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A TIME OF TRANSITION: FROM WOLSEY TO CROMWELL IN ENGLAND

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

The period between 1527 and 1534 in England was a period of transition. King Henry VIII up until this time period had been faithfully served by his chief minister Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. The English nobility had increasingly become unsatisfied and jealous of the absolute power Wolsey had commanded for so many years. Wolsey had done a good job solidifying his position as well as maintaining his monopoly over the ears of the King. A faction against Wolsey emerges at a crucial juncture for Henry, his divorce from Catherine of Aragon. The faction is successful in removing Wolsey from notoriety and influence. However, the ineptitude and lack of skill in administration that existed from those that had removed Wolsey paved the way for a new single chief minister, Thomas Cromwell.

The intent of this thesis is to examine the transition from Wolsey to Cromwell. Using various primary sources including letters, parliamentary records, and observations of foreign ambassadors in addition to various secondary sources, the thesis follows the coming together of the faction against Wolsey to the collapse of that faction and the rise of Cromwell. Through analysis of these numerous sources it is shown that the failures of the anti-Wolsey faction to satisfy the King's greatest desire in addition to their overall weakness in governance paved the way for Cromwell.

DEDICATION

For my family, especially my Mom and Dad, who have always supported everything I have done, in triumph or in failure.

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I would like to sincerely thank all of my teachers and professors. I would also like to thank the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Robert Wood, Dr. Robert Cassanello and Dr. Edmund Kallina, for taking the time to help on this project. I would especially like to thank my thesis chair Dr. Peter Larson for his guidance and support, without which I could never have come close to completing this project.

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INTRODUCTION

Henry VIII of England (reigned 1509-1547) still draws an extraordinary amount of curiosity across the globe. Most of his notoriety stems from his remarkable relations with and the number of his queens, six in all. However, the reign of Henry should also be remembered not to just due to the personal life of the sovereign but for other reasons as well. There was more to the reign of Henry VIII, and it is vital for historians to consider and study the other aspects and events of his reign. Many famous names litter the pages of history from the time period in which Henry held power. Of course, the more notable names are that of his three “legitimate” children that survived him, the future Edward VI, Mary I, and Elizabeth I, all of whom would eventually rule England.¹ Also, two of the most notable English politicians and royal councilors, the Cardinal Thomas Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell, reached the pinnacle of power under Henry. These two men each became the most powerful and influential man in England, save for the King himself, during the peak of their powers. Henry had a knack for choosing intelligent and extremely capable men to serve in major roles of his government. However, two of those men distinguished themselves above others and were also able to consolidate power that outmatched any of the other ministers or councilors. First there was Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, who rose from a humble birth to become a prince of the church, and eventually the chief minister to the King. Some years after the fall of Wolsey another man, Thomas Cromwell, also rose to the apex of power after coming from a similarly low birth. Both men achieved many great

¹ Both of his daughters were at some point declared illegitimate bastards but were eventually restored to the line of succession.

things during their times of authority in England, and each left his own stamp on the course of English politics and history.

However, there are pieces of Henry's reign that oftentimes go overlooked by historians. The two men, Wolsey and Cromwell, are two of the most often studied non-royal political figures in English history. They influenced many of the men that came after them. Some people fail to realize that the transition from Wolsey to Cromwell did not take place overnight. The way some historians frame their work makes it seem that way, with most only using a few pages out of hundreds, and sometimes even less, to cover the time period. It is a glimpse into the way politics operated during those times in England. Three to four years elapsed between Wolsey's fall and Cromwell's consolidation of power. The make up of government over these years are often overlooked and marginalized by historians, yet they should not be ignored. A tremendous power vacuum followed the downfall of Wolsey. For so many years Wolsey had monopolized the attention and deference of the King. With his rapid and unexpected collapse Wolsey had no opportunity to put into place his own men to follow him. The main factions, parties, and individuals that had helped engineer and contribute to the fall of the Cardinal expected to rise. But the man that would rise would be one that nobody expected, Thomas Cromwell.

The rise and fall of Wolsey is a topic that is often broached by historians. Cardinal Wolsey was able to consolidate his power steadily during the late 1510's and early and middle 1520's. As he rose and became more powerful he created many enemies, most of whom lay at the top of English society, the nobility and clergy. This is due to the fact that

the prestige, influence, and titles normally given to the nobility were being reserved for the Cardinal. Polydore Virgil summed up the feelings toward Wolsey by writing, “Wolsey, with his arrogance and ambition aroused against himself the hatred of the whole country, and by his hostility toward the nobility and the common people, caused them the greatest irritation through his vainglory. He was, indeed, detested by everyone.”² Wolsey had many enemies and had alienated large sections of the English political world; all his enemies needed was an opportunity.

During the first sixteen years of his reign, Henry had been rather happily married to Catherine of Aragon, who had previously been married to Henry’s deceased older brother Arthur, Prince of Wales. Henry and Catherine had conceived many times; however, only one child would survive infancy, his daughter Mary. Thus by the end of Katherine’s child bearing years Henry was left without a male heir and Katherine had become unable to produce children, ensuring he would not have one by her. Around 1525-26, Henry met and fell in love with Anne Boleyn. By 1527 he was writing letters to her signing them, “written with the hand of him which I would yours.”³ It was around this time that Henry had finally come to grips with the fact that Catherine would have no children. He consulted the Old Testament, which says in Leviticus 20:21 that a man should not take his brother’s wife for they would be childless.⁴ Eventually Henry decided he had committed a sin by taking his brother’s wife and wished that his marriage be annulled, so he could marry Anne with the

² Polydore Virgil, Description of Wolsey, ed. D. Hay (*Anglica Historia* pp. 230-32), as quoted in, C.H. Williams, ed., *English Historical Documents: 1485-1558* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967), 402.

³ “Letter From Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn.” 1527.

⁴ Retha Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 54.

hope of producing a son. Wolsey was put in charge of the matter and his failure was another major factor in his fall. The jealousy and resentment among the nobility and the King's infatuation with Anne Boleyn hastened the fall of the Cardinal. The Cardinal would be disgraced and stripped of all his titles and influence in 1529.

By 1533, Thomas Cromwell had reached levels of influence and significance that Wolsey had previously held. In his youth Cromwell had been a soldier of fortune, and then in the service of Cardinal Wolsey in various capacities. It was not until around 1530 that Cromwell would enter the service of Henry. His intelligence and competency was only matched by the Cardinal, and he proved himself just as valuable. His diplomatic abilities and his knack for pleasing the King kept him in the King's good graces until Henry's fourth marriage, with Anne of Cleves, heavily supported by Cromwell, failed.

The period between Wolsey and Cromwell was a period of transition. Many changes occurred in England during this time, some drastic, others minor. The Reformation Parliament began, and with it came many new uses of the Parliament itself. It was one of the earliest parliaments to have real sway over the King. Also, new nobility, mostly from the Boleyn circle, arose and took positions in government. The great Howard family also really returned to its former role as the chief noble family in England. The fall of Wolsey was indeed a drastic shift in English politics and culture. The Cardinal represented the Catholic Church from which England was beginning to break away. The English Reformation was one of the most drastic changes of the Tudor Dynasty. The break with Rome, engineered by reformers, drove a wedge in English society between Catholics and

reformers. Many of the King's new ministers after Wolsey were reformers and pushed the King in that direction; however, it is hard to say how much of a reformer Henry truly was. The transitions also affected the political situation in England, with many prominent Catholics forced to accept the "new" religion or go into exile abroad. Those that stayed and continued to maintain the Catholic faith

Between Wolsey's fall and Cromwell's rise many councilors held at least moderate amounts of power and many factions gained footing. The people that came to power during this interregnum between the "vice-kings" of Henry are a topic that is often a historical footnote, touched upon and mentioned but rarely detailed. It is a truly fascinating era in English politics. The Wars of the Roses fifty or so years earlier had wiped out a large number of the gentlemen and nobility in the English realm, in fact by 1530 there were only two non-royal dukes, Norfolk and Suffolk, and Suffolk had only been granted his dukedom by Henry VIII. This left Thomas Howard, the Duke of Norfolk, as the premier nobleman in the kingdom. It is likely Norfolk felt excluded from a high political position of influence and power. This was his motivation in leading a faction of the nobility against Wolsey. Other factions had also emerged against Wolsey. Many of the leading clerics in the English Church had grown to resent Wolsey's domination of the church and its revenues. Many old gentry families that made up the aristocratic conservatives also hated Wolsey. Understanding how factional politics worked during is important when looking at any political issue from Henrician times.

