmen, with whom he surrounded the King, remained supreme, the Church was comparatively safe."⁴² Wolsey depended solely on Henry's support; if that support was ever withdrawn, Church and Cardinal would fall together.

⁴¹John Bowle, Henry VIII, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964), p. 77.

⁴²A. F. Pollard, Henry VIII, (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1905), p. 238.

CHAPTER IV

PINNACLE OF THE STATE

Thomas Cardinal Wolsey was now the leading churchman in England. But this office alone was not enough for one as power-hungry as the Cardinal. He wanted to become even closer to the King and eliminate the need for any other advisors. Certainly Wolsey raised England to a position in Europe which she had not occupied since the death of Henry V.¹ Most of this was due to Wolsey's administrative skill. "The evidence also tends to show that he played steadily on the side of the pope and considered it essential to keep England and the papacy in harmony."² But how was Wolsey to persuade Henry in this point of view? The answer was a simple one. He must become the highest ranking official of the state as well as the church to influence the King. This feat would not be difficult as the one counselor Henry listened to was Thomas Wolsey. England, at this time, was dominated by the scarlet figure of the king's great minister.³

¹Read, The Tudors, p. 59.

²Ibid., p. 59.

³Garrett Mattingly, Catherine of Aragon, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1941), p. 191.

Wolsey was as powerful in the state as in the church. In the sixteenth century the King was ruler not only in name but in fact also; there was no room for a Prime Minister. "When, however, the King was not interested in day-to-day administration, the responsibility for this passed to his foremost councillor, the Lord Chancellor and Keeper of the Great Seal."⁴ Archbishop Warham was chancellor until 1515, but in that year, it was said that Wolsey pestered him into resigning and took over the office himself.

Thus, on Christmas Eve, 1515, only two months after receiving his legateship, Thomas Cardinal Wolsey became Henry's chief minister, succeeding Warham as Lord Chancellor of England. This made Wolsey actually the first person ever to have such power over both the church and the state.⁵ Now Wolsey was in a position to dominate all of the affairs of England.

There was something meet and fitting about Thomas Wolsey of Ipswich seated on a sack stuffed with wool. The woolsack was the throne, so to say, of the Lord Chancellor of England, and now the Chancellor was the son of a man of sheep which owed its wealth and daily living to sheep, with sheep outnumbering humans three to one. Dealings in cloth occupied men's thoughts daily. The government concerned itself gravely with every detail of the trade in cloth: the import of foreign-made hats and caps was forbidden; the prices of articles produced at home were fixed; the export

⁴Cavendish, A Life of Wolsey, p. 15.

⁵A. F. Pollard, Wolsey, (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1929), p. 304.

of more expensive kinds of cloth was not to be allowed unless the cloth was fully finished.⁶

The woolsack was a healthy and solid reminder of an ancient fact. It survived ceremonially out of a time when woolsacks had been occupied in Parliament by high dignitaries of the Crown. Now the highest councilor of the Crown still occupied it. With all his glory, and though a Cardinal, the Chancellor of the realm accepted as his symbol a sack stuffed with wool and covered with rich and appropriately red cloth.

It gave him, the emblematic sack, some kinship with the common people and some basis for concern with their daily problems. The King existed above and beyond the commonalty; the Lord Chancellor was of it: an audience for the complaints and aspirations and pleas of the lowborn and the bedraggled. The Chancellor stood between the throne and the people, and the woolsack signified that he was of the people.⁷

Wolsey took his woolsack seriously. It is true that he had little or nothing to do with the actual symbol of his office, for the woolsack was the seat of the Chancellor in Parliament, not outside of it, and Parliament sat but once during the fourteen years he occupied the office.

Wolsey had a mania for dictating every aspect of English life. As Chancellor, he continued the work begun by Henry VII which was to establish a strong central government in England.⁸ His strong rule as Chancellor produced some good results. A turbulent society like that of Tudor

⁷Ibid., p. 143.

⁸Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 41.

England needed firm government if it was not to break up under the strain of sectional interests. England had a single monarch, but it was hardly yet a single state.⁹

Wolsey also kept the accounts of the treasury and insisted that even the king record how his money was spent. Wolsey spied on everyone in the kingdom, including Queen Catherine.¹⁰ The Cardinal also often took matters into his own hands and did things before Henry commanded him to.

Wolsey now controlled all three branches of government; executive, legislative, and judicial.¹¹ As a matter of fact, the greater part of the Chancellor's work was judicial.

The new chancellor was not slow to tighten the reigns of policy, but what he regarded as his first duty in the commonwealth had nothing to do with reform of the Church and little with reform of the major troubles of the state.

He announced to the Council in Henry's presence his intention to see the law enforced against the powerful and begged the King to assist, a help which Henry--solemnly expressing himself in favour of justices--said he was very willing to give. Of course, there was truth in Wolsey's charges. Despite Henry VII's achievements, many men still escaped the consequences of illegal actions and violent transgressions because they enjoyed protection and favour, or because the normal processes of the law, with its technicalities and delays, prevented justice from being done.

⁹Cavendish, A Life of Wolsey, p. 16.

¹⁰Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 41.

¹¹Ibid., p. 42.

And Wolsey thought that he had an instrument ready at hand to make the law effective; he proposed to revive Henry VII's practice of using the King's Council in the active general oversight of law and order.¹²

As Wolsey was to discover, he could not hope to secure enforcement of the law, especially of those penal laws that controlled social and economic behavior, outside the courts of common law. Wolsey concentrated on those tribunals in which, as chancellor, he dominated the court and its proceedings. In the first place this meant the Court of Chancery in which he certainly sat frequently, dispensing his personal brand of justice to petitioners: however, little is yet known about his activities there or his influence on the court's development. He took over a going concern and, apart probably from working it harder, did nothing to settle its organization; he inherited a rather vague set of guidelines designed to remedy hardships or deficiencies in the law and to all appearances did nothing to settle the law administered there.¹³

For his lack of legal knowledge, Wolsey liked to substitute his untutored common sense and a genuine desire to help people in their troubles.

In the sixteenth century, disputes arising out of material for lawsuits were often settled, at least temporarily, by private arbitration if both parties agreed to seek some eminent person's opinion; Wolsey

¹²Elton, Reform and Reformation England, 1509-1558, p. 58.

¹³Ibid., p. 59.

as judge in the Chancery seemed to have regarded his task as that of arbiter supreme, cutting through the inanities of personal and legal problems with a self-confidence born of ignorance.¹⁴

No doubt Wolsey had his successes, but the indications are that he caused as much trouble as he cured, leaving disputes still open and still forced to go to law. The matters brought to the Chancery were often far too technical to be solved by his methods.¹⁵

The Court of Chancery was only part of the Chancellor's work. He also spent four days a week presiding over the royal councillors who sat as a court in the Star Chamber. It was part of his function as Lord Chancellor to serve as a kind of effigy for the King, sparing the King actual contact with the populace and keeping the royal person sacrosanct.¹⁶ Thus, these councillors were concerned above all with the problem of maintaining the King's peace, putting down riots, and making sure that the ordinary law courts functioned impartially and effectively. Events were now to occur to test this court.

The Parliament of 1515 had passed an act to restrain the rise in the cost of labor. The first draft of this act was in the handwriting of Wolsey. Humbler artisans and traders were beginning to demand some voice in the organization of trade and in the conditions under which they worked.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁶Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, p. 394.

This condition, if not handled, would lead to riot and civil commotion. In London, there were strikes among the shearmen, the saddlers, the shoemakers and the tailors. There was implicit in all this unrest the threat of government by mobs.

Persons of low degree might by severity of punishment be kept in their places; but there was to be noted also a restlessness and eagerness for betterment to be found among the slightly more privileged classes. These classes showed a tendency to dress and eat beyond their appointed station. The whole question of dress needed to be reviewed; and the Parliament of 1515 passed an Act of Apparel, fathered and furthered by Wolsey, which restricted the burgesses to their appropriate homespun cloth and defined in more precise terms than did the earlier laws what men of the several classes would be permitted to wear.¹⁷

The Act of Apparel went further. It set up regulations in another area, food where persons of low order had begun to ape their betters in grander meals. Those who stood in the ranks of gentlemen were permitted to have three dishes at a meal; lords of Parliament, Lord Mayors, and Knights of the Garter could have six. In the proclamation issued by the Cardinal to make this law known, it was pointed out that, since a cardinal ranked above the nobility and even above princes of the realm, he himself would be entitled to nine

¹⁷Ibid., p. 144.

dishes; and it was further made a matter of record in the same proclamation that the number of dishes allowed would be determined by the rank of the most distinguished guest.¹⁸

It was plain from this act and from the proclamation accompanying it, that Wolsey as Lord Chancellor intended to inspect and oversee every detail of common life of the people of England. Regulation had become an established Tudor principle; it was a part of the heritage of the seventh Henry, who had set the land in order after chaos, that government in its essence meant making people behave according to the wisdom of those charged with the responsibility of governance.

The English were quarrelsome and unruly, wild and restless, addicted to factions and fighting, assertive and independent. They needed a strong ruler, who would hold them firmly in check and exact obedience. Their society was based fully upon the principle of rank and authority by rank. The King stood above all ranks--that much Henry VII had made painfully clear. And as he brought law and order to the profit of one and all, so his successor must continue that government by law and edict lest the land fall again into weakness and decay. And the King being busy with many matters and with ceremonies of the throne, it would devolve of necessity upon his chief aide to see that orders from the throne for the good of all be severely enforced.¹⁹

The offices provided Wolsey with all sorts of authority. Theoretically he had scant connection with the law courts, save that he was entitled to name justices of the peace in the shires and could in this way keep a finger on their conduct. But the personality of Thomas Wolsey overflowed any

¹⁸Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 144-145.

polite bounds of tradition. "The King must be made the center and focus of the whole life of the people, and the royal prerogative must be exalted above royal factions, and even above the law, if necessary."²⁰

Thus, the Court of Star Chamber was created anew by Thomas Wolsey, and it was Wolsey who presided over it. This court had been designed to bring defiant lords to heel and compel them to obey. It kept its purpose and tradition; all Wolsey did was to extend the purpose and amplify its jurisdiction in line with his high intent of disciplining the people.

The Star Chamber had long been a place where the King's Council sat in judgment. It withdrew there to resolve itself into a judicial body.

But its meeting had been only occasional before the time of the seventh Henry. Parliament authorized the king to establish a court of judges chosen from the Privy Council to relieve the Council of its judicial duties. The particular function of these judges was to seek out offenders among the barons, to summon those to trial and to punish those whom they found guilty. In 1495, the activities were extended, with jurisdiction over riots, perjury, and appeals in criminal cases. Later, issues between merchants were also settled.

²⁰Ibid., p. 145.

It was this court which, by virtue of his personal capacity and his great disposition for official meddling, Wolsey converted into an instrument that brought him in touch with every quarter of life of England. He settled every kind of dispute without embarrassment.

This court was to do much useful work in bringing law and order to the land. Wolsey planned to employ the weight of Council authority directly upon disturbers of the peace and oppressors of the weak.²¹ This noble idea produced very little practical effect, however.

His readiness to hear complaints, based on his conviction that he could do good to the disadvantaged, attracted a rapidly swelling mass of suits. Few of these quite fitted his preconceptions. Most were started by people trying to sort their affairs or advance their ambitions, and too many were frivolous--brought to trouble an enemy, obtain an improper advantage, or cross an action at law which was quite rightly going against the complaintant.²²

"Though too many Star Chamber cases ended inconclusively, though too often the chancellor had to repeat ineffective decrees, and though commonsense justice was no better served by Wolsey than by ordinary courts, he did some good."²³ The real effect, however, of Wolsey's peculiar administration

²¹Elton, Reform and Reformation England, 1509-1558, p. 60.

²²Ibid., p. 60.

²³Ibid., p. 61.

lay in the development of Star Chamber's authority over cases of public disorder, contempt of the law, misbehavior in office, and personal violence--in the creation of a tribunal so exalted that even the powerful came to recognize the limits of their selfish power. Wolsey, that is, turned the litigant's purposes to his own intended ends.

Though most of the cases heard dealt with property rights (and in consequence always left open the further resort to the common law where alone such issues could be finally settled), the principle that the court had jurisdiction only if some form of physical or other violence had taken place set the Star Chamber on the way to a reform of the criminal law which the country badly needed.²⁴

Dispensing with the jury, and basing its decisions on the parties' sworn statements and witnesses' sworn dispositions, the court developed methods of establishing the truth and attitudes concerning facts and motives which were to help transform the jury trial of the common law.

Star Chamber could not deal with anything that threatened a man's life or freehold, and that rule was observed, but such limitations (which excluded felonies and treasons from its competence) still left a vast area of importance where forcible dispossession, corruption of legal process by maintenance or perjury, or the exercise of undisguised power reduced the effectiveness of the law.²⁵

Wolsey still, by proclaiming his desire to help, built a large practice increasingly helpful to the law and its greater effectiveness.

²⁴Ibid., p. 61.

²⁵Ibid.

This court was in many ways an ideal instrument for Wolsey. In it he could indulge to the full his love of power and passion for activity. "For he was a man who loved to be engaged in affairs, who was concerned far more with the journey than the destination."²⁶

As always, the Cardinal's lack of interest in the fundamentals left his creation unfinished; to him Star Chamber meant an active extension of his personality, and he failed to give it the shape which would ensure continued activity without him.²⁷ In the awkward procedures of law, the Cardinal had never had any training, either in canon or civil law. Some historians believe that Wolsey was not only ignorant of common law, but also he was very indifferent to it.²⁸ He only believed in despotic authority so long as it served his interests.

Wolsey's training had been in the sturdy principles of philosophy, and to these, as he pontifically sat, he had recourse.

His court was a court of equity and a court of conscience, and his dual role as the King's chief minister and as a high official of the Church vested his decisions with no small measure of sanctity among his countrymen, accustomed as they were to bow before princes and to accept the edicts of those who stood above them.²⁹

²⁶Cavendish, A Life of Wolsey, p. 16.

²⁷Elton, Reform and Reformation England, 1509-1558, p. 60.

²⁸Pollard, Wolsey, p. 304.

²⁹Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, p. 147.

In effect, the court over which Wolsey presided was the court in which the King was judge, and if the King cavalierly delegated his authority and prerogative to the richly robed Cardinal, it did not lessen the honor of appearing before a tribunal in which the sovereign with his inherited wisdom was the supreme symbol of justice among his subjects.³⁰

Wolsey drew a sharp line between law and conscience. He felt that law could not be carried out without conscience. With such a philosophy and with abounding confidence in his own conscience, Wolsey provided a court that was welcome to the hearts of the people. Actions were prompt, delays, in the beginning, were rare. Counsel fees were moderate and, in the case of the poor, dispensed with entirely. Here was a court open to one and all, superior in rank and dignity to all the old-fashioned and rusty courts of common law. And it was a court where justice was rarely denied merely because it might happen to be illegal.

