

shattered when the armies of Charles sacked Rome and captured the Pope. Although Clement was soon released he was obviously anxious not to offend Charles, who opposed the divorce. Two years of delicate negotiations by Wolsey failed to gain support from the Pope by 1529.

Wolsey also sought to enlist French military support. Francis I made an agreement with Wolsey at Amiens in August 1527 and by January 1528 France and England were both at war with Charles V. The French defeat at Landriano in June 1529 confirmed that Clement VII would remain in the power of Charles V. The Treaty of Cambrai in August 1529 allied Francis, Charles and the Pope and destroyed any remaining illusion that the Pope might view the divorce with sympathy. Through no fault of his own Wolsey had failed Henry and fatally weakened his own position.

10 THE FALL OF WOLSEY

In October 1529 Wolsey was stripped of his authority and departed for his diocese of York for the first time. His death on 29 November 1530 came five weeks after he was charged with treason.

Various explanations are advanced for the fall of Wolsey. The simplest comes from Peter Gwyn. He argues that Wolsey was Henry's servant, whose duty it was to fulfill his master's wishes. Through no fault of his own, his diplomacy failed as did all his other schemes, such as the Legatine Courts, which met in England in 1527 and 1529. His failure to get the divorce inevitably brought about his dismissal. In addition he was particularly vulnerable because of his close association with the Papacy.

Gwyn's explanation is simple and coherent, but not generally accepted. David Starkey and Eric Ives both argue that Wolsey was a victim of factional intrigues organised by leading aristocrats, such as the Duke of Norfolk, around the person of Anne Boleyn.

Anne, it is argued, had to enter politics to challenge the popularity of Catherine of Aragon. She weakened Wolsey's control of patronage by securing the rejection of Wolsey's candidate for the valuable position of Abbess of Wilton in 1528. Control of patronage was essential if a man like Wolsey was to maintain his hold on power.

During 1528 there was no serious split between Anne and Wolsey as he was her best hope of securing the divorce. It was only in the summer of 1529 that it became clear that Wolsey had failed. This enabled Anne and her faction to bring Wolsey down at a time when Wolsey had little close contact with the King. Ives argues that the fall of Wolsey was 'first and foremost Anne's success'.

On such matters differences between scholars are inevitable. It is clear that Wolsey failed the King on a major issue that involved personalities and politics. This was bound to weaken his position. It is

equally clear that there was a constant battle for prestige and position in Henry's Court and that Anne Boleyn was a formidable figure in this struggle.

George Cavendish was an intimate servant and admirer of Wolsey. His biography provides one of the few sympathetic contemporary portraits and interesting insights into Court intrigues:

As I heard it reported by them that waited upon the King at dinner, that Mistress Anne Boleyn was much offended with the King, as far as she durst, that he so gently entertained my lord [Wolsey], saying as she sat with the King at dinner in communication [conversation] of him, 'Sir,' quod she, 'Is it not a marvellous thing to consider what debt and danger the Cardinal has brought you in with all your subjects . . . there is not a man within all your realm worth five pounds but he hath indebted you unto him by his means' [meaning by a loan that the King had but late of his subjects] . . . 'there is never a nobleman within this realm that if he had done but half so much as he hath done but he were well worthy to lose his head. If my Lord of Norfolk, my Lord of Suffolk, my lord my father, or any other noble person within your realm had done much less than he, but they should have lost their heads or this.' 'Why then I perceive,' quod the King 'ye are not the Cardinal's friend.' 'Forsooth sir,' then quod she, 'I have no cause nor any other man that loveth your grace. No more have your grace if ye consider well his doings.'

- 1 To which loan is Anne probably referring (line 9)?
- 2 What impression is given of her personality?
- 3 How does this conversation illustrate the weakness of Wolsey's position?
- 4 Which modern interpretation of Wolsey's fall seems most justified by this extract?

It is easy to deride the first twenty years of Henry's reign. His foreign policy seems anachronistic and unrealistic. Wolsey was undoubtedly greedy and vainglorious and an exceptionally worldly churchman. His achievement was to enhance the prestige of the country to a far greater level than its actual power merited. It might also have been very dangerous to stand on the sidelines when France and the Empire were struggling so fiercely for supremacy.

Wolsey may have achieved little at home, but he showed an energy and social conscience that must be respected. He was not an intolerant man and although he took action against the first stirrings of heresy, he was not a persecutor by temperament. He should be seen as the dynamic and imaginative servant of a capricious master.