The fall of Wolsey brought about many changes in England. Eventually what would become most significant is the rise of Cromwell. Cromwell had been employed in the service of Wolsey up until the time of his fall from power. The court figures that held power in the time between this transition were unable to effectively govern England as Wolsey had been able to, and as Cromwell would eventually do. They also failed to gain the greatest desire of the king, his divorce. The failures of the anti Wolsey faction coupled with the lack of focus and skill of the other leaders of court paved the road for the rise of Cromwell.

An examination of this political period in English history has been a lightly detailed section in many scholarly studies regarding the reign of Henry the VIII. Historians have focused on other parts of his reign, specifically focusing on the Cardinal and Cromwell, but not in between. What many overlook is the fact that Henry's reign was more than Anne Boleyn and more than the fact that he had so many wives. Two of the most able administrators in English history served Henry and made their own impacts on the development of their parliamentary system. Some histories make it seem like one came immediately following the other, which is not completely accurate. This study of the period will detail the factions allied against Wolsey, and their failure to please the king and secure power, until one man is able to reverse all their work and seize power himself. The expectation of the factions that worked against Wolsey were that once he was gone they would be able to seize the offices and influence that they deemed rightfully their own. Unfortunately, they did not consider that the administrative ability of Wolsey far exceeded

their own and the King would not be satisfied with his new advisors. This would ultimately force him to look else where for an able minister, which he would find in Cromwell.

CHAPTER ONE

TUDOR HISTORY

The Tudor Dynasty emerged from The Wars of the Roses, an English civil war fought between the rival houses of York and Lancaster. The Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485 was the final and decisive battle in the War, as the Yorkist king Richard III was killed in battle. At the end, the victorious House of Lancaster was led by Henry Tudor. In 1485 Henry Tudor was crowned Henry VII, beginning a 118 year period that transitioned England from the Middle Ages to the modern day. This period produced two of the most famous English monarchs ever, Henry VIII son of Henry VII and Elizabeth I the daughter of Henry VIII.

Henry VII married the Yorkist Elizabeth Woodville, daughter of Edward IV, for the purported reason of uniting the two rival houses to lead England out of the civil war that had ravaged it. He immediately demanded respect to solidify his position as King; in fact he was the first English sovereign to be referred to as 'his majesty'.⁵ Henry brought peace to his realm that had long suffered unrest and civil war. The peace increased prosperity. Trade began to increase and the English economy picked up.

Henry's first child was a son, Arthur, who was created Prince of Wales. Arthur would eventually be betrothed to the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, Catherine of Aragon. This match, arranged by his father, brought with it a large dowry from the wealthy Spanish monarchs. However, in 1502, Arthur died leaving the couple's second son Henry as heir to the throne. It also left the young Katherine a widow. Henry VII

⁵ Nancy Brysson Morrison, *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1964), 12.

received a papal dispensation that would allow himself or his son Henry to marry Katherine, which would later have momentous implications. Henry VII had originally intended for his second son to enter the church and had him educated accordingly, the death of his brother changed this and left Henry as Prince of Wales.⁶ The death of Arthur Tudor, and therefore the succession of Henry VIII, would shape the course of England for the next hundred years.

Henry VIII, as is widely known, would have six wives. He had children with three of them, his daughter Mary with Katherine of Aragon, his daughter Elizabeth with Anne Boleyn, and his son Edward with Jane Seymour. Henry also acknowledged one illegitimate son, Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond, by Lady Elizabeth Blount. With the exception of Richmond, who died in his teens, all of his children would go on to reign over England. His son Edward VI was followed by his eldest daughter as Mary I who was then followed by his younger daughter as Elizabeth I.⁷ Of his three children, Elizabeth is the most well known and her reign was known as the Golden Age.

The Tudor Dynasty had a lasting effect on England. Many of its greatest achievements and failures would impact England for centuries and some are still felt today. One of the most lasting effects was the break with the Catholic Church and the establishment of the Church of England. England also grew culturally during the Tudor Dynasty, experiencing the English Renaissance. Overall the Tudor Dynasty helped shape

⁶ Alison Weir, *Henry VIII: The King and His Court* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2008), 7.

⁷ There was a disputed succession following the death of Edward VI. Lady Jane Grey was pronounced Queen for nine days.

English policies and culture that would last decades after it ended. This included the development of factional politics. Wolsey had been able to hold off the development of strong factions at court by staying close with the King and protecting his position.

However, when his position became perilous in the late 1520s, these factions were able to bring Wolsey down. Likewise, Cromwell was able to hold off his enemies as well. Once he cemented his position he was able to hold off strong factions by working against them and satisfying the King's wishes. Once Wolsey had been done away with, the factions' battles until Cromwell gained prominence. However, after Cromwell was executed the rest of Henry's reign was dominated by factional disputes.

HENRY VIII

"He was born, this second son and third child, on the 28th of June, 1491, and something of the shine and splendour of summer at its zenith accompanied him throughout his fifty five years of life."⁸ Unfortunately for the infant Prince, he was the second son born and as such would have little hope of ever reaching the throne of England. However, his appearance at birth and through his childhood always appeared healthier than his older brother Arthur, who was born prematurely. However, the death of Arthur nearly eleven years later would leave this second son as heir to one of the greatest thrones in Europe.

Following his brother's death Henry was groomed as the heir. Henry's education was expanded between 1503-09 as he prepared to take the reins of government. The papal dispensation for either Henry VII or his son to marry Arthur's widow, Katherine of Aragon,

⁸ Nancy Brysson Morrison, *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1964), 11.

kept her rich dowry and maintained England's alliance with Spain. In the Spring of 1509, Henry VII died, leaving the nearly 18 year old Henry VIII as king. In a letter following the death of Henry VII, Lord Mountjoy would write of the optimism and excitement that surrounded the ascension of Henry VIII: "How wisely he behaves, what a lover he is of justice and goodness, what affection he bears to the learned, I will venture to swear that you will need no wings to make you fly to behold this new and auspicious star!"⁹ The English people were excited for a young man to replace Henry VII, who although considered by many to be a good King was not immensely popular or loved. He married Katherine, and they were crowned together as King and Queen. One of his first acts of being King was to order the execution of two of his father's hated advisors, Empson and Dudley, which set the tone for his reign. Elton calls them "predecessors of many in this blood-stained reign".¹⁰ Towards the end Henry VII had become a cautious, cold man and his popularity had slipped, by executing two of his most hated ministers the new king cemented his popularity. Henry is known for a bloody reign, with reports of over 70,000 executions and these were the first in a line of many high profile executions.¹¹

Early in his reign, Henry left the hands of government to trusted advisors of his father. Many courtiers felt that Henry was more interested in hunting and sport than in government, and they were probably right. This hands off attitude Henry had early in his reign would continue, and is one of the biggest factors in the ability of Wolsey to seize such

⁹ "Letter from Lord Mountjoy to Erasmus," as quoted in, Alison Weir, *Henry VIII: The King and His Court* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2008), 4.

¹⁰ G.R. Elton, *England Under the Tudors* (London: Cox & Wyman Ltd., 1967), 71.

¹¹ Alison Weir, *Henry VIII: The King and His Court* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2008), 24.

great control. Henry spent more time hunting and drinking during his early reign than governing. Henry, as many young kings naturally did, desired the feeling of glory on the battlefield.

In 1513 Henry led his soldiers into battle for one of the only times during his reign. The previous year, he had sent the army to Spain to support his father in law Ferdinand in a joint invasion of France, and it had not gone well. Ferdinand used the opportunity to capture the independent Kingdom of Navarre, strengthening his hold over Spain. The next year Henry himself joined his army in a successful invasion of France. They captured the town of Tournai, which was the richest city north of Paris.¹² Following his French campaign Henry was urged into a treaty with Ferdinand of Spain and the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian. The treaty united them against France. However, Cardinal Wolsey learned of secret dealings between the other two parties of the treaty, which said they planned to invade England. Wolsey showed his flair for diplomacy and outmaneuvered Ferdinand and Maximilian by concluding a peace with France and betrothing Henry's younger sister Mary to the recently widowed French King Louis XII. Mary had previously been betrothed to the heir of Ferdinand, Charles, later Emperor Charles V and Wolsey and Henry had abandoned him for the elderly King of France.¹³ The War allowed Wolsey to show the king his skill in organizing and executing the planned operations. He was richly rewarded for his service during the campaign.