In no other phase of Wolsey's life does one find such a daily, sustained, unrelenting interest as he showed in sitting as judge of other people's problems. He taught that a judicial decision should at all times be vested in a person and not in a procedure or rule of conduct. His court, and those that broke off from it with delegated authority when the docket grew too heavy even for Wolsey to handle, established plainly in men's minds that conscience was king,

³⁰Ibid., p. 147.

that supreme authority lay within a man, or at least within a man of rank.³¹

In this respect the Chancellor never forsook the woolsack. In all his pomp and glory, he remained a local, simple man.

For much of his career as chancellor, it was Wolsey alone who guided English affairs. His quick, strong hands grasped everything because Henry seemed unable, or unwilling, to make the smallest decision himself. "Who shall attend upon the Princess Mary? What shall he reply to the regent of the Netherlands' request to visit England? Shall the law courts be closed because of the outbreak of sweating sickness and so on."³² All these Wolsey had to decide for him, for they were problems which this apparently helpless man, for all his bluster and swagger, could not resolve. "Wolsey must be a servant yet master, creature yet impresario; he must abase himself and yet dominate, playing a part which only a man of superlative energy, self-confidence and loyalty could have endured."³³ Henry could not visualize life without his loyal Wolsey who thought of everything, saw to everything, and did everything.³⁴

³¹Ibid., p. 147.

³²Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 45.

³³Ibid., p. 45.

³⁴Morrison, The Private Life of Henry VIII, p. 56.

The Chancellor of England had various other duties besides royal decision making. He controlled the financial policy of the country, fixing prices and regulating the flow of trade in the general interest. Wolsey was also the chief of the admiralty. Within this office, the Chancellor paid wages to the seamen and investigated ships. It was also his task to supervise the making of coinage.

The post of chancellor was really like a secretary of state of all departments.³⁵ In addition, Wolsey held the dual role of Henry's war minister and chief diplomat. It was in foreign affairs that Wolsey showed his talent for details and outshone all others in the realm.

This period of his domination was the period in which England played its most active part in foreign affairs. With one exception all the wars which Henry VIII fought were organized and directed by the great cardinal.³⁶

He not only drew England very definitely into the concert of the European powers but made a very conspicuous plan for her there. The neighbors he had to deal with were France, Spain, Burgundy and the Empire, with France as the hereditary foe and Burgundy as the hereditary friend. Scotland so far as her relations with England were in question, was little more than an extension of France.³⁷

³⁵Reese, The Tudors and Stuarts, p. 31.

³⁶Read, The Tudors, p. 57.

³⁷Ibid., p. 57.

Burgundy meant for England the Low Countries and the Low Countries meant the best market for English wool and English cloth. As for the Holy Roman Empire, it hardly mattered except that it could generally be counted upon to oppose France. A little later when Spain and Burgundy and the Empire were all gathered together under Charles V, the natural allies of England marched under the same banner.³⁸

It was somewhat strange that Wolsey supported a policy of an alliance with France, in view of England's natural hatred of France since the Hundred Years War. As one might guess, however, his motives were not unselfish. Wolsey wanted to unite Europe under Christianity, an idea already suggested by the Pope. Wolsey saw his chance to make Henry the permanent arbiter of princes. This scheme would make Henry great, but all would know that Wolsey devised this plan.³⁹ There was also a chance that the French might favor Wolsey in the next papal election.

In 1515, Francis I became the new King of France. The news had barely spread worldwide when Francis slipped around the guards of an Alpine pass and made himself master of northern Italy by a crushing victory at Marignano. Unhappy with this invasion, the pope devised a plan of peace which Wolsey altered. This plan of peace was called the

³⁸Ibid., p. 58.

³⁹Mattingly, Catherine of Aragon, p. 193.

Treaty of London. England and France signed this treaty in 1518, which bound them, the other great powers of Europe, and twenty minor ones, to perpetual peace. All disputes would be settled by arbitration, and anyone who broke the peace would be punished by collective action. As peace treaties go, this one fared reasonably well. It lasted thirty months and was considered Wolsey's masterpiece.⁴⁰

Due to the death of Maximilian, the office of Holy Roman Emperor was vacant. There were three candidates, Francis I; Charles, Maximilian's grandson; and Henry VIII. This was an elective position. The accepted method of campaigning was to shower the electors with money. Both Charles and Francis were lavish with bribes, but Henry was uncharacteristically frugal. His agent was instructed to make promises, but pay only after he was chosen. Needless to say, Charles won the title.

Henry, however, held the key to mastery in Europe because his kingdom was more united than the others.⁴¹ Both kings, Charles and Francis, realized Henry's importance as an ally. So, both began to court Henry. It was even said that Wolsey and Queen Catherine fought over whom Henry was to see.

⁴⁰Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 46.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 48.

Because Charles had been the most likely to be elected, Henry and Francis began to lean on each other. The title of emperor was no longer important, but peace between England and France was. Thus, meetings were planned.

"The site chosen for the meeting was at the border between France and what was then the English-owned area of Calais, halfway between the French castle of Ardres and the English castle of Guines."⁴² A record of that time reports that they were there in order to build a palace before the castle gate of Guines. Thousands of laborers were sent by Wolsey.

The workers labored, and the open space selected was transformed into an amazing playground and meeting place for royalty. The meeting hall itself was a gigantic tent of cloth of gold--a beautiful fabric embroidered with golden thread, from which the entire location and meeting took the name of the Field of the Cloth of Gold.⁴³

Preparations for the French-English meeting were interrupted by the arrival of Charles I from Spain, who was worried that Francis and Henry might join forces against him. Wolsey was there to meet him and hastily sent word to Henry. Henry met with Charles and was duly impressed.

⁴²Southworth, Monarch and Conspirators, The Wives and Woes of Henry VIII, p. 55.

⁴³Ibid., p. 56.

The meeting with Francis occurred after Charles had departed. This great spectacle was considered one of Wolsey's finest accomplishments. The meeting, however, was not an overwhelming success. Francis had beaten Henry in a wrestling match and had left the English monarch quite angry. The result was an alliance with Charles instead of Francis and a failure for Wolsey.

"It is customary to say that nothing at all came from the Field of the Cloth of Gold save huge expenditures and useless playing and feasting. This is almost but not quite true."⁴⁴ Although the formal discussions amounted to almost nothing, the meeting was not quite as useless as it seemed. Cardinal Wolsey had brought together on this field the very flower of the French and English nations, to meet in peace and friendship rather than in war. This was something new--something that would set a pattern for other peaceful meetings in the future.

Peace was fragile. Francis and Charles were still concerned about Henry's intentions. The French were fortifying Andres, while the imperialists were urging Henry to violate his promise of amity with France. Wolsey constantly pointed out that his sovereign was bound to Charles V by fraternal love but at the same time held Francis I in special affection.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 60.

France began the hostilities against the imperialists and Charles called on England to come to his aid under the Treaty of London obligations. Henry wanted to fight for Charles.

But, since money was short, Henry allowed Wolsey to go to Calais as mediator, though under cover of this attempt to bring the disputants together round the conference table he was required to negotiate an alliance with Charles V, thus postponing England's entry into war--if peace could not be patched--for as long as possible.⁴⁵

At Calais, the Cardinal worked desperately from early August to late November for an agreement. Then the Cardinal met with Charles at Bruges to sign a treaty of assistance. This was much against Wolsey's own desires.

By the terms of the Anglo-Imperial treaty of 1521 England was to declare war on France the following May only if a peace agreement had not been signed. Wolsey hoped the hostilities would end and, for a time, it looked as though this would happen. Francis was willing to sign an agreement, but Charles was not.

Charles was to make an official visit to England at the end of May, 1522. Wolsey urged Francis to come, but in vain. Upon his arrival, Charles declared his intentions of war and the peace that England had enjoyed for eight years was over.

⁴⁵Williams, The Cardinal and the Secretary, p. 47.

Wolsey was sent to raise money for this war. In order to do this, he would have to summon Parliament. There was nothing else to do or Wolsey would have done it. Parliament heard him in what the Cardinal himself described as a marvelous obstinate silence. Not a word could he extort from them, no matter how he yelled and how shrilly he demanded some reasonable answer. Very humbly, a speaker informed Wolsey that they would not speak in his presence. Discomfited, Wolsey left.

A delegation asked to persuade the King to accept half of the enormous sum requested. "Wolsey replied that he would rather have his tongue plucked out of his head with red-hot pincers than induce the King to do such a thing."⁴⁶ The Parliament took a hundred days to grant Henry a little less than two-thirds of the required sum.

Henry needed more money which endangered the already dwindling Tudor fortune. Wolsey devised laws to extort money, but the people protested and Henry and Wolsey both backed down.

Just when things began to calm down, another incident occurred. In the spring of 1521 the wife of Charles, duke of Bourbon and constable of France, died, whereupon the French king claimed the extensive lands which his wife had held and which he himself quickly entered. By the end

⁴⁶Morrison, The Private Life of Henry VIII, p. 71.

of 1522, the constable had been driven to the edge of attack and asked England for help. Negotiations began between Charles and Henry to back the Bourbon claims.

In June, 1523, a treaty was signed between Henry, Charles, and Bourbon. England was to attack France by the end of August. As long as there was to be a war, Wolsey suggested that Henry march all the way to Paris and claim the French throne. This idea appealed to Henry. Things went well, at first, but later, the bad weather sent Henry's troops homeward. The war never started again.

Wolsey was a very active man as Chancellor of England. He was not only ambitious to succeed publicly, but also privately as well. There were many who believed that Thomas Cardinal Wolsey was the actual ruler of the realm. His mode of living suggested that Wolsey might have had the same thoughts.

He is in very great repute--seven times more so than if he were Pope. He has a very fine palace, where one traverses eight rooms before reaching his audience chamber, and they are all hung with tapestry, which is changed once a week. He always has a side-board of plate worth 25,000 ducats, wherever he may be; and his silver is estimated at 15,000 ducats. In his own chamber, there is always a cupboard with vessels to the amount of 30,000 ducats, this being customary with the English nobility. He is supposed to be very rich indeed, in money, plate, and household stuff. . . .

The archbishopric of York yields him about 14,000 ducats; the bishopric of Bath 8,000. One-third of the fees derived from the great seal are his; the other two are divided between the King and the Chancellor.

The Cardinal's share amounts to about 5,000 ducats. By the new year's gifts, which he receives in like manner as the King, he makes some 15,000 ducats.⁴⁷

The biographer of Wolsey estimated that he was almost as rich as Henry VIII himself.

This style of living might suffice for awhile. But Henry was not one to let others outdo him, including the Cardinal. Wolsey, at this time, was at the pinnacle of glory. It would be a tragedy if ever he were to fall from grace.

⁴⁷A. F. Scott, The Tudor Age, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976), p. 210.

CHAPTER V

CRISIS AT COURT

Thomas Cardinal Wolsey was enjoying life. He held the two most prestigious offices in England next to the King. His salary almost equalled that of Henry. There was no one in the country that Henry Tudor trusted more than his faithful Cardinal.

Just as Wolsey thought all was well, a crisis at court occurred. This crisis was to last for many years and cause Wolsey much anguish. All the while, Wolsey knew that it was his business and his duty to obey his master's voice.

It now became the function of the King's able servant, however, to drop administration and diplomacy and secure the dissolution of a royal marriage. For such a task he had neither talent nor natural bent of interest. He was engaged in a dozen and one enterprises far more entertaining to a man of his abilities. Now he must turn aside from all this and undertake a task which he knew would be enormous and threatened at every turn in the road with unforeseeable brigands of difficulty. As a churchman and as the Pope's representative in England, he would bear the brunt not only of the task but of the responsibility; for an annulment of a marriage, royal or private, was the business of the Church and it would have to be referred to Rome. . . .

The truth of the business is that Wolsey's life had now entered a new and bewildering phase. He was suddenly dealing with intimate personal affairs and not with the vague destiny of peoples. Here was a minister of remarkable competence, a manipulator of kings and emperors and popes, accustomed to high

duties and exalted offices, and with no warning at all called upon to adjust the affairs of the royal bedroom. There was an indignity about it as well as an interruption of his manifest destiny. It was as if a distinguished chef had been asked to mind the baby. And he went about it in the way he might manage a military campaign or bring a treaty to fulfillment. In doing it he put on such a show of outward earnestness that he soon came to be identified with the King's cause and, quite naturally, to be blamed for it because he worked for it.¹

The English people were concerned about their King.

The succession of a new monarch was always a source of insecurity to them not only in their public affairs, but also their private ones. Henry VIII was a very popular leader of the people, but there was now a growing concern that the English throne would fall to a woman if Henry produced no male heir to succeed him.² The only person to follow Henry was his only legitimate child, a daughter, Mary. As Queen Catherine grew older, Henry began to fear the worst. His wife was forty-one years of age and past the age of childbearing.³ She had had sons, but they were either stillborn or lived only a few days. Thus Henry began to consider his future.

The actual date that Henry lost interest in Catherine is unknown. The fact that Henry had mistresses did not surprise or annoy the Queen who was not afraid of losing her

¹Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, p. 334.

²Read, The Tudors, p. 59.

³Mattingly, Catherine of Aragon, p. 236.

position as Henry's wife. So, when a pretty young woman came to court and caught Henry's attention, Catherine was not uneasy in the least. Henry fancied many women. This one was no different.

This new maiden at court was an English woman, Anne Boleyn. She had been sent to France to accompany Henry's beloved sister Mary who was to wed King Louis XII. This marriage did not last long as Louis was an old man. He died a short time after the wedding, and soon afterward the headstrong Mary eloped with Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk. This sudden elopement left the young girl Anne stranded. It was decided that she be returned to the English court and become one of the Queen's ladies. At court, the young Anne Boleyn caught Henry's eye.

However, Henry had a problem in that Lady Anne was betrothed to Harry or Henry Percy, the eldest son of the most powerful noble in England, the Duke of Northumberland. Henry could not have a betrothed woman as his mistress. The solution was easy. He would order the engagement to terminate, but not let Anne know that he was behind it. The question was how could he do this? As the King could not possibly do such a dirty deed, the task must be handled by his most trusted servant, Thomas Cardinal Wolsey.

Wolsey very much disliked this task, but obeyed Henry's order just the same.

Then after long debating and consultation upon the Lord Percy's assurance, and that the Lord Percy should marry with one of the Earl of Shrewsbury's daughters--as he did afterwards, by means whereof the former contract was clearly undone. Mistress Anne Boleyn was greatly offended with this, saying that if it lay ever in her power she would work the Cardinal as much displeasure as he had done her; as she did in deed afterwards.⁴

Now the way was clear for Henry, but Anne Boleyn would not become his mistress. All of Henry's requests were turned down, and Henry was not accustomed to being refused. Her sister Mary and even her stepmother had at one time been Henry's property. Once Henry had tired of them, he married them off. Anne wanted no part of Henry's love games. She would be his wife or nothing. It was Anne's firmness in this decision that prompted Henry to start divorce proceedings against his wife of nearly twenty years.