¹² Nancy Brysson Morrison, *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1964), 41.

¹³ Jasper Ridley, *Henry VIII* (New York: Viking, 1985), 75.

CHAPTER TWO

WOLSEY

Thomas Wolsey was an unlikely man to rise to become the most powerful advisor to the English crown. His first biographer, George Cavendish, calls him “...an honest poor man’s son, born in Ipswich within the county of Suffolk.”¹⁴ Wolsey was born in the early part of the 1470’s, likely in early 1473, into a lower-middle class family. His father was a cattle grazer and likely a butcher. Little is definitively known about his family or his childhood, other than he was destined for service within the Church. Cavendish calls him the “boy-bachelor” for earning a Bachelor of Arts degree at age 15. Wolsey was able to rise due to early patronship by a few nobles, most notably the Marquess of Dorset, and Church leaders, including the Bishop of Hereford. Wolsey was over thirty years old when he first came to the attention of the King, at the time Henry VII, which is very late for the start of a political career.¹⁵ Hillaire Belloc compares Wolsey to Lord Marlborough and Oliver Cromwell as “classical examples in English History of unexpected genius appearing at the moment when the careers of most men are half over.”¹⁶ All of those men rose unexpectedly from base positions in society. All came to prominence under unique circumstances. However, what is most interesting about the three men is that they were all at an advanced age, for the time period, when they rose to distinction.

¹⁴ George Cavendish, *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1905).

¹⁵ George Cavendish, *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1905).

¹⁶ Hillaire Belloc, *Wolsey* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1930), 109-15.

Upon the death of Henry VII and the ascension of his son, Henry VIII, Wolsey's fortunes continued to progress. It is not until the waning months of 1511 where we see Wolsey on the King's council, which gave a position for Wolsey a base of wealth and power, upon which he was to build upon and rise from. The new King was young and had other matters on his mind before matters of state, recognizing this Wolsey was able to capitalize, using his skills to disengage the King from his responsibilities. Wolsey encouraged the King's follies, frequently suggesting he go hunting or play tennis instead of attending to the council. Cavendish says, "The king was young and lusty, disposed to all mirth and pleasure, and to follow his desire and appetite, nothing minding to travail in the busy affairs of this realm."¹⁷ He was almost immediately made the new king's Almoner, and his name begins to appear frequently in the papers of the Lord Chancellor. N. Brysson Morrison says that Wolsey had, "long ago outstripped his beginnings, and was at home amongst the great and noble."¹⁸

Around this time Henry entrusted Wolsey with more significant duties. His first war with France was approaching in 1512 and Henry relied on Wolsey to make the preparations for the impending conflict. Wolsey even selected the son of his former patron, Dorset, to lead the expedition. The 15,000 men England sent to France for battle failed terribly. Belloc comments, "It was the first launching of Wolsey's unpopularity, an unpopularity which grew unceasingly even as his power grew, spread to every rank."¹⁹

¹⁷ George Cavendish, *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1905).

¹⁸ Nancy Brysson Morrison, *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1964), 36.

¹⁹ Hilaire Belloc, *Wolsey* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1930), 132.

From then on the nobility's distrust and disapproval of Wolsey grew for more than a decade until his fall.

However much he was disliked or considered incompetent by soldiers, gentlemen, and nobles, only one man's opinion truly mattered and that was King Henry's as all power stemmed directly from him. Wolsey organized a second expedition in conjunction with the Emperor Maximilian. In contrast to the disaster that had befallen the previous adventure into France, this second campaign proved to be successful. The English force captured two towns, and the young King had his glory. Wolsey personally benefited greatly by obtaining the Bishopric of the captured town of Tournai, although he would struggle to collect revenue from it, and by obtaining the trust and confidence of his sovereign.²⁰

Wolsey's career prospects continued to improve in 1514. By mid February he had been granted the Bishopric of Lincoln. However, Wolsey continued to look up and he yearned for higher glory. It is around this time that Wolsey began using multiple agents in Rome to persuade the Pope to either make him papal legate, an ambassador of sorts who locally exercises the power of the Pope, or perhaps even a Cardinal. Wolsey's problem was that the Archbishop of York was already a Cardinal and the Papal Legate. Conveniently for Wolsey, Archbishop Bainbridge was poisoned in mid 1514 under suspicious circumstances that may have even traced back to Wolsey himself, though this was never proved. The Archbishopric of York then passed to Wolsey, so in one year Wolsey had been made Bishop of Tournai and Lincoln and also Archbishop of York. These offices were all of great

²⁰ Hilaire Belloc, *Wolsey* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1930), 58.

importance and the implications of them passing to Wolsey were immense. Bishoprics came with large revenues, which would in turn enrich the holders of the titles. The Archbishopric of York was one of exceptional wealth, and also importance. It was the second most powerful clerical position in England, behind the Archbishopric of Canterbury. The wealth from these offices and the esteem that came with them would boost Wolsey into the upper echelon at court.

The political shrewdness of Wolsey would shine in the following year upon the death of Louis XII of France, who had just a year earlier been married to Mary Tudor, sister of Henry VIII. The newly made Duke of Suffolk and favorite of Henry, Charles Brandon, was sent to retrieve the widow. He ended up writing to Wolsey, asking permission to marry the king's sister. Wolsey responded in friendly terms urging the match but when Suffolk wrote again informing Wolsey of the match, the tone was much different. Wolsey had never approached the King initially and did not until after the marriage had taken place. Wolsey said the King was furious and was threatened both Brandon and his sister. Wolsey, however, talked the King into a more rational outcome and arranged a settlement whereby upon the new couple paying the King Mary's dowry back they would be forgiven.²¹ To Suffolk and Mary Tudor, Wolsey was a friend who saved them and to the King Wolsey was his servant who negotiated a rich settlement for himself. In this case and in many others, both sides appreciated Wolsey. This is an important event in the rise of Wolsey. He proved himself to the King while also sealing the support of one of his favorite courtier, the Duke of

²¹ SJ Gunn, *Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk*(New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 36-8.

Suffolk. David Head goes further by saying that the Tudor-Brandon match was the, “...solidification of an alliance between Wolsey and Suffolk.”²² However, Suffolk would eventually turn on Wolsey, his one time friend.

By the end of 1518 Thomas Wolsey had reached his zenith. He had become Lord Chancellor of England, the highest civil post, replacing the Archbishop of Canterbury. He had also finally become Papal Legate, making him the leading ecclesiastical figure in England as well. Once he had reached as high as he was able to climb there was only downward to go from the top of the English court. Though it would take more than ten years for him to reach the bottom, 1518 marks the peak of his power. Wolsey had nearly a complete hold over Henry by this time. He had proved himself invaluable to the kingdom in matters of state and foreign policy. The Cardinal was the hardest working man in England, always desperate to satisfy and please his master. He was as dedicated a servant as Henry was to ever have. Other councilors and courtiers had gradually seen their power and influence with the king decline, as the King now relied nearly completely on Wolsey. By 1520 the seeds of hatred, jealousy, and displeasure had been sown.

WOLSEY’S FALL

Richard Nixon once said that, “only if you have been in the deepest valley, can you ever know how magnificent it is to be on the highest mountain.”²³ Thomas Wolsey, a son of a butcher in Suffolk had risen through the ecclesiastical ranks to become a Cardinal, a

²² David M. Head, *The Ebbs and Flows of Fortune: the Life of Thomas Howard, Third Duke of Norfolk* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 44.

²³ From Nixon’s last White House speech August 9, 1974

Prince of the Catholic Church. He had also risen through the court of King Henry the VIII of England to become the most influential advisor, chief minister, and what seemed to be a vice-regent. A Venetian ambassador wrote in 1519 that Wolsey was, “the person who rules both the king and the entire kingdom.”²⁴ Wolsey had reached the very top of the highest mountain. In the sixteenth century there was no higher a man could climb in England. His rise to the top had only taken a few quick years, his fall would take even less time.

The fall of Cardinal Wolsey has been examined by countless historians and biographers, in books and journals for centuries. The consensus has been that the fall of Wolsey stemmed directly from the fact that he had been unable to obtain for Henry the divorce he so coveted. Desperate to rid himself of his wife, Henry had Wolsey seek out a divorce from the Pope. Unfortunately, circumstances prevented the divorce from occurring. Although Wolsey had tirelessly labored on the King’s behalf for so many years, his inability to obtain for Henry this his greatest desire sealed the Cardinal’s fate. There is debate, however, as to whether the Cardinal put forth his best effort in finding Henry relief for his conscience. Getting the divorce for Henry would have elevated Anne Boleyn to Queen, which would have caused a number of problems for Wolsey. Anne did not like the Cardinal at all. She would later become openly hostile to him, and like her father and uncle resented Wolsey. Merriman goes a step further and says that Anne detested Wolsey.²⁵ If the divorce were granted it would elevate Anne and leave Wolsey in almost a precarious a

²⁴ Maurice Ashley, *Great Britain to 1688: A Modern History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), 205.

²⁵ Roger Merriman, *The Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902) 64.

position. Although he would likely have been safe for a while given what he would have accomplished for the king. It was almost a lose-lose situation for Wolsey. Anne's family consisted of opportunists and climbers who sought to elevate themselves and their friends. Perhaps Wolsey viewed Anne as one of the king's passing fancies like her sister Mary or Elizabeth Blount before her. Maybe Wolsey did not fully grasp the situation at hand. There is a bloc of historians that believes that Wolsey did in fact put forth his best efforts into finding a way to grant the king's wishes. This seems to be a more credible argument. Wolsey was one of the greatest minds in England at the time and must have seen the writing on the wall. The king had no male legitimate heir and Katherine was no longer able to have children. Surely the king wanted to rectify this and Wolsey had to have understood it.

It is true that the cardinal's failure to obtain the divorce led to his downfall; however, it cannot be looked at as the singular and only reason. Wolsey had risen from such a low base to such a high degree. Anyone making that journey is bound to create enemies along the way. Whether the Cardinal had marginalized someone's influence or power, or had directly interfered with one's advancement and fortunes, many men grew to despise him. These enemies worked behind the scenes to squash the Cardinal and they were prepared to use any means to meet their end result. The King had not been very involved in the affairs of state to that point, leaving the welfare of England mainly to Wolsey. He and Henry had worked well together; Morrison called the relationship warm

and unstrained.²⁶ Wolsey would form the bulk of policy and modify his own to fit the small details the king wanted. However, this instance where Wolsey struggled made the King look elsewhere for advice. Wolsey's enemies were able to capitalize.

Wolsey had been able to maintain his power for a number of years. This required an immense amount of skill, intelligence, and charm. Wolsey was a great speaker and socially able, and Russel Tarr calls him a "schmooser" and a tremendous "networker."²⁷ Wolsey knew how to charm the king and he would pick just the right moment to present his new ideas and policies to the king, so he would be in the right mood to positively receive them. Wolsey was unbelievably intelligent. He earned a bachelors degree at age fifteen and used his brightness and organizational skills to his own profit. He also used his positions and power to enrich himself exceeding the wealth of all the peers of the realm and rivaling even the king. In addition he managed the king by controlling what men were around him and on his council, which proved to be what essentially kept him at the top of the court for so long.

Wolsey had garnered resentment from a wide variety of nobles, courtiers, and clerics along the way. Most considered the Cardinal vain and self-serving. Power in Henrician times was based on access to the king, and the esteem the king held for you. Wolsey had strictly regulated those who had a lot of access to Henry throughout the years. He had a network of his own men around the king and a loyal network of domestic spies so

²⁶ Nancy Brysson Morrison, *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1964), 58.

²⁷ Russel Tarr, "The Rise and Fall of Thomas Wolsey," *History Review* 20 (March 2003): 21.

Wolsey was very familiar with the comings and goings to court and the like. In one of his more notable attempts to keep powerful men away from the king he sent Thomas Howard, the third Duke of Norfolk then (the Earl of Surrey) to Ireland for multiple years in the early 1520's, presumably to exile him from court and make him irrelevant, and then to the Scottish border thereafter.²⁸ He was probably smart to do so, because once back at court Norfolk would be one of the leaders in the downfall of the Cardinal.

The direct chain of events that would to the fall of Wolsey has to begin with Anne Boleyn. The king had fallen in love with her, and desired to marry her, not just for the fact of love but also in the hopes of producing a male heir. Her father Thomas Boleyn, Lord Rochford and later Earl of Wiltshire, was a companion of the king. He was also connected and related through marriage to the powerful Howard family and its patriarch the duke of Norfolk. The chain also starts with a renewal of alliance with the French in 1527. Wolsey was forced to work endlessly on this desire and his time away from the king would prove costly.

Wolsey was very supportive of the English alliance to France; however, a large section of the court was in favor of an alliance to Spain. A few years earlier it would not have mattered as Wolsey had such a great hold over the king, but now was different. The king started to meet with and listen to some of Wolsey's sworn enemies at that point like Norfolk, Suffolk, and Thomas Boleyn. In earlier times Wolsey might have arranged for these nobles to be sent elsewhere in the realm or on diplomatic missions abroad, but not in

²⁸ David M. Head, *The Ebbs and Flows of Fortune: the Life of Thomas Howard, Third Duke of Norfolk* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 54.

1527. Wolsey was tucked away aggressively negotiating with the French. The Cardinal probably did not realize the seriousness of the threat Anne Boleyn posed, due in large part to her family connections.

The factional politics at Henry's court in the late 1520's come into play at this point. A faction at that time was a group of people at court who joined together, usually for a singular issue or goal. Once the goal or issue was resolved the faction would disband. These factions were almost always short term alliances. Factions are comparable to but are not completely like modern political parties. The factions in this day were short term and mainly oriented towards one major goal. For example Norfolk and Suffolk were in a faction against Wolsey and by 1532 were at each other's throats. Some people fell into multiple factions. For example, Norfolk was a member of the "Boleyn Faction" but he would also be considered part of the aristocratic faction and the conservative faction. The anti-Wolsey alliance, which will be referred to as a faction, is what ultimately caused the demise of him, he had survived earlier attempts to depose him but he would not survive the events of 1529. The main nobles that are often mentioned as the alliance that brought down Wolsey are Norfolk, Suffolk, and Rochford, however there were others. Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of London led a group of churchmen against Wolsey. They felt that Wolsey had unfairly dominated the English Church and resented it.²⁹

There is an argument that Wolsey's relationship with the king never really soured to a point where reconciliation would be impossible until 1530; however that is not

²⁹ David M. Head, *The Ebbs and Flows of Fortune: the Life of Thomas Howard, Third Duke of Norfolk* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 87.

altogether true. Up to this point Wolsey had enjoyed unimaginable sway and importance in England. Foreign ambassadors would deal with him as if they were dealing with a king. Princes around Europe sought warm relations with him as a way of gaining good relations with Henry. His control of access to Henry slipped, which was the key to power at the time; to be absent from the light of the king's sun meant to drown in the darkness of political irrelevancy at court. This all changed in 1529 Wolsey was in an uneasy position. He had failed for more than a year to find a way to satisfy the king's desire for a divorce. Foreign ambassadors at the English Court during this time are some of the best resources of gathering court sentiments. An envoy from Milan commented that Wolsey's fall was the result of the "envy and fear of his rivals."³⁰ "Wolsey no longer saw ambassadors as quickly and as regularly as he had previously done...He did not meet the new Imperial Ambassador, Eustace Chapuys..."³¹ This turn of events is significant. Wolsey had been the gatekeeper of Henry's throne, any business you had with the King had to go through Wolsey. Anne Boleyn was now a political force, for she had the ear of the king. The dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk denounced Wolsey more loudly than ever, not only in the presence of the king, but also in public. Thomas Boleyn continued to advance his families interests. Foreign ambassadors commented on the situation; for instance, the Imperial ambassador Mendoza wrote in February that:

This lady [Anne], who is the cause of all the disorder, finding her marriage delayed, that she thought herself so sure of, entertains great suspicion that the Cardinal of England puts impediments in her way, in a belief that if she were Queen his power

³⁰ Retha Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 88.

³¹ G.W. Bernard, "The Fall of Wolsey Reconsidered," *The Journal of British Studies* 35 (July 1996): 300.

would decline. In this suspicion she is joined by her father, and the two dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, who have combined to overthrow the Cardinal; but as yet they have made no impression in the King, except that he shows him in court not quite so good countenances as he did, and that he said some disagreeable words to him.³²

Mendoza recognized that the nobility was getting further than it had in previous attempts at undermining Wolsey, as the king was speaking ill of him in public. In May of that year another ambassador, du Bellay of France, wrote that, "Wolsey is in the greatest pain he ever was."³³ Wolsey seemed to be on the brink of falling; however, he had one card left to play, obtaining the divorce.