One must consider that there were many sides to this situation. The principal parties of the divorce were Henry VIII; Catherine of Aragon, his wife; Anne Boleyn; and of course, Thomas Cardinal Wolsey. One can better understand the whole affair upon examination of the motives of all parties concerned.

The major party of the divorce was Henry VIII. The problem was that he wanted to marry Anne Boleyn, but Catherine stood in his way. Therefore, he would divorce Catherine. This presented another problem. Since the Queen was very

⁴Cavendish, A Life of Wolsey, pp. 63-64.

popular with the English people, he must discover a way to achieve his goal and not turn his kingdom against him. Thus, it is interesting to note Henry's reasons in justifying a divorce which seem to be tailored by him to fit his case.

"The reasons for the decision were in part dynastic, but in a large measure personal."⁵ It was the birth of an illegitimate son named Henry by his mistress, Elizabeth Blount, that started Henry thinking of a divorce.⁶ Henry Tudor was so concerned with the prospect of having no legitimate sons that he named Henry Fitzroy the Duke of Richmond, a sentimental title once held by the King in his youth. However, Henry could not simply state that he wanted to divorce Catherine because she could produce no male heirs. And it was true that Catherine was well past the age of bearing children. This reason was secondary to his desire for Anne Boleyn. If only he could find a weapon with which to rid himself of this burden. It is not exactly known who informed Henry of the passages from the Bible, or whether Henry found them himself. The importance of these passages was that they created a doubt in Henry's mind as to the legality of his marriage to Catherine.

Before their marriage, Catherine had been married to Prince Arthur, the oldest son and heir of King Henry VII.

⁵Read, The Tudors, p. 62.

⁶Lacey, The Life and Times of Henry VIII, p. 69.

But Arthur was frail and sickly and died about six weeks after the marriage. Thus the question arose in Henry's mind about the consummation of this first marriage. If it had been consummated, then Henry believed that he had been living in sin with his dead brother's wife. His punishment was that he had no sons. Therefore, he must wed again to make sure that the English throne would seat a king and not fall into the hands of a woman. So, Henry, determined to look good to his subjects, found his weapon with which his campaign was to be fought--namely Leviticus.⁷

"Leviticus was, so to speak, his discovery and he committed himself to it from the start."⁸ The particular passage that Henry found read, "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's nakedness;" and later stated "If a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless."⁹ In Henry's case, this meant no sons. However, these chapters did not directly refer to a dead brother. The claim that the Holy Writ absolutely forbade marriage with a dead brother's wife depended on the consummation of the first, or the dead brother's marriage.¹⁰ This consummation would

⁷Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 195.

⁸Ibid., p. 195.

⁹Leviticus 18, 20: 16, 26.

¹⁰Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 195.

be difficult to prove, but Henry believed all would go his way.

Henry lacked any common sense where Anne Boleyn was concerned.¹¹ "Anne had skillfully refrained from satisfying Henry's passion, and by her elusiveness had awakened in him an adoration such as he had never before experienced."¹² Thus Henry's desire for a legitimate heir and his desire for Anne Boleyn became linked together as one issue that became known as the divorce.

Having convinced himself of his need for a divorce, Henry turned to Wolsey to have it accomplished speedily. Here at last was a matter in which the Cardinal's comprehensive legatine powers would be put to good use, for if Catherine should prove obstinate, and insist on appealing to Rome, Henry was in no doubt that Wolsey's great influence in the curia would procure a satisfactory solution.¹³

Wolsey was faced with all kinds of problems with this divorce business. The Cardinal saw the divorce as a political move and he encouraged it. Wolsey immediately began maneuvering to marry Henry to a French princess Renee, not knowing that Henry had already chosen the woman who would be his new wife.¹⁴

Wolsey wanted this divorce primarily for one reason-- he sought revenge against the Emperor Charles. Wolsey

¹¹Cavendish, A Life of Wolsey, p. 59.

¹²Albert, The Divorce, p. 90.

¹³Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁴Albert, The Divorce, p. 94.

advocated a pro-French alliance, and he would do anything to ruin the Emperor. In return for all those past agreements to support Charles, Wolsey had been promised the Imperial support in the next papal election. Since then, two popes had been named and Wolsey realized that he had been double-crossed by Charles. Besides being angry with Charles, he was afraid of Catherine. The Queen was no different from Charles, her nephew. Both were Spanish and therefore against Wolsey. The Cardinal wanted a pro-French alliance so badly and he would remove any threat that stood in his way. Catherine must go as she was really the only one who could dislodge Wolsey from favor.¹⁵ This threat must be prevented at all costs.

From the start the horrified Catherine jumped to the conclusion that Wolsey was the instigator of this plot against her. "Her husband, she was certain, was as much an innocent victim as herself. Wolsey had instilled doubt into him, confused him, duped him into walking a path which the King himself did not really want to follow."¹⁶ Catherine never believed for one instant that Henry might want to be rid of her.

In his own day, and since, Wolsey was accused of being the architect of the King's Great Matter. It was natural that Catherine of Aragon should regard him as the instigator of her troubles, for she had

¹⁵Mattingly, Catherine of Aragon, p. 243.

¹⁶Albert, The Divorce, p. 96.

gradually seen her own political influence with Henry wither away with the Cardinal's rise and she resented his intrusions.¹⁷

She had come to fear him for his pro-French policy. She blamed Wolsey for Henry Fitzroy's elevation to the dukedom of Richmond. She hated him when Mary, aged nine, was taken from her side to fulfill her duties as Princess of Wales at Ludlow, which had such bitter memories for her. She felt humiliated when Wolsey had her spied upon and refused to allow her to see the Spanish ambassador alone. When she discovered that Henry had turned against her, this, too, she blamed on Wolsey. When Wolsey later fell from power, her sympathizers would heap accusations on him.¹⁸

Anne Boleyn's reasons concerning the divorce were partly personal, but largely political. As noted earlier, Anne wanted her revenge on Wolsey for breaking off her romance with Lord Percy. Anne's father was an ambitious man, and what he could not obtain for himself, he sought to gain in wealth and position through his children. His daughter Mary, once Henry's mistress, had been cast aside but not his Anne. She was a crafty one. If all went well, she would not only become wife to King Henry VIII, but also Queen of England.

There was to be much guessing about the role Wolsey actually played in launching the struggle for the divorce.

¹⁷Williams, The Cardinal and the Secretary, p. 105.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 105.

The guessing game has continued to this day. "Some have claimed that it was Wolsey who first whispered the idea of divorcing Queen Catherine into Henry's ear; hoping to wed Henry to a French princess so that they might bear a son to rein over both France and England."¹⁹ "Others have believed that Wolsey favored the divorce until he discovered that Henry planned to marry Anne Boleyn; by which time matters had progressed too far for him to back out."²⁰ "Still others have said that Wolsey, opposed to the divorce from the start, pleased with Henry to change his mind, and finally went along with it only reluctantly, and thus ineffectually."²¹ "I marvel not a little at thy peevish folly, that thou wouldst tangle and engage thyself with a foolish girl yonder in the court, I mean Anne Boleyn."²² As a matter of fact, once Wolsey discovered that Henry had his mind set to marry Anne, he tried to befriend her.

He might supply Anne Boleyn with delicacies from his table; she found them more delectable than ever from the King's, but he knew there was more tooth than sweetness behind her honeyed blandishments. He might receive a letter from her assuring him she could never repay him for the great pains and troubles he was taking on her behalf except by loving him, next to the King's Grace, above all creatures living, but he knew such words were penned only because he was the means by which she hoped to be made queen.²³

¹⁹Albert, The Divorce, p. 97.

²⁰Ibid., p. 97.

²¹Ibid.

²²Cavendish, A Life of Wolsey, p. 59.

²³Morrison, The Private Life of Henry VIII, p. 84.

It was very likely that Henry himself was the author of his doubts. Wolsey said later that Henry's doubts had sprung partly from his own study and partly from discussions with many theologians. Wolsey tried to persuade Henry to leave his doubts and Anne Boleyn, "but I could never bring to pass to dissuade him therefrom."²⁴ "What Wolsey felt in his heart will never be known. Guessing at it would be pointless. From the moment Henry decided to get rid of Catherine, Wolsey was committed to the divorce. There was no question of choice on his part."²⁵

It had been the Church which had made it possible for Henry to marry his brother's widow. Now Henry wanted the Church to make it possible for him to set aside Catherine of Aragon, and Wolsey, the Pope's special representative in England, should be able to manage it if anyone could. It seemed a simple matter to both the King and the Cardinal. But they were both wrong, and it was the Cardinal who would pay the price of failure.²⁶

If the royal marriage were to be declared null and void, then this must be done by due process of law and by the sentence of unimpeachable authority.²⁷ So, before the

²⁴Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 154.

²⁵Albert, The Divorce, p. 97.

²⁶Lacey, The Life and Times of Henry VIII, p. 67.

²⁷Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 154.

marriage could be terminated, two things must be done. First, Wolsey needed papal consent to try the case and had to obtain a dispensation stating that the marriage was unlawful. This could prove somewhat tricky as a previous Pope, Julius II, had already granted a dispensation years before so that Henry could wed Catherine. It would not do for one pope to go against another. Secondly, Catherine must be told, which would be no easy task.²⁸ This would be Henry's chore and he proved himself to be a trifle cowardly by procrastination.

According to due process, In May 1527, an extraordinary tribunal was called into being to test the validity of the King's union to Catherine.

Acting by virtue of his legatine powers, and with Warham as assessor, Wolsey set up a secret court in his residence at Westminster and cited Henry thither to answer a charge of having for eighteen years unlawfully cohabited with the wife of his deceased brother Arthur.²⁹

The court began its deliberations on May 17. "Conscious perhaps of the gravity, not to say enormity, of the proceedings, Wolsey started by begging the King's consent to this citation."³⁰ Henry consented. Then Wolsey put to the King the facts of his marriage--how he had married Catherine by virtue of the papal dispensation, how he now had grave doubts about the validity of that dispensation and wished

²⁸Mattingly, Catherine of Aragon, p. 243.

²⁹Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 155.

³⁰Ibid., p. 155.

the matter to be put to the legate's judgment, and so on. The King replied briefly that this charge was true and that full evidence would be brought forward later. "He then named his proctor and promoter and retired, leaving it to them to bring to a swift conclusion what--since no one outside, not even Catherine, knew about it--was little short of a conspiracy."³¹ Further sessions were held on May 20, 23, and 31, during which time the King's counsel, Richard Wolman, built up Henry's case against Pope Julius's bull. Then something went wrong. Wolsey lost his nerve. In the last session of this secret court, Wolsey shrank from taking on himself the responsibility of giving an authoritative ruling on so intricate a point of canon law.³²

Two factors account for Wolsey's change of heart. First, he held the conviction that Catherine would insist on appealing to the Pope and the Emperor, her nephew, to support her case, which would transform a domestic event into a key issue in international diplomacy. Second, there came the disturbing news of the sacking of Rome by Charles.³³

The trial Wolsey held was a sham because it was called at the King's request and it was held in secret so that Catherine could not appear and defend her marriage. Because

³¹Ibid., p. 155.

³²Williams, The Cardinal and the Secretary, p. 110.

³³Ibid., p. 110.

the Pope also had to agree to the dispensation, the fact that Clement VII was Charles's prisoner was somewhat a problem. Wolsey had to adjourn the court and try to free the Pope.³⁴

In retrospect, one must remember that in the fifteenth century, and before, popes were not only spiritual leaders of the strong and influential Church in Europe, but also feudal lords with lands, castles, and followers. Most of these lands were in Italy. The Pope was against Charles V because he was becoming too powerful. Charles was distressed that the Pope claimed so much of his territory. Thus war prevailed and Pope Clement was taken prisoner by the Spaniards.³⁵

Now that the Pope was imprisoned, Wolsey must act. As efficient as ever, Wolsey soon drew up the commission by which Clement would delegate his whole authority to him. He wrote this draft in the Pope's name for him to sign. This document proclaimed that Wolsey should be taken as the very voice and mind of the Pope in all that he said or did and promised on release to ratify all that he had done. This would have enabled Wolsey to choose the judges and decide in Henry's divorce case.³⁶

³⁴Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 68.

³⁵Southworth, Monarch and Conspirators, The Wives and Woes of Henry VIII

³⁶Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 156.

However, Wolsey was in for more trouble. He bargained with Francis to help him in freeing Clement. He also discussed again the possibility of Henry marrying a French princess. Upon Wolsey's return from France, Henry agreed with all the arrangements, such as an alliance against Charles. He did not agree with Wolsey's marriage plans. He had plans of his own.

Because of the sack of Rome, Henry sent Wolsey to France. The first part of his mission was to enlist help in freeing the Pope.

If Pope Clement could not be freed, Wolsey was to try to get the other cardinals of Europe to declare that, since the Pope was no longer in a position to give impartial consideration to Henry's problem, it should be turned over to Wolsey for final judgment.³⁷

The European cardinals, however, would not agree to let Wolsey decide in the divorce.

The Cardinal was not to receive power so easily. To make matters worse yet, Pope Clement escaped to a city called Orvieto. He had escaped Charles, but not Henry. Henry's diplomatic mission was there, and it lost no time in laying a series of strong requests before the Pope. There were two papers to be signed.

One would bestow on Cardinal Wolsey the right to hear the evidence concerning King Henry's much-desired divorce and to make a binding decision in the matter. The other--to become effective only if the Cardinal

³⁷Albert, The Divorce, pp. 106-09.

decided that a divorce was justified--would grant King Henry the right to take as his second wife any unmarried woman he wished, even if she was engaged to someone else.³⁸

It is important to note here that all the while Wolsey worked for the divorce, he never thought Henry was serious about Anne Boleyn. Wolsey did come up with ammunition for Henry's war.

Wolsey saw the point, and saw it with that swift precision which was the hallmark of his intelligence. When, in June 1527, Catherine was first informed officially of Henry's scruples about the legitimacy of his marriage to her, she had shown herself to be very stiff and obstinate and, thinking thus to silence all doubt once and for all, had flung back the reply that Arthur had in fact never known her and that Henry's scruple was therefore groundless.³⁹

Wolsey pondered this point. A few days later he was writing to Henry that if Arthur had never known Catherine intimately, there was no affinity or relationship contracted; yet in that she was married in public and was contracted to Arthur verbally, there did arise the fact of public honesty.⁴⁰ In other words, Catherine had publically lied in her marriage vows. The point had been put exactly. Lacking full grasp of canon law, Catherine had unwittingly exposed herself to a terrible threat. "If there had been no copula carnis, as she had asserted, there had been no affinity; but there had

³⁸Southworth, Monarch and Conspirators, The Wives and Woes of Henry VIII, p. 78.

³⁹Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 194.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 194.

been the negligence of public honesty." Not only did the Cardinal grasp this point, he held on to it.⁴¹

Some months later Wolsey rehearsed this argument with some learned men. Though Wolsey himself made the leap, at the time no one else of consequence seems to have followed. Why? The answer could be as follows. Outside promptings may have helped him onwards, but the true initiative for the divorce had come from Henry himself. What is more, it was Henry who found the weapon of Leviticus.⁴² Two other factors must also be considered. One was Henry's own argument and was so simple and sweeping that there was a feeling that he was being guided by the finger of God's right hand. Besides, Henry would not have listened to alternative arguments anyway.