The previous October of 1528 the Pope had dispatched Cardinal Lorenzo Campeggio to England to try and mediate a compromise between Henry and Catherine. He was authorized to set up, jointly with Wolsey, a legatine court that supposedly had the power to hear and decide on the matter of the divorce of Henry from Katherine. A legatine court would carry a binding verdict, which could not be appealed. Campeggio was formerly the papal legate to England and England's Cardinal Protector; he was also the Bishop of Salisbury. Wolsey distrusted him and had wanted to convene his own court and decide the matter himself. If he had been allowed to convene a court himself the verdict would be assured. This would have never been allowed to happen, however. In June 1529 the court opened at Blackfriars Church in London. A successful outcome would have probably saved Wolsey, restoring him to his high degree. However it would have also meant the elevation of Anne Boleyn and her followers, so a successful outcome may have only delayed the

³² Letter from Inigo de Mendoza, as quoted in, David Head, *The Ebbs and Flows of Fortune: the Life of Thomas Howard, Third Duke of Norfolk* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 90-91.

³³ David Head, *The Ebbs and Flows of Fortune: the Life of Thomas Howard, Third Duke of Norfolk* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 91.

inevitable for Thomas Wolsey. By the beginning of August the court had recessed and Wolsey's fate was sealed. The Pope had revoked the case to Rome and Henry was summoned there to present his case.³⁴ This had probably been the Pope's intention all along and what he had instructed Campeggio to do from the beginning due to the political situation in Italy. On October 9, 1529 Wolsey was indicted in Parliament and on the 17th of the same month he was ordered to hand over the Great Seal of England. Wolsey was finished in English politics.

Wolsey also had to partially blame himself for his failure in the case of the divorce. This in part leads to a portion of blame being placed on himself for his demise. Wolsey had weak connections with the Pope. Once he had secured his cardinal hat and legatine authority his relationship with other cardinals and popes were not as important to him. He had failed to win friends among the cardinals in Rome surrounding the Pope. His failure to make friends of these cardinals led to a lack of support from them with regards to the divorce. He also failed to monitor and maintain knowledge of the complex affairs in Rome.³⁵ Wolsey had only realized his oversight in these areas when it was too late to matter. Had Wolsey charmed some of the Italian cardinals that were close to the pope he probably would have been more successful in negotiating with them, and the Pope.

The fall of Wolsey was not the death of Wolsey. Wolsey's death was brought on by, depending on how you look at it, treason or simply sheer arrogance. He was exiled to his diocese of York, as Henry had allowed him to keep the archbishopric there. This was

³⁴ Conrad Russell, *The Crisis of Parliaments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) 87.

³⁵ Conrad Russell, *The Crisis of Parliaments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) 82-3.

actually the first time that Wolsey had ever visited his diocese in York. He began to correspond with not only men and women at the English court but also with the French, Imperial, and Papal courts. Wolsey was looking for a way to get back into power and either he did not think he would be discovered or he truly thought himself invincible. Eventually his letters were brought to light and he was charged with treason and ordered south to London. Being an old and weak man, for that time period, Wolsey died on the journey at Leicester Abbey, the news of his death was greeted happily at court by many. Up until his death the faction that had brought him down including Norfolk and Boleyn feared Wolsey.³⁶ As long as he was alive there was a chance he could regain royal favor, and if he did they knew his vengeance would fall on them.

The demise of Cardinal Wolsey was inevitable. He had put himself in a position of imminent demise; the only question was when it would happen. Throughout history great men who hold hefty amounts power struggle to hold it for extended periods of time. Some are able to hold it only for a short while, and others for longer. It is very rare that a man is able to maintain great power for long stretches of time. Wolsey had a backing of loyal followers, but his followers really only had any power due to his patronage. His rise to the top had isolated the “rich and the famous.” Men with money, titles, and land (i.e the nobility and ranking members of the church) were fed up with Wolsey. His dominance of all affairs, his control of the king, and higher then all attitude had angered almost everyone at court who mattered independent of Wolsey. In the early years of his power his political

³⁶ Roger Merriman, *The Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902) 70.

shrewdness gained him young and naïve noble allies, such as Charles Brandon, but Wolsey seems to have done his best to isolate any and all of them. In fact, once friends, Brandon was one of the leaders in the faction that ultimately sent Wolsey to his political exile.

Wolsey's power derived directly and solely from King Henry. This is where the very large majority of power came from in the 1520's in England. Another source of power was land holdings; again Wolsey was one of the largest property owners in England and had built palaces greater than the king's, most would eventually become royal houses. Yet another source of power was wealth Wolsey was maybe the wealthiest man in England; his fortune definitely rivaled if not surpassed the king's. The other source of power was friends in high places. Wolsey sorely lacked friends at court in the late 1520's. When his slip on power started most of the few allies he had jumped ship. Interestingly enough though, Cromwell fought for Wolsey until his death. Shortly after the end of the trial at Blackfriars Cromwell wrote to William Claybrook, another of Wolsey's retainers. The King's Attorney wished to seize Wolsey's papers and accounts, to prove corruption by Wolsey. Cromwell, wishing to clear Wolsey's name, writes, "sort out...all other registers, with also the bulls of my lord's legacy, to the intent that they said may be showed this night to the kings attorney."³⁷ In his reply to Cromwell, Claybrook denies having possession of the documents and raises the legal hurdles faced by Wolsey. Most nobles and clerics could feel which way the wind was blowing and most already despised Wolsey anyway. When a major policy initiative failed for Wolsey, like the divorce, his enemies pounced. Norfolk had

³⁷ Letter from Cromwell to William Claybrook, July 1529. As quoted in Arthur Slavin, *Thomas Cromwell On Church and Commonwealth*. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969) 5-6.

lurked for more than ten years, waiting for when Wolsey would be at his most vulnerable. He had built a powerful network and faction to oppose him and to speak poorly of him to the king. He also had his secret weapon in Anne Boleyn. Wolsey had nowhere to turn for help.

CHAPTER THREE

CROMWELL

After the fall of Wolsey the faction of nobles and court officials that helped bring about his disgrace expected their own fortunes to increase. The power vacuum left by the

Cardinal was vast, and leading court figures such as Norfolk and Suffolk expected to figure prominently in the new order of the court. However, this was not to be. Within a few short years another man of low stature would rise to equal or perhaps greater power than Wolsey, whom nobody expected to achieve what he did. His name was Thomas Cromwell. Like Thomas Wolsey, Thomas Cromwell was also from a less than noble birth. His father, Walter Cromwell, was a brewer and blacksmith in Putney. His father was a less than reputable figure who was constantly in trouble for various offenses including selling ale without having it inspected and assault. Walter had three children, two daughters, one of whom would be the great-great-grandmother to Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell and another who married a sheep farmer; he also had one son, Thomas.³⁸

Very few reliable first hand accounts about Cromwell exist today. One widely used accounts come from Reginald Pole. However, can the accounts of Pole really be trusted considering Cromwell had a major role in the persecution and execution of the majority of Pole's family?³⁹ Elton acknowledges Pole can not be trusted due to his personal hatred of Cromwell, but also allows for the possibility of some truth in his statements. Carlton agrees, saying that any historian choosing Pole as a source for Cromwell "could hardly choose a more biased source."⁴⁰ Cromwell was a polarizing person; many were firmly allied with him or firmly hated him and thus spoke ill of him at every opportunity. Due to this, many of our accounts of Cromwell are prejudiced in one direction or another.

³⁸ A.G. Dickens, *Thomas Cromwell and the English Reformation* (London: English Universities Press, 1959) 12.

³⁹ G.R. Elton, "The Political Creed of Thomas Cromwell," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 36 (December 1993): 72.

⁴⁰ Charles Carlton, "Thomas Cromwell: A Study In Interrogation," *Albion* 5 (Summer 1973): 117.

However some have been proven to be slightly more unbiased than others. One of the most well known foreigners at the English court during Henry VIII reign was Eustace Chapuys, the Imperial Ambassador. In 1535 he sent a coded letter to a leading imperial councilor in Brussels that provided a reliable sketch of Cromwell. In the letter he affirms the background of Cromwell as the son of a poor blacksmith and his troubles during his youth.⁴¹ Another account that may be less unfair than both is that of these is the account given in Foxe's *Ecclesiastical History*. Foxe's account details experiences Cromwell had in his youth, spending time in Antwerp and at the Papal court. It also says that a prominent courtier, Sir Christopher Hale, took the care to put in a good word to the king for Cromwell after the fall of Wolsey.⁴² The rise of the unknown in the English court probably intrigued foreign rulers who needed to learn all they could about Cromwell. Chapuys discusses Cromwell's service to Wolsey and how he positioned himself after the fall of Wolsey. Chapuys is probably the most reliable source on a number of important court figures in England during the 1530's.