The other factor to be considered was that Wolsey was already suspect.

Hypersensitive, perhaps paranoiacally sensitive, to sluggishness in this matter, the King had smelt dissatisfaction and had begun to work behind Wolsey's back as early as the summer of 1527. Henry was already beginning to assume that any advice from Wolsey was bad advice.⁴³

Henry had sent William Knight to make a direct appeal to Pope Clement. This subterfuge had been done without Wolsey's knowledge and, once learned, made the Cardinal very much afraid of his position.⁴⁴

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., p. 195.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Williams, The Cardinal and the Secretary, p. 112.

In the circumstances, the zeal which Wolsey displayed in the King's cause served to inflame the people all the more against him. For at this stage Catherine still considered the Cardinal the author of the King's conscience and the goad in the proceedings against her.

The Cardinal faced, on the one hand, the wrath of his King if it were suspected for one moment that his efforts were halfhearted or slack, and, on the other hand, the resentment of the countryfolk and housewives if he pushed the King's cause with his accustomed earnestness. Regarded as responsible for the King's action, he would be visited with blame one way or another, however matters went. . . .

Yet the mutterings now had in them a tone not proper to be directed at a dignitary of government; they seemed to be directed at a person and not an office, at a man who strutted about in the flamboyant finery of a prelate and the glaring red of a prince of Rome while corn was dear and money hard to come by and vagabonds stalked the roads and infested the alehouses and poverty became the captain of men's thoughts.⁴⁵

The people were against Wolsey. Catherine detested him. The Pope, who was afraid to anger either Henry or Charles, delayed any kind of decision. And Wolsey would not go against the Pope. Henry, himself, was doubtful of his servant. Thus, when Wolsey first suggested orally to Henry that if he accepted Catherine's statement that her first marriage had not been consummated he had at hand a weapon with which to split his union with her, his remark was taken by a petulant master as evidence of disloyalty.

⁴⁵Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, pp. 383-94.

A few days later Wolsey was off to France, still suspiciously regarded, and for several weeks was out of close contact with the King. By the time he was back, the King's design had finally hardened and Wolsey no longer had the full confidence of the King. At this time when Henry needed him the most, by a supreme irony, he turned away.⁴⁶

The fact that the Cardinal had failed in the secret proceedings was a source of great aggravation to Wolsey and Henry. However, the Cardinal was to be given another chance. A new public trial had been set and another Cardinal was coming from Rome to hear the case. Henry was sure of his victory now.

⁴⁶Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 195.

CHAPTER VI

DISASTER AT BLACKFRIARS

Henry VIII's and Cardinal Wolsey's secret proceedings against Queen Catherine to obtain a divorce had not only come to no conclusion, but was also one of the King's and Cardinal's lowest and shabbiest tricks. This deviousness placed Cardinal Wolsey in a very precarious position. Wolsey was ever conscious of Henry's watchful eyes. Queen Catherine was totally against him. Even the Mistress Anne Boleyn avoided him, which seems odd when one sees that Wolsey was working in her behalf. Wolsey could not speak freely to his King as Anne Boleyn now ruled over Henry. What Wolsey did not know was that Anne held power over Henry not because she was his mistress, but because she was not.¹

So, where was Wolsey to turn in this time of confusion? He decided to turn to Rome. Wolsey felt that the final decision should be made by Pope Clement which would take much of this aggravating divorce business off of his shoulders and place them elsewhere.² Then Wolsey could return to his own affairs.

¹Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 73.

²Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, p. 416.

Persuading the Pope to decide this case was more difficult than Wolsey imagined.

By the end of 1527 England faced a dilemma of her own making. She wanted the war then being fought in Italy between Charles and the League of Cognac [of which France was the leading spirit] to end, but at the same time the most obvious way to persuade Clement to grant Henry the divorce was probably to keep the war alive, join the League and help avenge the wrongs done to the Pope by the Emperor.³

Charles, however, released Clement. Rome was still in an uproar, so Clement and a few cardinals based themselves in Orvieto. Clement now needed a friend, and Henry wanted to be this friend, hoping to obtain his divorce. But the Pope was still afraid of Charles and somewhat sympathetic to the good Queen Catherine.⁴

Wolsey had hoped that the League would force Charles to come to terms. Once more, he hoped that his policy of getting others to do the fighting would bring peace and that England would never need to be more than a potential combatant.⁵ But, unfortunately for all concerned, Charles had not succumbed.

However, Wolsey was not to be outdone. He had worked too long and too hard to give up now. After all, his position might be at stake now. He must try every means he could to achieve Henry's wishes.

³Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 198.

⁴Ibid., p. 198.

⁵Ibid., p. 199.

Wolsey sent a Gregory Casale to retrieve a bull signed by Henry that his marriage was invalid. Casale was to take over the whole affair from William Knight, who had been sent to Rome by Henry without Wolsey's knowledge.

Heavily disguised, he was to smuggle himself into the Pope's presence and deliver to Clement a mixture of threats and blandishments.

Then, turning to fundamentals, he was to demonstrate to the Pope the evident invalidity of Henry's marriage to Catherine. It was not the Levitical argument with its dangerous inuendo against papal jurisdiction which he was to present, nor the argument from public honesty, but the humbler one that the particular bull of Julius II on which the marriage rested was defective.⁶

Once persuaded of this, the Pope was to agree to set up a court in England to settle Henry's case and to issue a decretal, as distinct from a general commission to the judges--delegate, that is, a commission in which the law was stated definitively and the judges empowered merely to examine the facts of the case and then apply that law.⁷

This decretal commission would have declared that any one of the defects alleged in Julius's bull would have been sufficient to invalidate it. It would have commanded the recipient to examine the charges made and, if any was verified, declare the marriage null and separate the parties. Against this decision there could, in theory, be no appeal save on grounds of suspicion of the judges-delegate.⁸

Casale was supplied by Wolsey with this necessary document. It needed only seal and signature. Lest the Pope,

⁶Ibid., p. 204.

⁷Ibid., p. 205.

⁸Ibid.

or indeed the world, should think Wolsey suspect, he (the Pope) was to be asked to send a legate from Rome to try the case alone--Campeggio, for instance, or Farnese, or anyone who was not an Imperialist. Wolsey wrote this request in a second letter to Casale. That he himself might stand down was, he said, Henry's suggestion. It was a revealing one, and it must have stung him.⁹

After the commission was granted, Henry would need a dispensation to marry Anne. A new draft of this order was sent to be signed. Casale was to be content with nothing less than all this and to set to work immediately sparing nothing. To help his efforts, ten thousand ducats were being credited to bankers in Venice and would be sent on to him by his brother.

The scene was therefore set: a papal commission was to declare the first marriage void; a papal dispensation to allow the second. The problem had now been correctly set out. With these letters to Casale, dated 5 and 27 December 1527, the campaign for the divorce really began.¹⁰

Wolsey was sure that Casale would do the deed in a few days, all the more so when the news came of the Pope's release--which would allow free access to the latter for the English agents. Casale, working with Knight, did indeed procure a commission with remarkable speed. But a Cardinal Pucci had cut to ribbons the draft presented to him, despite

⁹Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁰Ibid.

the offer, which he declined, of two thousand ducats. "What was sent off to England was exactly what Wolsey did not want-- not a decretal, but a general commission to examine the case without the right of definitive sentence."¹¹ No statement of law was given and no promise to confirm without appeal was made. Clearly Rome had not begun to yield. Indeed, Rome was evidently surprised and irritated by the fuss surrounding this comparatively trivial affair of Henry's. The obvious procedure, so it seemed to Clement's advisers, was for Wolsey to use his existing legatine authority, or this commission, to try the case in England. Let Henry marry again if Wolsey found for him and only if that second marriage were challenged need the matter be taken to Rome.¹²

Wolsey in 1528 cast aside the dispensation and commission which Clement had granted to Casale and announced a new embassy. Wolsey wanted himself and another cardinal to settle the matter in England. An envoy was sent to Rome to see if this was approved. The embassy of Stephen Gardiner and Edward Fox was to impress on Clement the gravity of their mission, protest Henry's devotion to the Holy See, his many services to it and Anne's excelling qualities.¹³

They were to explain that Wolsey's fate was in Clement's hands and that, if justice was denied, the king might be compelled by the dictates of natural and divine law to cast off an allegiance which in the past he had given so

¹¹Ibid., p. 205.

¹²Ibid., p. 206.

¹³Ibid., p. 207.

generously to the Holy See--words which they may have only been intended to play and to bully with, but which give us a glimpse of how brittle things were and how easily the divorce could get out of hand.¹⁴

Clement took the path of least resistance. He stalled and delayed making decisions as he was afraid of angering Charles. Clement refused to grant a commission allowing a final decision to be made in England. At last on April 13, this commission in which the verdict had to be agreed upon by Rome, was sealed. Clement was warned that it would not satisfy the King. He replied wearily that even this document was a declaration against the Emperor Charles and that he feared punishment for what he had done.¹⁵

Thus three bulls had been sealed: (1) a new dispensation to marry Anne; (2) a general commission to Wolsey, with Warham or any other English bishop as assistant; and (3) sealed, but not dispatched for some time, a general commission to Wolsey and another legate from Rome, empowering them summarily to investigate the validity of Henry's marriage to Catherine and pass sentence upon it.¹⁶ Should they judge it void, Henry and Catherine were to be separated and might contract marriage again. What was more, no appeal would be allowed against the legate's sentence. This last bull was seemingly a decisive document, but in truth, there

¹⁴Ibid., p. 207.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 208.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 208.

were fatal loopholes in it. Rome had not given that statement of law which would make Wolsey's work simple and sure, the vital matter of papal confirmation had not been established and the commissioners' broad powers and immunity to challenge did not protect them against appeal on the grounds of partiality.¹⁷ Henry was delighted with the news of the three bulls. Wolsey was also pleased at first. Then, he and Henry realized that Clement still had not given his final consent.

It had already been decided that Campeggio would be the second legate to sit with Wolsey in the trial. But, to make matters worse, Cardinal Campeggio was delayed by illness and could not leave Rome. Henry's wrath at this further interruption of his divorce plans was not to be curbed. The King wrote to Stephen Gardiner ordering him not to return to England without Campeggio. One could not possibly imagine that things would grow worse still. Another delay came in the form of an epidemic. The dreaded sweating sickness again broke out in London. This disease struck so many that Wolsey was obliged to halt the legal term. The English people stayed home, most of which were too sick to venture out in the streets. It also prevented a number of foreigners from entering England, one of them being Campeggio. Then, the epidemic befell the Court. Anne Boleyn was taken ill. It is interesting to note

¹⁷Ibid., p. 209.

that Henry was so much in love with Anne, that upon hearing that she was ill, he took to his heels in fright believing that he might fall ill if he stayed with "his beloved."

Finally, by August, Campeggio had started from Torquinia to England. He arrived on October 9, in London. Because he was still very ill, it was two weeks after his arrival that he finally saw Henry.

Campeggio came to London for the avowed purpose of joining with Wolsey in examining the validity of Henry's marriage, conducting a divorce trial, and pronouncing judgment. But this last act, the Pope's secretary warned him again and again by mail, was a goal which Campeggio must never reach.

If in satisfying His Majesty the Pope would incur merely personal danger, his love and obligations to the King are so great that he would content him unhesitatingly; but as this involves the certain ruin of the Apostolic See and the Church, owing to recent events, the Pope must beware. If so great an injury be done to the Emperor, all hope is lost of the universal peace, and the Church cannot escape utter ruin, as it is entirely in the power of the Emperor's servants. You will not, therefore, be surprised at my repeating that you are not to proceed to sentence, under any pretext, without express commission from the Pope. Protract the matter as long as possible.¹⁸

Pope Clement had instructed Campeggio to enlist Wolsey's help in persuading King Henry to remain married to Catherine. This Wolsey said he could not and would not do. Even at this late date, Wolsey had not given up on his idea

¹⁸Albert, The Divorce, p. 122.

of a French alliance. Campeggio warned Wolsey that a divorce would result in mortal war with Catherine's nephew. Wolsey denied this. Wolsey was certain that Emperor Charles would not take it so much to heart. With Campeggio's cooperation, the divorce could be conducted with dignity, Catherine treated respectfully, and both she and her husband come out of it honorably. Surely Charles, burdened with so many problems all over Europe, would not choose to burden himself further with a great war merely to avenge an aunt.¹⁹

Campeggio brought out every other argument he could think of, but he could make no dent in Wolsey's decision. "I have no more moved him," Campeggio told the Pope, "than if I had spoken to a rock."²⁰ Campeggio alternated between assuring Wolsey that Catherine might yet be persuaded to give in, and urging him to persuade King Henry that a divorce trial was too dangerous for the peace of Europe.²¹

Campeggio had been sent with a precious document. Tortured with doubt and fear, Clement had yielded the decretal commission. This document was to be in the sole care of Campeggio, to be shown to no one but the King and Wolsey, and not to be used in Court. This document was a gesture only to bolster Wolsey. It left undecided whether the two legates could give final decision or sentence on

¹⁹Ibid., p. 124.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., p. 133.

Henry's marriage. "Clement had promised in writing never to revoke this commission, but this was not quite all that was required; and besides, there was a long delay before this promise, the so-called pollicitation arrived in England."²² However, there was indisputably a decretal commission in Henry's favor available to the legates. Wolsey, therefore, now possessed a public general commission which was thoroughly inadequate, but hoped to profit from a second and sufficient, or nearly sufficient, commission which in theory must remain secret; while Clement had undertaken to honor a document which, in his heart, he intended should never be used.

Wolsey was very concerned at this point. He knew he was finished if Campeggio failed to act. Clement's orders to Campeggio were to try and find some simpler means of solving Henry's problems than a full-scale, public court case. Campeggio toyed with the idea of persuading Catherine to enter a convent. When confronted with this suggestion, Catherine flatly refused. In fact, she refused all terms of an amiable separation.²⁴

More documents were sent back and forth from Rome to England in an attempt to prolong the proceedings. Every

²²Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 213.

²³Ibid., p. 213.

²⁴Mattingly, Catherine of Aragon, p. 272.

document that Clement sent to Wolsey, he sent another to Campeggio changing his mind. Campeggio was to delay the hearings. If the trial was held, it was only to discover the facts of the case, not to make a decision. It was not safe to go to trial with the Pope's indecision. Even Campeggio himself did not want to be involved in this mess.

Admidst all of this indecision and chaos, a second brief appeared on the scene. This was a dispensation for Henry to marry Catherine. Wolsey had been plotting for some time to get his hands on the original bull signed by Pope Julius II which gave Henry permission to marry Catherine in the first place. This document was housed in Spain. Even among all of Wolsey's spies in her apartments, Catherine had managed to send warnings to her nephew that the bull would be destroyed if ever Henry or Wolsey possessed it. Thus a copy was sent. English envoys in Spain first picked up rumors of its existence in early 1528, but they did not discover its contents. A copy was in Catherine's hands probably by April of that year, having been delivered to her by the Spanish Ambassador, Mendoza. She discreetly kept it to herself until, six months later, provoked by the hostility around her, she showed it to Campeggio, and in so doing nearly ruined her husband. This bull threatened to destroy Henry's argument. If the brief stood, the whole complex business of the divorce would come to a standstill and he would have to think and begin again.

The first reaction was to treat or denounce the brief as a forgery. Henry now wanted the original bull which was in the possession of Charles I. And Charles was very reluctant to part with it.

Henry then tried other tactics. He stooped to bullying Catherine. First, he said that there were threats against him and she would be blamed. Secondly, her popularity with the people proved she hated him. Catherine was popular with the English, more so than Henry. This angered Henry and made him jealous. It made him so furious that he ordered her to move to Greenwich Castle where she could no longer make any public appearances.²⁵ Lastly, the Privy Council no longer deemed it safe for her to share his bed, so the Princess Mary would not be allowed to come into her company. The Queen bore and suffered many hurts from Henry, but she was a far wiser opponent than Henry ever realized. She would not budge.

Still more attempts were made by Henry to bully Catherine. A messenger named Thomas Abel was sent with a letter in Catherine's hand (obtained by force) asking that the original papal brief be sent to England. Henry did not count on Abel's loyalty to the Queen. He told Charles not to let the brief out of his sight.

²⁵Albert, The Divorce, p. 132.

Henry had men spending all of their time trying to prove Catherine's document a forgery. Once they had gathered sufficient evidence, they were to present their case to Clement and require that Charles be commanded to send the original to England. Then Clement must grant a decretal commission--another one--to the legates so that they might pass final sentence on the document. If this proved impossible, then Clement must decide the matter himself. The two legates would hand over to him the problem of the brief, provided that he gave a written promise beforehand to find against it. All the necessary documents were provided, which Clement had only to sign. Next the Pope was to remove the nullifying restrictions on the other decretal commissions, the one which Campeggio had brought, so that, as soon as the brief was dealt with, the divorce case could go forward more rapidly.²⁶

Thus Henry had three alternatives: (1) prove the brief false, (2) persuade Catherine to enter a convent, and (3) have two wives--this provision would mean another decretal commission was needed.²⁷

The first would have declared that his first marriage was null and void and make him a bachelor; the second that it was valid but terminated by death--a spiritual death--and make him a widower; the third that it was still valid but now unique, and make him a bigamist.²⁸

²⁶Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 220.

²⁷Ibid., p. 221.

²⁸Ibid., p. 221.

Added to all of this confusion were the diplomatic instructions concerning a universal peace treaty and an Imperial coronation at Avignon. These new plans made the Pope more the center of Henry's world than ever. He was to establish the truce, summon and preside over the peace conference, crown an emperor and, of course the vast intricacy of the divorce plans turned entirely on him.²⁹ It was stunning news, therefore, that reached England in early February 1529 that Pope Clement had died. Henry was distraught. This could ruin everything. But, perhaps there was still hope. If Wolsey could now possibly become the new pope, it could be the solution to all of Henry's problems. An imperialist for a pope would do no good at all. Wolsey realized that his life was now at stake.

A minor reprieve for Wolsey came with the news that Clement was not dead. It was said that his disease fooled all the physicians. His illness had, however, left him very weak and would keep him incapacitated for a while. Along with this shocking news came Clement's refusal to denounce Catherine's brief and his refusal to command Charles to send the original to England.

Campeggio wrote to Rome that there was much disorder in England over the divorce and that Wolsey was caught in the middle. Henry's allies were all defeated by Charles,

²⁹Ibid.

but Henry's mind was elsewhere. Catherine, who was much loved by the English, stood steadfast in her convictions. Anne Boleyn had attached herself to a group of men who wanted power and hoped to see her cut down Wolsey.

The lady who is the cause of this King's misconduct, perceiving that her marriage, which she considered certain, is being put off, begins to suspect that the Cardinal of England is preventing it as much as he can, from fear of losing his power the moment she becomes Queen. This suspicion has been the cause of her forming an alliance with her father, and with the two dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, to try to see whether they can conjointly ruin the Cardinal. . . . The Cardinal is no longer received at Court as graciously as before, and . . . now and then King Henry has uttered angry words respecting him.³⁰

Then letters were written to Henry of defeat. The Pope had sided with Charles. He wanted the case tried in Rome.

On April 23, Henry had decided to wait no longer. The two legates were to proceed with the case acting on the commission they had received months ago. Wolsey even tried to trick the Pope into signing a document promising not to interfere in the legates' work. Wolsey told Campeggio that he already had this document. The truth was that he did not. Stephen Gardiner was to go to Rome and tell Clement that his documents had been damaged by rain and travel and

³⁰Albert, The Divorce, p. 135.

to get him to sign an identical copy. This ploy did not work. The campaign at Rome was over.

Thus, the battle lines were clearly drawn now: Henry, lured by Anne Boleyn, demanded divorce; Catherine, backed by Emperor Charles, was fighting for her marriage; Campeggio, instructed by Pope Clement, was delaying the decision. Wolsey, increasingly alone, was caught in the crossfire.³¹

In the midst of all this, Campeggio finally agreed to bring the divorce to trial at Blackfriars, in June 1529. Campeggio begged Clement to call the case to Rome as he did not want to have to make a decision, while Henry was urgent for the court to begin work.

On 29 May license was issued under the great seal for the two legates to proceed. But at that very moment a letter was on its way from Rome bidding Campeggio to exploit every tactic of delay until Clement should have the courage to revoke the cause.³²

The next day the legates appeared in the Parliament Chamber at Blackfriars and appointed lawyers to summon Henry and Catherine to appear before them on Friday, June 18.³³

"There are hinges upon which historical revolutions turn. The great drama of the divorce between Henry and Catherine--and between England and the Roman Catholic Church--turned on the hinge of the Blackfriar's trial."³⁴

³¹Ibid., p. 138.

³²Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 224.

³³Ibid., p. 224.

³⁴Albert, The Divorce, p. 139.

To Catherine, the announcement that the trial would be held in England meant that Clement was preparing to give in to Henry. The advisors assigned to her did not dare endanger themselves by opposing their King. So, Catherine secretly planned her strategy.

One must feel somewhat sympathetic toward this lone foreign figure who was Queen of England. In looking back at her early years with the Tudors, she had been treated with far less respect than she had been due. Catherine was the last of five children born to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. She was used by her parents as were the rest of her brothers and sisters as a marriage pawn to strengthen the family ties throughout Europe. Thus Catherine became betrothed to Prince Arthur of Wales when she was three and Arthur was two. She had traveled alone to the English coast and had been kept waiting for two weeks before she was finally granted an audience with Henry VII. Nevertheless, upon her arrival in London, she had been greeted with cheers and shouts of joy. Catherine was very popular with the people from her first day, and this popularity had never waned.

Her marriage to Arthur had been a short one as he had died only weeks after the ceremony; now all the hopes of England had rested on the shoulders of Prince Henry. However, Henry VII had not been sure whether he wanted to marry Catherine himself or have his second son Henry marry her.

During this period of waiting, Catherine had been kept isolated from court and allowed no visitors. Then came the question of Catherine's dowry. Half had come with her and the other was to come after her marriage. But Arthur had died, and Henry VII had now demanded the rest of her dowry. Ferdinand and Isabella were enraged, but finally sent the money and gold plate. After months of uncertainty, Catherine had been betrothed to Prince Henry because of Henry VII's deathbed request.

Up until the time of the trial at Blackfriars, Catherine had known happiness in England. Now, her position at court was threatened by the trial.

The other principals approached the trial with different feelings. Henry and Anne Boleyn saw their desired goal within grasp. Campeggio regarded the trial as a last chance for a compromise: Henry's determination might weaken before the enormity of his act; or Catherine, seeing that her ruin was inevitable, might yet retreat to the safety of a convent life.³⁵

Cardinal Wolsey approached the trial with the most uncertainty. His power, his career, perhaps his life were at stake. And with his position at its most precarious, Wolsey was also at his most ineffective. Though he was to be one of the two legates at the trial, Campeggio was the presiding legate. It should be mentioned however, that Wolsey had the power as legate not only to try the case,

³⁵Ibid., p. 139.

but he could also decide or rule in Henry's favor if Campeggio would not decide.³⁶

The extraordinary legatine court charged with the task of passing sentence on Henry's marriage opened on June 18 at Blackfriars. Henry appeared by proxy, but to the surprise of all, Catherine came in person, attended by four bishops, to protest boldly against the judges and announce her appeal to Rome.³⁷

The actual trial began on June 21.

The great personages of England crowded into the Chapter House of Blackfriars as spectators. An assembly of English bishops entered, led by Warham, the aged Archbishop of Canterbury, to form the court. Above them upon a dais Wolsey and Campeggio, wearing their scarlet robes, were ceremoniously ushered in to act as judges. King Henry's counselors were grouped on one side of the officers of the court. On the other side were Queen Catherine's--among them John Fisher, the old, devout Bishop of Rochester.³⁸

Catherine made her appearance, taking her seat under a cloth-of-gold canopy to the left of the legates. Only she knew what she intended to do that day. Only she knew what it cost her nerves, to maintain her composure and wait for the perfect strategic moment to do it.³⁹

³⁶Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 76.

³⁷Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 224.

³⁸Albert, The Divorce, p. 140.

³⁹Ibid., p. 140.

Henry was the last to arrive. He took his seat far from his wife, to the right of Wolsey and Campeggio.

The court was called to order and the great hall was ordered to silence. The crier commenced the proceedings by calling King Henry into court. Henry declared his presence. Next, the Queen was summoned. Catherine did not reply, but instead she rose from her seat and made her way to where her husband sat. Her moment was here. She looked him in the eyes and knelt before him.

Sir, I beseech you for all the loves that have been between us, and for the love of God, let me have justice and right! Take of me some pity and compassion. For I am a poor woman and a stranger born out of your dominion. I have no assured friend, and much less indifferent counsel. I flee to you as to the head of justice within this realm. Alas, Sir, wherein have I offended you?⁴⁰

The legatine court was speechless. Henry was stunned and probably somewhat embarrassed.

Her words continued to strike out at Henry and echo around the court.

I take God and all the world to witness that I have been to you a true humble and obedient wife, ever conformable to your will and pleasure, that never said or did anything of the contrary thereof, being always well pleased and contented with all things, wherein you had any delight or dalliance. Whether it were in little or much, I never grudged in word or countenance, or showed a visage or spark of discontent. I loved all those whom you loved only for your sake, whether they were my friends or enemies. This twenty years I have been your true wife or more, and by me ye have had divers children--although it has pleased God to call them out of this world, which hath been no default in me.⁴¹

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 141.

⁴¹Ibid.

As the Queen expected, every person in Blackfriars hall was listening. Everyone heard. Now Catherine came to the heart of the matter. "When ye had me at the first, I take God to be my judge, I was a true maid without touch of man. And whether it be true or no, I put it to your conscience."⁴²

Catherine then related how both their fathers, who had arranged the marriage, were wise men. Also, others in the realm seemed wise enough to know Catherine and had pronounced her marriage good. All of this struck at Henry's image.

After Catherine's attack on Henry, she set her anger on the court and told why it was not an impartial one. First, the court could not be impartial because of its fear of disobedience to Henry. Second, the English were really Henry's subjects and not hers.

Now came her final gesture. Catherine rose to her feet, made a low curtsy to her husband, and left him.

At first, everyone, including Henry, thought she was returning to her seat. Instead she went past it and, leaning on the arm of one of her attendants, headed for the door of the hall. She was ordered to return, but Catherine left the court, never to return.⁴³

⁴²Ibid.,

⁴³Ibid., p. 142.

An embarrassed Henry tried to cover up the flush of a bothered conscience. He told his subjects that he had no desire to part with Catherine, but because all of his male heirs by her had died, he now had doubts about the validity of his marriage.

It was up to the bishops assembled to try the validity of this marriage. They had all, on being consulted earlier, signed a document declaring that the marriage was in doubt, and that the doubt must be resolved by trial.

Warham, the Archbishop of Canterbury, wanting to speed up the trial, quickly agreed that all the bishops present in the courtroom had attested to this. However, there was one man who stood up and declared that he was not in agreement with the others. He was John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, and Catherine's lawyer. "No, Sir, not I. You have not my consent thereto."⁴⁴

Now Henry looked at the document and asked if the signature was his. Fisher told Henry and the court that it was not his signature or seal. Warham was cross examined as to how he obtained Fisher's signature. Warham again stated that Fisher had signed the document. Fisher disagreed and replied that he had refused Warham's request to sign the paper as it bothered his conscience. Warham admitted that this was true, but that Fisher had given him permission to

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 143.

sign the document for him. Henry finally halted the argument stating that Fisher was only one man and that one man made no difference in the outcome of the verdict.

Catherine was not abandoned however. Many spoke in her behalf. The sessions of the court moved rapidly now. A sentence was expected soon. The court had examined Juluis's bull and heard about Catherine's first marriage, including all the idle gossip which the dowager duchess of Norfolk brought as evidence that the first marriage had been consummated.

Thus Henry took courage and decided to present his case to Clement in the hope of forcing him to agree to the royal wishes. The legates, therefore, had gone about their business as swiftly and quietly as possible, while Benet, the latest English envoy in Rome, tried to throw dust in Roman eyes. Benet swore that the trial had not begun and would not begin. News came from London differing from Benet's story. Now he promised that no sentence would be passed. But even as Benet and Casale told their lies, letters from Campeggio and his chaplain were arriving in Rome giving full accounts of all that was happening.

Clement was in near despair as Spanish anger mounted. As soon as Clement heard that Catherine had publicly appealed against the court and had been declared contumacious by the legates, the King's cause was really lost.

Each day brought more news from England which gave extra force to Imperial pressure. On 13 July Clement succumbed and agreed to halt the legatine court. After a further forty-eight hours of hesitation, the documents of revocation were drawn up. The most for which Benet could now hope was either that its despatch might be delayed or that only a single copy would be sent to England, where Wolsey might intercept it. But on 23 July one copy of the revocation was published in Rome, two went to Flanders and several others were handed to the emperor's agent, to be sent to Catherine, and he despatched them, for safety's sake, by six different ways. All proceedings in England were thus quashed.⁴⁵

Back at Blackfriars, Henry's case had been going badly.

Perhaps it was Campeggio himself, or Fisher, or the intrinsic weakness of Henry's case, or all three, which caused the trouble. On 27 July Wolsey reported that the proceedings were in a quagmire of minute, technical disputes. What was more, Wolsey was warned that the legal term ended in a week whereupon the court would be prorogued for two months.⁴⁶

Finally, Campeggio announced that on the last day of the month, the legatine court would follow the Roman calendar and adjourn for the summer vacation.