Again, very few details of the early years of Thomas's life are known as he never took the time to record any; thus we rely on sketchy accounts from other sources. Cromwell is described as short and strongly built with a dull, clean-shaven face. ⁴³He is reported to have commented to Archbishop Thomas Cranmer that he had been quite a

⁴¹ "Letter from Eustace Chapuys" as quoted in, C.H. Williams, ed., *English Historical Documents: 1485-1558* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967), 412-13.

⁴² "Foxe's Account of Cromwell," as quoted in Roger Merriman, *The Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902) 23-5.

⁴³ Roger Merriman, *The Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902) 84.

ruffian in his younger days.⁴⁴ It is fairly certain that he served with the French Army in Italy as a mercenary in the early years of the sixteenth century. Following that he became a banker and merchant in Florence before eventually moving to the Low Countries to live and work with other Englishmen. In his time in Italy and the Netherlands he became versed in banking and the law.⁴⁵ Working in and around Antwerp, one of the largest trading points in Europe at the time, gave Cromwell crucial experience and knowledge he could call on later as a statesman. Approximately in 1512 Cromwell married Elizabeth Wyks, a woman of a higher social stature. Together they had a son, Gregory, and two daughters, Anne and Grace. However it is highly probable that Cromwell's wife was dead by 1529 because in his will written that year he refers to his "late wyffe."⁴⁶ Cromwell spent several years working in Antwerp, however, by 1520 it is certain that he was a practicing lawyer in London. His first political office came in 1523 when he appeared as a member of Parliament. It is around this time that his own writings tell us of Cromwell's opinions of the Church and Church power in England. However, it is unclear until his hold on power is secure what his own personal feelings are. During this time he was working his way up and his efforts are made on behalf of men he was employed by. It is also following his first time in Parliament around 1524 that Thomas Cromwell became known to Cardinal Thomas Wolsey.⁴⁷ The date of this is debated, but the true date lies between 1520-22.⁴⁸ Cromwell

⁴⁴ Roger Merriman, *The Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902) 9.

⁴⁵ Jasper Ridley, *Henry VIII* (New York: Viking, 1985) 196.

⁴⁶ "Will and Testament of Thomas Cromwell" as quoted in Roger Merriman, *The Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902) 56-63.

⁴⁷ A.G. Dickens, *Thomas Cromwell and the English Reformation* (London: English Universities Press, 1959) 17.

⁴⁸ Other dates that have been provided are entering Wolsey's service in 1519. Diarmaid Maculloch, *The Reign of Henry VIII* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) 41.

performed well in the Parliament of 1523, giving a memorable speech, and by 1525 men seeking Wolsey's favor would write to him, and by the tone of the letters it is said that men understood that to gain the Cardinal's favor they first needed Cromwell's.⁴⁹

In the service of Wolsey, Cromwell proved himself an able civil servant and administrator. He was also able to gain wealth and stature, gaining much property during the 1520's, mostly related to bribes he was able to take while in his duties.⁵⁰ He performed various tasks for the Cardinal and became one of his major agents. The Cardinal put Cromwell in charge of the dissolution of several minor religious houses, so that the proceeds could be used to fund his endeavors such as his college at Oxford.⁵¹ Cromwell also personally benefitted as he went about the Cardinal's business, enriching himself through bribes. Cromwell became quite a wealthy man between 1525-29 while serving Wolsey; when the Cardinal was removed from power and disgraced, Thomas Cromwell faced a crossroads.⁵²

A. G. Dickens points out that Cromwell was fearful of his future after the fall of Wolsey. Dickens cites his drafting of a will and a story from Cavendish of Cromwell weeping at the Cardinal's palace at Esher over his future prospects.⁵³ I tend to agree that Cromwell was and had good reason to be fearful as many of those associated with Wolsey to find bleak prospects following his fall. However, Cromwell had proven himself a

⁴⁹ Roger Merriman, *The Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902) 47.

⁵⁰ Roger Merriman, *The Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902) 12.

⁵¹ Jasper Ridley, *Henry VIII* (New York: Viking, 1985) 196.

⁵² A.G. Dickens, *Thomas Cromwell and the English Reformation* (London: English Universities Press, 1959) 30.

⁵³ A.G. Dickens, *Thomas Cromwell and the English Reformation* (London: English Universities Press, 1959) 32-3.

talented man but also a shrewd man whose loyalties could change at the drop of a hat. He abandoned his former master in Wolsey to continue his career in Parliament, earning a seat from Taunton. He did this with permission of Norfolk, with the help of Sir William Paulet, another of Wolsey's former retainers. In a letter written by Cromwell's clerk Ralph Sadler to Cromwell he says:

I spake with Mr. Gage and according to your commaundment moved him to speke unto my lorde of Norfolk for the burgeses Rowme of the parlyment on your behalf And he accordingly so dyd without delay like a faythfull Frende, whereupon my saide lorde of Norfolk answered the saide Mr. Gage that he had spoken with the king his highnes and that his highnes was veray well contented ye should be a Burges So that ye wolde order yourself in the saide Rowme according to suche instructions as the saide Duke of Norfolk shall give you from the king.⁵⁴

Norfolk had become one of the leading ministers after Wolsey and Cromwell approached him to serve on the Parliament. He needed the good graces of Norfolk, which in turn brought the good graces of the king. After Wolsey fell in 1529 Cromwell did not abandon Wolsey, he spoke against his attainder in Parliament.⁵⁵ Although Cromwell had moved on and on the outside showed changed feelings towards Wolsey, his personal correspondence at the time suggests he still cared deeply for Wolsey up until the latter's death.

CROMWELL AFTER WOLSEY

As with many court figures and high-ranking officials in England between 1527 and the early 1530's, one's advancement and success revolved around the singular issue of the King's divorce. Many great men including Wolsey and Thomas More would not survive due to either their disagreement with the King or their inability to satisfy his wishes. De Silva

⁵⁴ "Letter from Ralph Sadler to Thomas Cromwell," November 1, 1529.

⁵⁵ C.R.N. Routh, *Who's Who In English History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 64.

comments that Wolsey had dominated secular life in England but his failure in the divorce cost him everything.⁵⁶ Henry sacrificed many of his best advisors in his pursuit of the Boleyn marriage and his journey to produce a male heir. After Wolsey, the reins of government had been left to the men who helped destroy him, namely the dukes of Suffolk and Norfolk, and the Earl of Wiltshire, Thomas Boleyn. Henry pressed the men to satisfy his wish that his marriage be annulled and he be allowed to marry Anne. Obviously, Wiltshire would have wanted the same, as it would mean elevating his own daughter to Queen and securing royal favor for his family for generations. Both Norfolk and Suffolk sought to please the King and pressed on his behalf. However by 1532 the men Henry had entrusted with his government had proved themselves inept. The situation in Rome was unfavorable to Henry. The Emperor occupied much of Italy and therefore the Pope would do nothing to offend him, like granting Henry's divorce from Katherine, the Emperor's aunt. The stagnant proceedings in Rome and the incapability of his advisors led Henry to turn once again outside the nobility for help.

When the next Parliament opened on November 3, 1529 Wolsey was gone. Hall recorded his observations of the opening in his Chronicle. The King attended the opening session sitting at the head of the room with the new Chancellor, Thomas More. It was during this parliament that articles were brought against Wolsey. Wolsey was charged with a variety of offenses; chief among them was that Wolsey signed his correspondence

⁵⁶ Alvaro de Silva, *The Last Letters of Thomas More* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2000) 137.

Ego et Rex meus.⁵⁷ This implied that the King was a servant of Wolsey. There many other charges against Wolsey read in the House of Commons. They were all confessed to and signed by Wolsey, according to Hall.⁵⁸ The other notable events to take place in this session of Parliament were new noble creations. Thomas and George Boleyn were created Earl of Wiltshire and Viscount Rochford respectively.