"No one present misunderstood Campeggio's true meaning: the trial was over; there would be no sentence. The case would be revoked to Rome, where Pope Clement would eventually decide it."⁴⁷

⁴⁵Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 226.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 227.

⁴⁷Albert, The Divorce, p. 147.

Thus Blackfriars Court ended. In effect, the Pope had ruled in Catherine's favor by moving the case to Rome.⁴⁸

By failing, Henry had predictably brought upon himself the humiliation of being cited to Rome, like any other suppliant, to put his case before the Rota. This was not only an indignity, but also a grave risk; for Henry knew well enough that in Rome he would probably be denied the justice which it had certainly been his wish to deny Catherine in England.⁴⁹

The tables had been turned against him. Henry had suffered a great public defeat. "And since he was a man unused to accepting blame for anything, he looked around for another recipient."⁵⁰ His choice fell on Wolsey.

All blamed Wolsey for the divorce even though Henry had publicly announced that Wolsey had had nothing to do with it. Clement was beginning to blame Wolsey for having involved the Vatican in the divorce just as Catherine blamed Wolsey for instigating the divorce action, and Anne Boleyn blamed him for impeding it.⁵¹ "Would to God," Clement's secretary wrote to Campeggio, "the Cardinal had allowed the matter to take its course."⁵² For all of Cardinal Wolsey's efforts on everyone else's behalf, Wolsey was now left virtually alone.

⁴⁸Mattingly, Catherine of Aragon, p. 287.

⁴⁹Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 228.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 228.

⁵¹Albert, The Divorce, p. 137.

⁵²Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

COLLAPSE ON ALL FRONTS

Henry VIII's divorce trial was now over, or at least in England it was. Cardinal Campeggio had adjourned the court at Blackfriars to coincide with the Roman calendar. The court would not meet again for two months, and when it did, it would meet in Rome. "If the adjournment was a defeat for Henry, it was a disaster for Wolsey. For it was not long before papal messengers arrived summoning the whole proceeding, and Henry himself, to Rome. The threat in Suffolk's courtroom protest became a grim reality."¹ "Now I see that the old said saw is true, that there was never legate nor cardinal that did good in England."² Wolsey had tried and failed.

For some time the Roman Catholic Church had been on shaky ground in England. Wolsey had his suspicions that the Church and its relations with the English people were about to end. These suspicions were well-founded. The hasty conclusion of the Blackfriars trial by Cardinal Campeggio brought

¹Lacey, The Life and Times of Henry VIII, p. 87.

²Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 85.

about not only the ruin of the Church, but also the destruction of papal authority in England.³

The great Cardinal was now no longer held in the King's high esteem. Henry did not turn on Wolsey, he merely turned from him. This predicament worried Wolsey. He suddenly found himself outside the King's circle. It became impossible to see or speak to his monarch.⁴

However, Henry still had one last hope of using him to obtain his divorce. Campeggio was supposed to have brought with him a papal authorization for the decision to be made in England. If it could be found, Wolsey might even now act on that authority.⁵

In the beginning of October, Campeggio prepared to sail away from England. The decretal, if it existed, would sail with him. Henry's agents, as a last attempt, seized and searched all of Campeggio's luggage.

The decretal was not there. Campeggio left England and Wolsey's enemies fell upon him.⁶

Enemies thought that Wolsey was trying to outshine Henry by his splendor at Hampton Court.⁷ Even the King had become somewhat jealous of Wolsey's magnificent home.

There was an occasion when he showed the King and Queen over his palace of Hampton Court, with its two hundred and eighty guest rooms and rich tapestries that were

³Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 216.

⁴Albert, The Divorce, p. 148.

⁵Ibid., p. 148.

⁶Ibid.

⁷John Walden, Henry VIII, (London: Octopus Books Limited, 1973), u.p.

changed every week before he could tire of them. He explained how spring water, recommended by his medical advisers, was brought all the way from Coombe Hill in lead pipes.⁸

His Majesty as he looked round saw that this sumptuous place would take five hundred servants to run it if it took a man. It was a king's residence, not the home of the King's servant, and he was provoked by what he saw into demanding what his Lord Chancellor meant by building for himself so magnificent a palace.⁹

If Wolsey was taken aback, not for a moment did he reveal it. Never at a loss for the eloquent word, he explained at some length he meant it as a gift sufficiently worthy to be offered to His Majesty. With his father's acquisitiveness, Henry was not satisfied until he held the title deeds.¹⁰

Henry did finally acquire Hampton Court, but not as a gift. Wolsey gave up Hampton to try and regain favor with Henry for failing at the Blackfriars trial to obtain an annulment of Henry's marriage to Catherine.¹¹

Thomas Wolsey did indeed fail at Blackfriars. Because the Cardinal held so many positions, when he failed in one field, he also failed in the others.¹² Thus, Wolsey was doomed.

Anne Boleyn was still awaiting her chance to ensnare Wolsey for breaking up her engagement to Lord Percy of

⁸Morrison, The Private Life of Henry VIII, p. 58.

⁹Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Walden, Henry VIII, u.p.

¹²Brett, The Tudor Century 1485-1603, (London: Harrap Publishing Company, 1962), p. 58.

Northumberland. The nobility hated his position in the commonwealth. When all of these factions grouped together, Wolsey had no chance.¹³

King Henry had reached a forked path in his life. Because of Wolsey's failures, all the powers both civil and religious would descend upon the only man in England strong enough to carry them. Henry, the King, who was at last coming to know his own strength, and who was at last willing to throw aside his now threadbare cloak of appealing boyishness and reveal that strength finally assumed his rightful position.¹⁴

As the Cardinal failed at Blackfriars, so was he to fail in many other undertakings. His position as Chancellor of England was very much in danger at this point.

It had been one of Wolsey's duties as Chancellor to oversee the Court of Star Chamber. Because of the number of cases tried in the Star Chamber, the Council could not find time to try all of them. Backlogs piled up rapidly. Here, Wolsey's lack of interest in fundamental administrative reform produced chaos.¹⁵

¹³Southworth, Monarch and Conspirators, The Wives and Woes of Henry VIII, p. 79.

¹⁴Albert, The Divorce, p. 151.

¹⁵Elton, Reform and Reformation England, 1509-1558, p. 61.

Cases were shuffled from one court to another and in some instances were assigned to courts who had no power. At times Wolsey tried to improve the organization of his courts. He appointed other men to run them.¹⁶

His courts lost strength as he tried to send the cases back to the areas in which they had arisen. The council was concerned with what to do about the flood of petitions. Emergency measures were taken and cases were sent to the lesser courts that lacked authority. When Wolsey fell, the courts were in utter confusion.¹⁷

Wolsey was in trouble in his courts as the laws were too vague and his methods in court without Parliament against the nobility was wrong. He believed in enforcing the law without compromise.

Wolsey could have promoted new laws as Chancellor, but he did not. He had spent six years fighting enclosure and learned nothing. The result was more hatred of him by the nobility. It demonstrated the absence of political sensitivity and an unflinching refusal to look reality in the face.¹⁸

This might have improved conditions for the poor, but it did nothing for the labourers. All it did was to further annoy the men with power. In his government of England, Wolsey's activity backed his neglect in undermining the security of the Tudor monarchy, and before very long the fact was brought home to Henry VIII

¹⁶Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 69.

who throughout was careful to do no more than give the cardinal a free hand and listen to his songs of self-praise.¹⁹

The first twenty years of Henry's reign had been dominated by foreign policy. It was to foreign affairs that Wolsey had given most of his time and energy, not merely because of Henry's predilection but also because his own ambition had led him there.²⁰

Wolsey had chosen to keep England in European affairs because he had wanted to be arbiter of Europe and because he had wanted peace and glory. Needless to say, he had won little of either.²¹ He had failed as a peacemaker because Europe would not submit to his designs.

Wolsey had not always agreed with royal policies, but he had done his best to carry them out. Sometimes he had deceived both parties in conferences trying to keep treaties alive.

Wolsey had been overpowered by forces too great for a chancellor of England and papal legate to contain. Though he had secured eight years of peace for England, his elaborate mechanism of collective guarantees of peace and the device of summitry had proved powerless to protect European peace against princes bent on war.²²

Wolsey had always worked on the side of peace, but usually his plans would backfire on him leaving him in a

¹⁹Ibid., p. 69.

²⁰Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 46.

²¹Ibid., p. 50.

²²Ibid., p. 95.

worse position than if he had just left matters alone. He had been sent to Calais to obtain a treaty of peace with France.

The firm alliance Wolsey had brought back from France included a joint declaration against the Emperor. The people in England woke up one day in January to find they were at war with their best customer--Flanders. Bales of cloth deteriorated on London wharves waiting to be shipped abroad. Trade dried up as looms clacked to a standstill. Merchants would not buy wool they could not sell to clothiers of Kent who had lost their markets. Workmen were dismissed, shops were closed. There was a revolt in Norfolk, rising in Wiltshire, the clothiers of Kent were all for seizing Wolsey and turning him adrift in a boat with holes bored in it.²³

"Wolsey failed doubly in the summer of 1529. The papal court was a fiasco and the Cardinal's unpopular pro-French policy collapsed."²⁴

Had the legatine court passed sentence as Henry required, Wolsey might yet have been entirely rehabilitated. Instead, of course, it brought disaster; and by then foreign affairs also had gone appallingly wrong. The vast plans for an international peace conference and a new universal treaty, defeated because neither Charles nor England's allies would behave as the complicated agenda required, had fallen to bits. Rumors had it that the French and the Imperialists had an understanding that would isolate England completely; and talks had already begun at Cambrai.²⁵

Henry refused to believe this conference would take place. Just in case, an embassy was dispatched to France headed by the Duke of Suffolk, to pull the ally out of the peace talks and try to keep the war going. Henry and Wolsey

²³Morrison, The Private Life of Henry VIII, pp. 86-87.

²⁴Feuerlich, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 87.

²⁵Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 232.

were as one here. Both ignored the talks at Cambrai. The French even went so far as to send word to England to say that the talks were not important. Wolsey believed this. During the time when the legatine court was open, Wolsey had little time for anything else. He felt he could take over the talks after the divorce was settled. He also felt that nothing could be done without him.²⁶

By late July 1529 their miscalculation was apparent. The peace talks were going extremely well while Henry was at a standstill at Blackfriars. If these talks were successful, all would be lost for England--divorce wise. Henry decided someone must go to Cambrai. Wolsey could not as he was tied up in court. Tunstall, More, and Hacket were despatched in his stead.²⁷

"In retrospect, on 24 June Wolsey had heard of Clement's final refusal to yield any further on the divorce, and one month later came the disastrous finale of the legatine court."²⁸ However, early in August, Francis and Charles signed the Treaty of Cambrai or the "Ladies Peace" making them allies and leaving England isolated. "Charles also made peace with Pope Clement, and the Pope was even less inclined to offend Charles when he was his ally than when he was his enemy."²⁹

Wolsey had ruled England solely at the King's pleasure, and the King was no longer pleased. He remained the center of affairs for only a few more weeks.

²⁶Ibid., p. 232.

²⁷Ibid., p. 233.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Feuerlich, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 87.

At the end of August, foreign ambassadors were denied access to him by the King; state affairs were being handled by Norfolk and Suffolk and Anne's father, Rochford; a request from Wolsey for a personal interview with the King was answered by Stephen Gardiner, the new secretary, with a rebuff.³⁰

Wolsey was no longer in favor with the King as Chancellor of England.

Letters of Wolsey's ruin were soon sent all over the world, many of them filled with rumors of the day.

Cardinal Wolsey, after so much long continued prosperity, has at last found fortune irate and hostile beyond measure, bringing him to ruin which may be said to exceed his late fame and elevation. He has been forbidden to act as legate, and has lost the chancellorship, the bishopric of Winchester, the abbacy of St. Albans, and all his other revenues . . . in a moment and unexpectedly, he has lost everything. In truth a memorable example for those who believe worldly prosperity to be stable and true happiness.³¹

So read a secret Italian report. A few days later the French ambassador was writing home about Wolsey's ruin.

Wolsey asked for an audience with Henry and brought along Campeggio to see if he could help. They rode to Court on Sunday, September 19. When Campeggio was led immediately to his lodgings within the house, Wolsey followed, thinking that he would go to his accustomed place. He was told that there was no room for him; so a friend lent him a chamber in which to take off his riding clothes. Then he met with Henry in a room full of councillors.

³⁰Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 233.

³¹Albert, The Divorce, p. 149.

Henry led him to a great window and fell into a long discussion with him. Then Wolsey was sent away while Henry went to dine with Anne Boleyn in her apartments. She chided him [Henry] for entertaining a man who had done so much ill to him and the realm.³²

After eating, Henry returned to Wolsey and led him off to his privy chamber for more long discussion, all of which worried his enemies extremely.³³ Since there was still no accommodation for him at court, Cavendish, his gentleman usher, rode to find him lodgings some three miles away at Easton, where Wolsey rode by torchlight after supper.³⁴

Anne Boleyn struck the final blow. She knew Wolsey was due back to talk with Henry, so she persuaded Henry to go riding with her and took a picnic lunch to assure Henry's absence until very late. By the time they had returned, Campeggio had left for Rome; Wolsey too had left. This was Wolsey's final separation from Henry.³⁵

Two days later came the command to hand over the great seal, the symbol of his office as Lord High Chancellor of England. The order was delivered by the two dukes, Suffolk and Norfolk. After an argument which sent his

³²Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 234.

³³Cavendish, A Life of Wolsey, p. 100.

³⁴Ibid., p. 101.

³⁵Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 234.

visitors back to Henry for written commands, Wolsey surrendered the seal of office.³⁶

At the same time Henry seized Wolsey's great mansion at Westminster, then called York Place. This was the second castle confiscated from Wolsey, as Henry had already taken Hampton Court. As further punishment, Wolsey's most prized possessions were taken over. These were his colleges at Cambridge and Oxford. Wolsey was left with virtually nothing and was finally banished to a small palace elsewhere.³⁷

As Wolsey set out for Putney, his new residence, a strange incident occurred.

A messenger from Windsor suddenly appeared from the top of the hill with a message from the King to be of good cheer and to trust a master who had cast him down only to satisfy certain hostile spirits, but still held him in favor. As a token of his true love Henry sent him that ring which was always the privy token between them when the King wanted a special matter taken care of.³⁸

Wolsey was overcome with relief.

Full of radiant joy he gave the messenger his most prized possession, a small gold cross about his neck containing an alleged relic of the true Cross, and sent to Henry a jester he had in his entourage. Then he rode to Esher to await his rehabilitation. . . .

What had happened? Was Henry really going to save him? The truth seems to be that it was not Henry who was Wolsey's fiercest enemy and not he who wanted his complete, bloody destruction.³⁹

³⁶Ibid., p. 235.

³⁷Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 88.

³⁸Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 235.

³⁹Ibid., p. 235.

But Wolsey was not to be restored. Wolsey's enemies quickened their pace in pushing the King onwards. On October 9, Wolsey was accused of violating the Statute of Praemunire. This act, which had been passed in 1353, said that anyone who appealed abroad a case that should be tried in the King's courts was guilty of treason. "Now Wolsey was accused of treason for exercising his functions as papal legate in England, even though he had done everything with the King's approval."⁴⁰ When he was found guilty, the King hesitated again and pardoned him. Final action had been postponed and the cardinal was left in an uneasy limbo between retirement and disgrace.⁴¹

Sir Thomas More replaced Wolsey as Lord High Chancellor. More, having become Chancellor of England, delivered a savage attack on Wolsey to a meeting of Parliament.

More compared the English people to a multitude of sheep, and called King Henry their shepherd.

As for Wolsey: As you see that amongst a great flock of sheep some be rotten and faulty, which the good shepard sendeth away from the good sheep, though the great wether which is of late fallen, as you all know, so craftily, so scabbedly, yea, and so untruly juggled with the King, that all men must guess that he thought in himself that the King would not see or know his fraudulent juggling and attempts. But he was deceived, for His Grace's sight was so quick and penetrable that he saw him--yea, and saw through him . . . and according to his desert he hath had a gentle correction.⁴²

⁴⁰Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 88.

⁴¹Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 235.

⁴²Albert, The Divorce, pp. 149-50.

What was gentle was that Wolsey had been granted his life.

He was alive, but utterly crushed.

Twelve more months of life remained to Wolsey, months of torment, penury, humiliation and penitence, of constant scheming to recover lost power, of frequent moments of exultation when it seemed that his enemies would be scattered and he himself restored to that favor which, he said, he was ready to spend the rest of his life in a hermitage to recover.⁴³

This was precisely what he was to do.

For the first three or four weeks of his banishment to Esher, and until he could borrow stuff from friends, this prince of the Church and his household were without beds, sheets, table cloths, cups and dishes; and Wolsey was so short of cash that he had to beg money from his chaplains in order to pay his servants their wages.⁴⁴

His possessions were all gone. Henry had taken Wolsey's bishopric of Winchester, the abbacy of St. Albans, the school at Ipswich, and Hampton Court. His colleges were in danger of destruction and his palace at Westminster was taken.

Thereafter, and presumably because he was not sated, Henry relented. He sent the Cardinal another ring as a token of favor. He sent him four of his own physicians when Wolsey fell seriously ill at Christmas time. Soon yet another, the third, ring was on its way, one which Wolsey had given him and which was engraved with the King's likeness. Moreover Anne Boleyn was pressed by the King into parting with her tablet of gold hanging at her girdle; and these two gifts were delivered with the most comfortablest words.⁴⁵

At Christmas, Henry sent three or four cartloads of furnishings to Esher and soon afterwards gave permission for

⁴³Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 237.

⁴⁴Cavendish, A Life of Wolsey, p. 104.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 117.

the exile to move to Richmond, a fact not known to Henry's council.⁴⁶

Wolsey was encouraged by all of this attention. For months he had been seeking the aid of Francis and the Emperor and Rome to help him regain his position. Now his enemies were frantic that Wolsey might recapture his influence over Henry, so they persuaded Henry to send Wolsey to his see of York. Even Thomas Cromwell, who was working to alleviate Wolsey's misery, was warned that Wolsey was still too close to court for comfort. He must be moved out of Henry's reach.

On the whole and especially recently, Wolsey has had terrible judgment passed against him for having squandered power that was greedily amassed, for having mishandled, violated, corrupted or neglected most of what was in his charge. But perhaps it might be said in his defence that his critics have not always perceived that, since the bulk of his energy was given to foreign policy, ambitious designs for the domestic life of the country, to which he none the less gave some attention, had perforce to be set aside until the first call on his time had been answered. A reputation is not easy to make with a foreign policy, especially if that policy was a failure, as Wolsey's was; and it is even less easy if that policy is misrepresented.⁴⁷

It should be said that most historians agree that Wolsey had his finest hours dealing in foreign policy.

Wolsey failed miserably as Chancellor but his fall would not be complete unless one makes mention of his failure to reform the Church. Wolsey was primarily a religious man

⁴⁶Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 238.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 46.

and as Archbishop of York was one of the highest ranking Church officials in England. By failing in what he himself considered "his calling", Wolsey perhaps made his greatest error.

For ten years Wolsey was head of the Church in England, possessed of a power over it such as had not been known before. Throughout the greater part of the Middle Ages the bishops had been independent magnates, owing a dual allegiance to Pope and King, but controllable by neither.⁴⁸

Now the Church had a master, and a severe one.

Wolsey interfered in every diocese, appointing his own proteges, summoning men to appear before his courts, searching everywhere for possibilities of profit. With the power he had, Wolsey could have purified the Church and prepared it for the challenge of the Protestant Reformation. But far from purifying it, he epitomized its abuses.⁴⁹

For half a century thoughtful men had been insisting on the need for such reforms and the Lateran Council had at last made a constructive effort. Wolsey did nothing.

It became painfully obvious to those who desperately wanted to see a renewal of the Christian life, with the correction of all the blatant malpractices and injustices apparent in the Church, that the Cardinal was behaving with unpardonable dishonesty. He sought wide powers to enable him to achieve a thorough reform of the English Church, but once these had been accorded him, he had gloried in this unprecedented authority for its own sake and failed to undertake what had been expected of him. His own manner of life flatly contradicted the spirit of reform.⁵⁰

⁴⁸Cavendish, A Life of Wolsey, p. 14.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 14.

⁵⁰Williams, The Cardinal and the Secretary, p. 104.

In pretending to use his legatine powers to rid the Church of abuses, Wolsey weakened the clergy's feelings toward the Pope.⁵¹ "The Cardinal was judged to have broken all the rules at a time when those rules were expected to be tightened."⁵²

The Church needed reform so badly, that when Martin Luther, a German religious reformer, published his book, The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, in which he denied the supremacy of the Pope, criticized the mass, and accepted only three of the seven sacraments, the large numbers of people readily absorbed the ideas. The break with the Church was near at hand.⁵³

It seems for a time that Luther's writings were not taken too seriously. From 1520 onwards, letters from Rome to Cardinal Wolsey on the subject of Lutheran books became ever more insistent. Wolsey had, of course, been inclined against Lutheran influences from the outset, but one could hardly expect a prelate so preoccupied with state affairs to arrive quickly at an appreciation of Luther's true significance, save perhaps as a threat to the kind of established order which he represented almost to the excess.⁵⁴

Rome asked Henry to calm things down. It was not until 1521 that Wolsey was really urgently requested to take

⁵¹Pollard, Wolsey, p. 6.

⁵²Williams, The Cardinal and the Secretary, p. 104.

⁵³Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 53.

⁵⁴Erwin Doernberg, Henry VIII and Luther, (California: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 7.

severe action. "The Cardinal de Medici wrote Wolsey from Rome and requested that a bonfire might be a good solution to rid England of Luther's books which threatened England's religion."⁵⁵ Wolsey ordered the bonfire.

Wolsey ordered all of Luther's books confiscated from Oxford and Cambridge. However, only mild penances were imposed on those people found to be contaminated.⁵⁶

English readers did not so much embrace Luther's writings as explore them in simple curiosity. There was no real religious crisis so far as the people were concerned in England at this time. There was in England however, as in all other countries, a strong resentment against the popes, against the clergy, against certain abuses. But such critical resentment was by no means confined to those countries which eventually separated themselves from obedience to Rome.⁵⁷

The English complaint was more concerned with the power of the papal legates than with the popes, more with fiscal matters and questions of morals, jurisdiction and power in the Church government than with theological, doctrinal problems.⁵⁸

At this time, Wolsey suggested that the King attack the problem in a manner befitting a learned Renaissance prince. This he did. Henry was to write a book to counter

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 8.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 10.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

the Lutheran arguments, preparing The Defense of the Seven Sacraments. This book was the cause of much embarrassment to its author later since it stoutly supported the papacy, attacked schism and heresy, and defended the sacraments, particularly marriage.⁵⁹ This idea was another bad choice for Wolsey.

Wolsey's one mistake was that he did not react sooner. It might be very significant here to mention that none of Wolsey's writings were of a religious or theological nature, except perhaps some written about Henry's divorce.⁶⁰ If they had been, perhaps Rome would have acted more strongly when Wolsey needed assistance.

Now that the Cardinal seemed to be on unsteady ground, other enemies appeared and added their comments to the chorus of criticism. The Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk and Anne's own father, recently elevated by receiving the title of Viscount Rochford, vied in voicing doubts that the Cardinal had ever really cared about the King's interests. They suggested that he had expended his best efforts in building up his own fortune, power, and prestige. There was just enough truth in these accusations to make them extremely damaging.⁶¹

⁵⁹Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 55.

⁶⁰Doernberg, Henry VIII and Luther, p. 14.

⁶¹Southworth, Monarch and Conspirators, The Wives and Woes of Henry VIII, p. 80.

"Wolsey was not abused, but even worse than abuse is neglect when one has been an acknowledged leader. He was no longer invited to court. His advice was no longer sought."⁶²

It was the combination of all of Wolsey's failures and the rumors spread by Anne Boleyn's clique that caused Henry to send Wolsey to York. Actually, the Cardinal should have felt lucky. People who had done much less to offend Henry had lost their lives.

⁶²Ibid., p. 80.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CARDINAL'S FINAL JOURNEY

For the first months of Wolsey's fall, the Cardinal had been allowed to stay at Esher Palace.

Here Thomas Wolsey waited, feeding himself on secret messages from his sovereign to be patient. Others sat where he had sat, filled offices he had filled, handled affairs of state as he would not have handled them. The man praying in Esher for restoration to the King's favor did not realize his day was past, a day that encompassed an epoch. Never again would a cleric wield the power he had wielded; a lawyer now held the Great Seal in place of the priest. Never again would a servant of the Crown, cleric or layman, possess the power he, Thomas Wolsey, had possessed. . . .

Wolsey could not foresee in the shuffling of the cards, as posts were refilled and the insignia of authority changed hands, that there was one there who would become Pope in England with powers no Pope had ever possessed. He was not to know that the King with his boy's face had learned from him the principle of one-man rule, and that the pupil was far to out-distance the master.¹

"At the time of his downfall, Wolsey was fifty-eight years old; he was to live another year hoping in vain to be restored to the King's favor."² Henry encouraged this dream by sending gifts and friendly messages. After a while Wolsey's enemies at court began to worry that Henry longed for his competent minister and might return him to power.

¹Morrison, The Private Life of Henry VIII, p. 101.

²Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 88.

Anne Boleyn and the unforgiving nobility decided to move him so far from court that the King would forget him. Accordingly, it was suggested to Henry that since Wolsey had been Archbishop of York for some fifteen years without ever setting foot in his diocese, it would be fitting to send him there.³

Thomas Cromwell, who was working to alleviate Wolsey's misery, suggested that the Cardinal move to ensure his safety. Thus, Thomas Cardinal Wolsey obeyed and rode to York.⁴

It is interesting to note that Wolsey was a new man upon his arrival at York. It is further interesting to note that contrary to the people of London, Wolsey was well-liked by the people in York.⁵ And perhaps Henry had wanted him to spend his last years in peace. Perhaps he also had thoughts of recalling him some time to the center of power. No matter what the reason, Wolsey was finally in his diocese of York for the first time.

Six months he devoted to his archiepiscopal duties, confirming thousands of children, arranging disputes among neighbors, and winning such hold on the hearts of the people as he had never known in the days of his pride. Crowds in London had flocked to gloat over the sight of the broken man; now crowds in Yorkshire came to implore his blessing.⁶

This picture of the overbearing Wolsey as a gentle little lamb was astonishing but accurate. As a priest ministering to his new flock he began to show the same

³Ibid., p. 89.

⁴Albert, The Divorce, p. 151.

⁵Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, p. 239.

⁶Pollard, Henry VIII, p. 247.

unflagging devotion to the welfare of people who came to him as he had once given to the conduct of high high office.⁷

Behind this new found humility Wolsey began to be emboldened as time went by and no further moves were made against him. Wolsey decided to place himself in the cathedral at York. As Wolsey was one for details, he further decided that a ceremony would be held in his honor. He prepared for his installation at York on November 7, 1530. The ceremony never took place.

This new move was what his enemies had been waiting for. "Norfolk, who feared Wolsey the most, dug deep and found that Wolsey was secretly in contact with the French envoy--and, much worse, with the envoy of Emperor Charles.⁸

There is no doubt but that Wolsey was once again attempting to pull international strings.⁹ Norfolk did not care openly to consider the possibility that Wolsey might be trying merely to regain favor by working to achieve what the King wanted. "He dwelt, instead, on the rumor that Wolsey was acting for Catherine."¹⁰

"Spies or enemies had done their work well. The Pope, it was said under Wolsey's influence, had now officially forbidden Henry to marry the lady, or anyone else,

⁷Albert, The Divorce, p. 151.

⁸Ibid., p. 152.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

while his case was pending."¹¹ There was even talk by the Pope of excommunication from the Church for Henry if he disobeyed.¹²

Henry was furious. This time Wolsey had gone too far. And this time, Wolsey would get no assistance from Rome.¹³

Wolsey was finishing dinner in the midst of his household when the Earl of Northumberland entered with a number of men. This Earl was the same Sir Percy whose romance with Anne Boleyn Wolsey had once so brutally broken.

Harry Percy and a Master Walsh had come to arrest Wolsey, who was very much unaware of this fact. They demanded the keys to Cawood, Wolsey's lodgings, a request that was refused by his servants.

Wolsey met with Northumberland and offered him all he had, but to no avail. Percy then arrested the Cardinal on a charge of high treason. Because Percy refused to show Wolsey the arrest papers, the Cardinal refused to deal with Northumberland. With much dignity, Wolsey surrendered to Walsh. He decided to stand on his own honesty rather than his enemies' lies. He knew his end had come.

¹¹Bowle, Henry VIII, p. 154.

¹²Mattingly, Catherine of Aragon, p. 311.

¹³Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, p. 450.

Upon his surrender, Wolsey had played into Anne's hands. He could not stay out of politics. He had approached Francis I, Charles, and Rome, all of which did no good. Anne Boleyn blamed Wolsey for her lost honor, and nothing short of his arrest could be her revenge.¹⁴

Wolsey also could not understand why all of the nobility were against him, especially the Duke of Suffolk. It had been through Wolsey's intervention on Suffolk's behalf after his marriage to Henry's sister Mary that had restored the fallen duke to Henry's favor. But all of this speculation was useless now.

Henry, himself, believed that Wolsey had been secretly dealing with Rome to prevent his divorce. These rumors were false, but what was important was that the King thought they were true.¹⁵

News of Wolsey's arrest soon spread throughout the diocese. The arrest was very unpopular with the people of Yorkshire.¹⁶ However, the people could do little for Wolsey now.

It was a slow journey to London. Norfolk was so afraid that he wanted Wolsey's fate sealed before his arrival.

¹⁴Bowle, Henry VIII, p. 153.

¹⁵Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 90.

¹⁶John Farrow, The Story of Thomas More, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954), p. 156.