COLLAPSE OF THE ANTI-WOLSEY FACTION

The anti-Wolsey faction had barely enough time to celebrate a toast to the demise of Wolsey before their newfound positions and power were again seized, again by a man without a noble background and lacking the traditional prerequisites to rising as high in civil service as dukes, earls and bishops. How was it possible that this happened so soon after Wolsey's fall? The different factions that had joined against Wolsey could never have been longtime alliances. There are some issues even today that liberals and conservatives can work to achieve equally, but that does not mean that after that goal is achieved that they would continue to work well together. A similar instance occurred following the fall of Cromwell.

Norfolk essentially became chief among the ministers immediately following Wolsey, his two main partners being Wiltshire and Suffolk, his co-conspirators. Wiltshire gained advancement through his daughter and maintained influence through her as well. Suffolk appeared to have neither motivation nor passion for governing. Gunn says that

⁵⁷ This translates to I and my King

⁵⁸ "The Opening of the Reformation Parliament" excerpt from Hall's Chronicle as quoted in, C.H. Williams, ed., *English Historical Documents: 1485-1558* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967), 602.

between the fall of Wolsey and the fall of Anne Boleyn “Suffolk displayed neither the ambition nor the ability to play a dominant role in government,” and a Venetian envoy reported in 1531 that Suffolk only sat in council to discuss important matters and preferred to pass his time in other amusements.⁵⁹ Norfolk was described by another Venetian envoy, Falieri, as being “prudent, liberal, affable and astute...associating with everybody and desirous of further elevation.”⁶⁰ However, most other sources would describe Norfolk quite the opposite. It is seemed that the only true part of Falieri’s remarks was that Norfolk was ambitious, and he meant to remove the men in his way. Perhaps Merriman describes him best when he says that Norfolk “was the equal of neither of these two statesmen [Wolsey and Cromwell]; but his utter lack of honour [sic] and consistency, and his willingness to break promises in order to please the king rendered him an invaluable servant.”⁶¹

The alliance of convenience between the group of nobles who had helped to topple Wolsey, including Norfolk, Suffolk, Thomas Boleyn, the Earls of Sussex and Exeter, and the Lords Hussey and Darcy, who as a whole made up the heart of the King’s Council at the time, did not stay united for very long.⁶² The common goal that had bound them together had been achieved; not only had Wolsey been removed from his positions and from court he was now dead. Suffolk had no great love for Norfolk or his retainers and ideas. By 1531 Norfolk and Suffolk were again at odds; they continuously sparred in council and also on

⁵⁹ SJ Gunn, *Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 115.

⁶⁰ Roger Merriman, *The Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902) 83.

⁶¹ Roger Merriman, *The Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902) 83.

⁶² David M. Head, *The Ebbs and Flows of Fortune: the Life of Thomas Howard, Third Duke of Norfolk* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 105.

their estates in East Anglia.⁶³ Suffolk and most of the other nobles had even less of a love of the Boleyn specifically Anne; he resented her rise and that of her father.⁶⁴ Norfolk was quite pleased with it, obviously; Anne was his niece and he hoped that by advancing her he was advancing himself. Also, many conservatives at court did not really even support the divorce. Many true Catholics never supported it and those that did eased their support after the fall of Wolsey and the direction they saw Anne taking Henry. Most questioned some of her chaplains who were known to have protestant ties. The man that followed Wolsey as Chancellor would trouble the Boleyn faction nearly as much as Wolsey. Sir Thomas More had proven himself to be a staunch papist and supporter of Queen Catherine. He did not believe in the divorce. These beliefs ultimately led to him resigning the Great Seal and also to his execution some years later. Although More was a layman much of his time leading the government was spent on advancing a religious agenda. He fought against the beginnings of the reformation and opposed the Boleyn faction and its rise. After More, the council took on a more secular feel. The nobility was being squeezed out of the picture again as was when Wolsey took power. Again it comes back to the nobility's inability to give the King what he desired. Many of the new leaders at court, including Suffolk, Norfolk, and Thomas Boleyn saw Cromwell as a tool or an ally, certainly not a an enemy or rival. It was not until it was too late until they realized that Cromwell had surpassed them in terms of influence and power.

⁶³ Alison Weir, *Henry VIII: The King and His Court* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2008), 312.

⁶⁴ David M. Head, *The Ebbs and Flows of Fortune: the Life of Thomas Howard, Third Duke of Norfolk* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 110.

Cromwell's relationship with the two dukes was less than cordial. They viewed Cromwell as they had viewed Wolsey, an upstart who had seized the power that was theirs by right. Weir says the growing hostility Norfolk and Suffolk showed towards Cromwell was due to the fact that they had seen him rise into the place where Wolsey had been.⁶⁵ This is not surprising; their plan to remove Wolsey from council and usurp the influence he had was failing. Henry wanted action and skill from his advisors and unfortunately for the dukes Cromwell was a great administrator and more able to deal with matters of state than them. The triumvirate left following Wolsey, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Wiltshire, was ineffective and in terms of handling the government and policy, a failure.

In addition to the anti Wolsey faction a few men rose to prominence who had not been against nor in favor of the Cardinal. The most recognizable was the man who took over as the Lord Chancellor after Wolsey, Sir Thomas More. More had been a favorite of Henry VIII throughout his reign. More was a man of integrity who stuck to his staunch conservative views until his final breath. As Lord Chancellor More was focused on religious issues in England. He vigorously campaigned against the reformation, prosecuting as many reformers he could. More initially was willing to go along with Henry's plan to divorce Catherine, until the king had decided to break with the Catholic Church. More's religious views did not allow him to continue to support Henry. As what had and would continue to

⁶⁵ Alison Weir, *Henry VIII: The King and His Court* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2008), 312.

be the norm for Henry he had More executed in 1535. His last words professed his death that was for the Catholic faith.⁶⁶

RISE OF CROMWELL

There remains the question of how Cromwell had gotten his access to the king to begin his rise. After all, he was one of the only men left at court with such great connections to Wolsey. A tale that Chapuys tells is that Cromwell quarreled with Sir John Wallop and Cromwell begged for an audience with the king to protect himself, during which he told the king he could make him the richest king there ever was, and Henry immediately took Cromwell into his service.⁶⁷ By the end of 1530 or in the first days of 1531 Cromwell was made a member of the King's council. This afforded him a number of benefits. Although at this point he was not a policy maker, he frequently had other members of the council asking for his assistance and in doing so was able to showcase his abilities as an administrator. He also had frequent access to the King. He seems to have made good use of the access as Dickens says that, "Henry speedily came to see in him[Cromwell] the high-powered executive to replace the Duke of Norfolk and the other fumbling amateurs who had overthrown Wolsey."⁶⁸ Henry's eye for talent led him to employ Cromwell; however to stay at the pinnacle of power at Henry's court a talent must deliver with performance.

⁶⁶ David Halpin, "Utopianism and Education," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 49 (September 2001): 299-304.

⁶⁷ Roger Merriman, *The Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902) 75-6.

⁶⁸ A.G. Dickens, *Thomas Cromwell and the English Reformation* (London: English Universities Press, 1959) 35.

Cromwell probably understood that his personal opinions and thoughts were a very distant second to the King. Cromwell had witnessed first hand what happened to even the most loyal and hard working servants of the King who could not implement his policies. Alvaro de Silva says that, "His [Cromwell] career would henceforth depend upon his success in satisfying the King's goals and desires."⁶⁹ In contrast to Wolsey, Cromwell did not push his own political agenda. He used his influence in other ways. The King was the lead policy maker, Cromwell's job was implementation. His shrewd political mind and detail oriented administrative style made him the perfect compliment to the King.

By the end of 1533 the situation at court had changed once again. The divorce from Catherine was complete and Henry was married to Anne. The English Church had broken with Rome, in accordance with Henry's wishes. Also by this time Cromwell held a monopoly on the King, much in the way Wolsey did.⁷⁰ Cromwell had not only become chief advisor to Henry; he was now in control of administration of government and politics.

Henry consistently employed advisors of superior ability. During much of his reign the two most successful were Wolsey and Cromwell. Neither, at birth, seemed destined for service in the highest offices England had to offer and yet it was those offices that they rose too. Their vast talents in administration, policy, and oversight as well as loyalty to the crown and ability to please Henry allowed each to rise to become the most powerful man in England, save the King himself. Henry recognized Cromwell's genius in handling public

⁶⁹ Alvaro de Silva, *The Last Letters of Thomas More* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2000) 131.