He took Wolsey's physician, Agostino, prisoner. To escape torture, he had to denounce Wolsey, which he did. Norfolk informed the King of Agostino's confession. At this time, the Constable of the Tower of London, Sir William Kingston, was sent out with twenty-four soldiers to bring Wolsey the rest of the way under guard.

Kingston met the Cardinal at Sheffield Park. Wolsey finally became aware of what was taking place. He brushed aside the news that Kingston and his soldiers were merely an honor guard.

Wolsey knew that he was being taken to the Tower; that Norfolk, Suffolk, and the whole group led by Anne Boleyn's family had no intention of allowing him to remain there long as a live prisoner. The Tower would be too close to the King for their comfort. Wolsey's nerve broke completely with the arrival of the Constable. By the time they reached Leicester, he was so weak he could not ride any farther, and he had to be helped to bed. "I am come," he said to the monks of Leicester Abbey. "I am come to leave my bones among you."¹⁷

It was Saturday night--the last Saturday night of November in the troubled year of our Lord 1530. A chill mist from the River Soar crept in over the walls surrounding the Abbey of St. Mary of the Meadows, half a mile northward of the town of Leicester, and nestled around its massive hulk, making it look in the gloom

¹⁷Pollard, Henry VIII, p. 248.

of a winter's evening all the more reassuring and hospitable.

Lying near the center of England, known to dukes and beggars alike as a place of certain hospice on the road that led from the north to London, the Abbey would receive to its bounty tonight one who in his person was at once a prince and a pauper--Thomas Cardinal Wolsey, Archbishop of York, returning to London under the King's guard to stand trial for his life. In the late afternoon a messenger had brought to the Abbot word of the Cardinal's slow progress from Nottingham. Sick with a coldness in his stomach, deterred and weakened by the flux, the Cardinal was said to be scarce able to sit on his mule. He would reach the Abbey grounds near nightfall and enter by the gate that opened off the main traveled road.¹⁸

Wolsey told Cavendish, his manservant, that he never carried so heavy a burden in all his life. "And as soon as he was in his chamber he went at once to bed, very sick. This was upon Saturday at night. And there he continued sicker and sicker."¹⁹

Wolsey was not only physically sick, but mentally exhausted as well. He felt that in all deeds, he had always acted in the King's best interest. It grieved Wolsey that Henry had forsaken him. As the Cardinal grew weaker, he uttered his most famous line, "If I had served God as diligently as I have done the King, He would not have given me over in my gray hairs."²⁰

¹⁸Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, p. 3.

¹⁹Cavendish, A Life of Wolsey, p. 219.

²⁰Feuerlicht, The Life and World of Henry VIII, p. 90.

The great Cardinal knew his end was near. Death would serve as a kind release from the hurt he suffered. As Cavendish sat by Wolsey's bedside throughout the night, Wolsey predicted his final hour. "For by eight of the clock ye shall lose your master. For my time draweth near that I must depart out of this world."²¹ It is interesting to find that at eight o'clock the following morning, Thomas Cardinal Wolsey died, depriving his many enemies of his execution.

And being in the church the corpse was set in Our Lady Chapel, with many tapers of wax burning about the hearse, and divers poor men sitting about the same, holding lighted torches in their hands, who watched about the dead body all night, whilst the canons sang dirge and other devout orisons. And about four of the clock in the morning they sang mass. And that done, and the body interred, Master Kingston, with us, being his servants, were present at his said funeral and offered at his mass. And by the time that all things and all ceremonies that to such a person were decent and convenient were finished, it was about six of the clock in the morning.²²

He died, some said, from sheer terror of being put to death. In France, it was rumored that he had killed himself by swallowing a deadly powder. Another rumor hinted that he had indeed been killed by such a powder, but not knowingly.²³

"Whether his death was caused by suicide, an assassin, or the sickness of fear, one fact remained: Wolsey was gone

²¹Cavendish, A Life of Wolsey, p. 219.

²²Ibid., pp. 228-29.

²³Albert, The Divorce, p. 154.

forever, and could no longer influence what was about to happen."²⁴

Here is the end and fall of pride and arrogance of such men, exalted by fortune to honour and high dignities. For I assure you, in his time of authority and glory he was the haughtiest man in all his proceedings that then lived, having more respect for the worldly honour of his person than he had for his spiritual profession--wherein should be all meekness, humility, and charity, the telling whereof I leave to them that be learned and versed in the divine laws.²⁵

Thus ends the life of Thomas Cardinal Wolsey, the last cleric ever to hold the two highest offices in England.

²⁴Ibid., p. 154.

²⁵Cavendish, A Life of Wolsey, p. 227.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSIONS

Thomas Cardinal Wolsey was gone but his impact on English history was tremendous. He attained the very pinnacle of success in both the Church and the State, having risen high above his station in life. There was to be much speculation after his death about the reasons behind his downfall.

Historian A. F. Pollard surmised that Wolsey's ruin was due to more causes than his failure to get a divorce for the King.

It was at bottom the result of the natural development of Henry's character. Egotism was from the first his most prominent trait; it was inevitably fostered by the extravagant adulation paid to Tudor sovereigns, and was further encouraged by his realization, first of his own mental powers, and then of the extent to which he could force his will upon others. He could never brook a rival in whatever sphere he wished to excel.¹

Wolsey could not read Henry as well as Henry could read Wolsey.

Few would have thought that, under so careless and splendid an exterior--the very ideal of bluff, open-hearted good humour and frankness--there lay a watchful and secret eye, that marked what was going on, without appearing to mark it; kept its own counsel until it

¹A. F. Pollard, Henry VIII, (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1905), p. 239.

was time to strike, and then struck, as suddenly and remorselessly as a beast of prey. It was strange to witness so much subtlety, combined with so much strength.²

As one can see, Henry VIII really did exert his royal powers from the first moment of his succession to the throne. One of Henry's first acts was to execute two men, Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley, for supposedly extorting money from his father. These men were sent to the scaffold.

Popular though the move was, it threw a sinister light over the future. These men were only the first of a series of ministers whom Henry VIII in due time discarded, when it suited his convenience, without any consideration of the distinguished services they had rendered him or the legality or illegality of the methods he used for getting rid of them. Thomas Wolsey, Thomas More, and Thomas Cromwell, as well as two of his queens, went the same way.³

Wolsey had once told a friend that when he had established a firm amity between France and England, extinguished the hatred between the two nations, reformed the laws and customs of England, and settled the succession, he would retire and serve God to the end of his days. According to Mr. Pollard, the Cardinal seemed to have been entirely devoid of that keen perception of the distinction between what was, and what was not, practicable, which was Henry's saving characteristic.⁴ Despite Pollard's conclusion,

²Ibid., p. 241.

³Brett, The Tudor Century 1485-1603, p. 51.

⁴Pollard, Henry VIII, p. 244.

the real greatness and splendor of Henry's reign departed with Wolsey's fall.

Wolsey's policy was, indeed, a brilliant fiasco; with a pre-eminent genius for diplomacy, he thought he could make England, by diplomacy alone, arbiter of Europe. It's position in 1521 was artificial; it had not the means to support a grandeur which was only built on the wealth left by Henry VII and on Wolsey's skill.⁵

England owed her advance in repute to the fact that Wolsey made her the paymaster of Europe. But by 1523, that wealth had failed; Parliament refused to levy more taxes, and Wolsey's pretensions collapsed like a deck of cards. He staved off the ruin of the Church only by thrusting England into the maelstrom of foreign intrigue and futile wars.

Thomas Wolsey was a great prince of the church in the medieval tradition, proud of the dignity it gave him, revelling in its wealth. He saw nothing wrong in this, and, according to his servant and biographer, George Cavendish, many of his accusers were inspired more by jealousy than by reforming zeal.

In an age which judged men by their outward appearances it seemed imperative that the church should outshine in its brilliance the glitter that came from earthly authority. Since the power and the glory belonged to God, they belonged also to His ministers.⁶

For all his faults, there had been something lofty and great about him as a judge, as a patron of education

⁵Ibid., p. 245.

⁶Cavendish, A Life of Wolsey, p. 15.

and the arts, as a builder, and as an international figure. And for all his faults, he deserved more just treatment from his King and historians.

Later generations have been no more generous in their verdicts. Since he stood at the central place in the English Reformation, Wolsey's reputation has been at the mercy of both Catholics and Protestants, and each camp has branded him as the villain.

Those of the old faith have seen him as, at least the promoter, if not the author, of the King's divorce and the architect of the schism, a cardinal who brought down the entire Church with him by provoking a fury of anticlericalism.

The Protestants have continued to see him as the embodiment of the evils of the unreformed Church, worldly, uncaring and with an exclusive priesthood, a proud prelate tied to Rome who, like the Pope, had encroached unwarrantably on the temporal affairs, yet failed to rectify clerical abuse and had disastrously involved England in continental affairs.⁷

Though it is true that Wolsey failed to use his vast legatine authority for any but rather desultory and tentative ecclesiastical reform, and was himself seriously ill-equipped to promote the renewal which the Church in England so manifestly needed, it is not just to accuse him of having left the Church brow-beaten and dispirited or easy prey to the King. The Church was already in that position; Wolsey made it no more vulnerable. But he did compound his guilt by clearly pointing the way to the Royal Supremacy his own

⁷Williams, The Cardinal and the Secretary, p. 141.

union of high spiritual and temporal authority. To claim Wolsey as the author of the schism is about as convincing as charging Wolsey as the author of the divorce. Neither is true. Henry instigated the divorce and the Church was still corrupt after Wolsey's death.

With Wolsey did it lie more than with any other man whether the good or the evil fate should prevail.

More than any other man in that time of conquerors, discoverers and insane ambitions, flaming protests against evil, and evil unchained, this man had it in his power, had he but known his chances, to save our world; because he alone stood for so many years at the helm of a united nation free from foreign menace and with all its resources at his command. There was no other such complete opportunity in Europe.⁸

Needless to say, he failed. The tragedy of Thomas Wolsey's life was his failure. It was a tragedy both general and particular, European and domestic. It was Christendom made shipwreck. His domestic achievements were taken from him, his private desires sank down pitifully into nothing. Wolsey saw the beginning of the Church's ruin. His own glories ended in humiliations, and he lived to see the end of all that he had been.

Wolsey failed from two defects, one of the intellect, the other of the will, according to one English writer.

He failed from a defect of his high intelligence in this: that he had no vision. The thing of the moment absorbed him; he was concerned solely with the events

⁸Belloc, Wolsey, p. 5.

of day to day, in which the statesmen who follow foreign affairs are easily absorbed. . . .

Ambition is the putting of oneself before one's chief task, just as avarice is the putting of money before that task, and sensuality the putting of immediate physical pleasure before that task.⁹

This defect of intelligence was serious; but the defect of the will was fatal. It was the defect of ambition. In so far as a man gives something else the preference to a task he must accomplish, that task will be neglected and his achievement in it will fail.

There are other reasons for Wolsey's failure. His lack of vision made him fall. Lack of vision is a fatal thing to those who govern. It is not lack of judgment. Judgment is a sense of proportion in the elements of a problem, and a good estimate of cause and effect. Vision is much rarer and much more valuable. It is a perception of things distant in time or place.

His lack of vision made him fail in many areas. First, he was duped by Charles and Francis and Pope Clement VII. Second, he could not see into the depths of any mind--especially the mind of a woman. Last, the lack of vision forbade him to grasp the magnitude of the religious upheaval among the Germans.

All through his career and in his dealings with others, Wolsey always kept in mind that he was the King's servant and

⁹Ibid., pp. 5-6.

it was his duty to carry out Henry's will whether he agreed with it or not.

A year before--and for fourteen years before that--Wolsey had ruled England in the name of the King. He had shown Henry VIII what a state was good for and how it could be made to do a man's will better than a man could do it himself. This Ipswich boy had grown up to teach a monarch--and a Tudor monarch at that--the arts and artifices of statecraft.¹⁰

Rich and powerful, Wolsey was the most talked-about man in England. Many quaked before his baritone wrath. Few but his servants, and possibly at one time the King, loved him. Not a few hated him lavishly. Yet among all he excited unending curiosity.

The pageantry of his living and the shocking power that he wielded at home and among the crowned and mitred heads of Europe combined to leave his contemporaries bewildered. For he was of the people and lowly, yet he consorted with the rulers and bent them to his stubborn will and made them seek his favor.¹¹

The essence of tragedy is to know the end. For Wolsey, the end was now in sight. With Cardinal Wolsey an age was also dying and the end could not be casual. A recent biographer treats him gently: the death of one who had lived on such a scale as the Cardinal, and through such thunderous years of change, was not to be treated lightly.

And the Cardinal would make an event of it, whether he died before ravenous enemies among the nobility on the Tower green or in the vaulted halls of a great abbey

¹⁰Ferguson, Naked to Mine Enemies, p. 3.

¹¹Ibid., p. 4.

where he could play out the last scenes with inspired eloquence born of courage, for he was now free of the fear cast by the shadow of hope.

His life had been a tumultuous interlude between his christening fifty-nine years before and the moment when, now, broken in health and deprived of all the accouterments of power, he approached the abbey. . . .

Thomas Wolsey was in a sense the real Henry VIII, and the man who swaggers through history under the title was in fact Henry IX, a king whose performance was made possible by the work of Wolsey, just as Wolsey's work had been prepared for and outlined by the seventh Henry. A valid judgment of Wolsey, or even a partial understanding of him, can be reached only through a due regard for the sequence of events and pageant of persons in his own day. In methods and intentions he stood in direct succession to Henry Tudor.¹²

Wolsey was the man who put the principles of control formulated and announced by Henry Tudor into telling effect, and a good deal of the support and confidence shown in him by Henry VIII was due to the fact that Wolsey as the Lord Chancellor carried forward very ably the work of Henry VIII's father.

It is also interesting to note that had Henry VIII died at the same time as the great Wolsey, his reign would hardly have been a memorable one. By November 1530, he had ruled for over twenty-one years. "Approaching his fortieth birthday, Henry had lived gloriously, extravagantly and to little effect."¹³ He had squandered his father's fortune, won some passing victories in France, and let England become

¹²Ibid., pp. 5, 171.

¹³Lacey, The Life and Times of Henry VIII, p. 92.

the instrument of Wolsey's personal and vain ambition.

"Hunting, hawking, banqueting, dancing and music-making, he had ruled like a Nero. Fortunately, England had not burnt."¹⁴

In looking back over Wolsey's career, it seems that he had the best intentions for England and her people at heart. He always kept in mind the King's will. Wolsey had a strong affection for Henry as a father for a son. What he could not see was that he was Henry's tool and a tool can be discarded once it becomes too old and inefficient. This was essentially what happened to Wolsey. The Cardinal felt as if Henry VIII was equal to God himself and it was only upon his deathbed that he recognized the difference. Once Wolsey was no longer needed, it made no difference where he physically died. He was dead inside already from the pain bestowed on him by perhaps his only "friend", Henry VIII. Thus ends the story of Thomas Cardinal Wolsey, one of the greatest figures ever to grace the pages of English history.

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