⁷⁰ David M. Head, *The Ebbs and Flows of Fortune: the Life of Thomas Howard, Third Duke of Norfolk* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 119.

affairs and his loyalty, but also his radical anti papal ideas. John Guy calls Cromwell's organizational powers unmatched and also says that inside Cromwell was ruthless and single-minded.⁷¹ Guy is correct in confirming the talents of Cromwell and his characterization of him tells us why Cromwell, unlike Wolsey, was genuinely feared in court circles. Henry also respected the modesty of Cromwell, who, unlike Wolsey, did not aspire to the trappings of wealth and titles. Cromwell was not even knighted until 1536!⁷² Cromwell's rise was also slow, compared to that of Wolsey. Wolsey entered government service just before 1510 and by 1514 was one of if not at the point the chief Royal Minister. Cromwell entered government services through Wolsey right around 1520 and did even become a royal councilor for about a decade.⁷³ He was able to take advantage of his frequent access to the King to secure his favor.

The rises of Wolsey and Cromwell have proven to be quite different. The main cause of this seems to be the timing. Wolsey rose to power in the court of a young, aggressive King in 1510. Henry was only around 20 years old and was desperate for experienced and capable administrators. The English nobility was still recovering from the Wars of the Roses, where most of it had been wiped out. In 1530 Henry was a mature, middle-aged man. A King with experience in all aspects of governance, however, Henry always needed capable administrators. Wolsey had virtually little competition in his rise to the top. Cromwell could really only secure his position as the leading minister after the

⁷¹ Diarmaid Maculloch, *The Reign of Henry VIII* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) 42.

⁷² Neville Williams, *Henry VIII and His Court* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1971), 132.

⁷³ Diarmaid Maculloch, *The Reign of Henry VIII* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) 41.

death of Anne Boleyn in 1536, which he helped to orchestrate.⁷⁴ Wolsey and Cromwell arose during different times, which can for the most part explain the differences.

Cromwell was not rewarded as quickly or as extravagantly as Wolsey had been in his rise. Wolsey had been granted any title or office he desired, and he obtained many. Cromwell on the other hand did not quickly attain many offices or titles. In fact in 1533 in the records of council meetings he was still just the Master of the King's Jewel house⁷⁵, a high office and nice title but not near what you would expect from the man who had become the chief advisor for the king. He would eventually obtain the offices of Chancellor of the Exchequer (1533), Principal Secretary and Master of the Rolls (1534), and Lord Privy Seal (1536).⁷⁶ However, it took him longer than expected to gain the offices, which symbolized his consolidation of power. This is likely due to resistance from the nobility who were clinging to what little influence Cromwell had not yet usurped from them, who resisted the elevation of what they likely saw as a potential second Wolsey.

However, what significantly helped Cromwell were his Machiavellian principals. The Oxford English Dictionary defines Machiavellianism as "the employment of cunning and duplicity in statecraft or in general conduct." Cromwell is widely credited with adhering to these principals, and Paul Van Dyke calls him the English disciple of Machiavelli.⁷⁷ Cromwell, in their only conversation ever, spoke with Reginald Pole in 1528

⁷⁴ Diarmaid Maculloch, *The Reign of Henry VIII* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) 43.

⁷⁵ "Typical Proceedings In the Star Chamber" as quoted in, C.H. Williams, ed., *English Historical Documents: 1485-1558* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967), 602.

⁷⁶ G.R. Elton, *England Under the Tudors* (London: Cox & Wyman Ltd., 1967), 129.

⁷⁷ Paul Van Dyke, "Reginald Pole and Thomas Cromwell: An Examination of the Apologia Ad Carolum Quintum," *The American Historical Review* 9 (July 1904): 696.

about not opposing Henry on the subject of the divorce. Cromwell asks Pole if he would abandon his old world views and embrace modern views, offering Pole a book to read. That book was *The Prince* by Machiavelli, and Pole denounced him.⁷⁸ Cromwell's use of Machiavellian principles gave him advantages over his rivals.

Historian's examinations of Cromwell's correspondence also allow glimpses into his personality, ambitions, and ideas. In an analysis of his letters, Elton considers Cromwell to be a practical man who "rarely indulge[s] in those generalizations which give an insight into a man's mind."⁷⁹ Elton also discusses Cromwell's background in common law. Cromwell employed in his care two notable common lawyers who under him rose to prominence, Richard Rich and Thomas Audley. Cromwell himself was well versed in the law as well. However, Cromwell's view of the law appears different from Wolsey in one large area: Parliament. Wolsey tolerated Parliament and saw it as a burden and rubber stamp whereas Cromwell saw it differently. He had sat in Parliament in the early 1520's and after his rise still showed great interest in it. Under his direction the Reformation Parliament was able to accomplish as much or more as any Parliament before it. In the first twenty-two years of Henry VIII reign, when Wolsey enjoyed his prominence, 203 acts were passed by Parliament; in the eight years Cromwell enjoyed prominence Parliament passed 333 acts.⁸⁰ Cromwell used Parliament as a tool during the course of the work of implementing Henry's policies. Cromwell was not a man with an agenda as Wolsey had

⁷⁸ Paul Van Dyke, "Reginald Pole and Thomas Cromwell: An Examination of the Apologia Ad Carolum Quintum," *The American Historical Review* 9 (July 1904): 707.

⁷⁹ G.R. Elton, "The Political Creed of Thomas Cromwell," *The Historical Journal* 36 (December 1993): 76.

⁸⁰ G.R. Elton, "The Political Creed of Thomas Cromwell," *The Historical Journal* 36 (December 1993): 81.

been. His gift was not in making policy it was in taking what policies the King wished to be enacted and making them come to fruition.

CONCLUSION

Henry VIII has developed into one of the more well-known and most studied English monarch to date. This is for a number of reasons, and some of them tend to over shadow the actual reign of Henry. Henry is famous for his wives and children but his reign was also the start of a period of transition for England, as it started the country on the path from isolated island nation to a major European power and empire. Thomas Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell were two of the leading figures of Henry's reign.

As unlikely as Wolsey was to rise to prominence in any sense on a national level for England, let alone on the European scene, he was able to. The question that begs asking is how he was able to do it, and the explanation is quite simple. Wolsey was a self-made-man, he was not born into land or titles and had no advantage given to him. Wolsey was a shrewd politician and a talented statesman. He was well past what many would have considered middle aged in those times when he rose to prominence. He caught several small breaks that gave him access to some important figures, but his talent is what carried him to the top. His ability to placate Henry kept him there.

Thomas Cromwell was almost more unlikely than Wolsey to have risen to any sort of fame at the English Court. He had spent much of his younger years a mercenary on the continent and as a lawyer and banker in Holland and London. However, he changed his own fortune by seeking and gaining a seat in Parliament and coming into the service of Wolsey. This afforded him access to not only the nobility, but also the King himself.

Cromwell's reputation has been skewed by biased reporting's of him. Discounting the polar views it seems that Cromwell, like Wolsey, sought to please the King above all else. This philosophy was required for keeping your head on your shoulders during Henry's reign.

The fall of Wolsey and then the lead up to Cromwell's rise was a time of overall change in England. Wolsey's failure in obtaining a divorce for Henry is the oft-cited reason for Wolsey's demise, this is credible but does not paint the whole picture. The motives for Henry's desires are misconstrued as well. Henry was clearly infatuated with Anne Boleyn, however, his fear of dying without male issue seems to be his primary motivation. Wolsey's enemies seized on his hesitation in finding a solution for the divorce problem, and Wolsey probably did not realize how perilous his situation was until it was too late.

Wolsey had been the face of Henry's administration for almost two decades and was larger than life figure in the scheme of European politics. The factions that had cooperated to bring Wolsey down struggled to fill his void. Norfolk was not a diplomat or administrator. He was smart, but rough around the edges, more of a brilliant soldier than statesman. Suffolk was a man that Henry had made. He also struggled with his larger role. The clergy who had resented Wolsey's dominance of the church would find that in just a few years the church as they knew it would cease to exist. Most importantly the men who had brought down Wolsey failed to find the King a solution to his marriage problem.

Cromwell and Wolsey were both opportunists, and his abilities caught Henry's eye, which would eventually lead to his consolidation of the administration. The failure of the

nobility to properly and effectively rule the way Henry had grown accustomed too paved the way for Cromwell. Cromwell would last less than a decade in power; however, he oversaw many significant events in England. The transition period between the two leading ministers is an area of Henry's reign and English history that warrants more examination.

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