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TUDORS

MACMILLAN

1

Hallelujah



The land was flowing with milk and honey. On 21 April 1509 the old king, having grown ever more harsh and rapacious, died in his palace at Richmond on the south bank of the Thames. The fact was kept secret for two days, so that the realm would not tremble. Yet the new Henry had already been proclaimed king.

On 9 May the body of Henry VII was taken in a black chariot from Richmond Palace to St Paul's Cathedral; the funeral car was attended by 1,400 formal mourners and 700 torch-bearers. But few, if any, grieved; the courtiers and household servants were already awaiting the son and heir. When the body, having been taken to the abbey of Westminster, after the funeral service was over, was lowered into its vault the heralds announced 'le noble roy, Henri le Septième, est mort'. Then at once they cried out with one voice, '*Vive le noble roy, Henri le Huitième*'. His title was undisputed, the first such easy succession in a century. The new king was in his seventeenth year.

Midsummer Day, 24 June, was chosen as the day of coronation. The sun in its splendour would herald the rising of another sun. It was just four days before his eighteenth birthday. The ceremony of the coronation was considered to be the eighth sacrament of the Church, in which Henry was anointed with chrism or holy oil as a token of sacred kingship. His robes were stiff with jewels, diamonds

and rubies and emeralds and pearls, so that a glow or light hovered about him. He now radiated the power and the glory. He may have acted and dressed under advice, but he soon came to understand the theatre of magnificence.

Henry had taken the precaution, thirteen days before the coronation, of marrying his intended bride so that a king would be accompanied by a queen; it was thereby to be understood that he was an adult rather than a minor. Katherine of Aragon was the child of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, in whose reign Spain was united. She had come from that country in order to marry Prince Arthur, Henry's older brother, but events conspired against her. Arthur died less than six months after their wedding, of consumption or the sweating sickness, and Katherine was left at the English court in the unenviable position of a widow whose usefulness had gone. It was said that the king himself, Henry VII, might wish to marry her. But this was unthinkable. Instead she was betrothed to Prince Henry, and was consigned to some years of relative penury and privation at the hands of a difficult father-in-law who was in any case pursuing a better match for his son and heir. Yet, after seven years of waiting, her moment of apotheosis had come. On the day before the coronation she was taken in a litter from the Tower of London to Westminster, passing through streets draped in rich tapestry and cloth of gold. A contemporary woodcut depicts Henry and Katherine being crowned at the same time, surrounded by rank upon rank of bishops and senior clergy.

Henry's early years had been spent in the shadow of an anxious and over-protective father, intent before anything else on securing the dynasty. The young prince never spoke in public, except in reply to questions from the king. He could leave the palace at Greenwich or at Eltham only under careful supervision, and then venture into the palace's park through a private door. Much care was bestowed on his early education, so that he acquired the reputation of being the most learned of princes. Throughout his life he considered himself to be a great debater in matters of theology, fully steeped in the scholarship of Thomas Aquinas. He took an early delight in music, and composed Masses as well as songs and motets; he sang, and played both lute and keyboard. He had his own company of musicians who followed him wherever he

walked, and by the time of his death he owned seventy-two flutes. He was the harmonious prince. Thomas More, in a poem celebrating the coronation, described him as the glory of the era. Surely he would inaugurate a new golden age in which all men of goodwill would flourish?

Henry was himself a golden youth, robust and good-looking. He was a little over 6 feet in height and, literally, towered over most of his subjects. It was written that 'when he moves the ground shakes under him'. He excelled in wrestling and archery, hawking and jousting. Nine months after the coronation, he organized a tournament in which the feats of chivalry could be celebrated. He rode out in disguise, but his identity was soon discovered. He had read Malory as well as Aquinas, and knew well enough that a good king was a brave and aggressive king. You had to strike down your opponent with a lance or sword. You must not hesitate or draw back. It was a question of honour. The joust offered a taste of warfare, also, and the new king surrounded himself with young lords who enjoyed a good fight. The noblemen of England were eager to stiffen the sinews and summon up the blood.

When he was not master of the joust, he was leader of the hunt. He spoke of his hunting expeditions for days afterwards, and he would eventually own a stable of 200 horses. Hunting was, and still is, the sport of kings. It was a form of war against an enemy, a battleground upon which speed and accuracy were essential. Henry would call out 'Holla! Holla! So boy! There boy!' When the stag was down, he would slit its throat and cut open its belly before thrusting his hands into its entrails; he would then daub his companions with its blood.

Older and more sedate men were also by his side. These were the royal councillors, the majority of whom had served under the previous king. The archbishop of Canterbury, William Warham, remained as chancellor. The bishop of Winchester, Richard Foxe, continued to serve as lord privy seal. The other senior bishops – of Durham, of Rochester and of Norwich – were also in place. The young king had to be advised and guided if the kingdom were to continue on its settled course. Whether he would accept that advice, and follow that guidance, was another matter.

The surviving members of the House of York were restored to favour, after they had endured the indifference and even hostility of the previous king. Henry VII had identified himself as the Lancastrian claimant to the throne. Even though he had married Elizabeth of York after his coronation, he was suspicious and resentful of the rival royal family. The essential unity of the realm was now being proclaimed after the dynastic struggles of the previous century.

The older councillors now took the opportunity of destroying some of the 'new men' whom Henry VII had promoted. His two most trusted advisers, or confidential clerks, were arrested and imprisoned. Sir Richard Empson and Sir Edmund Dudley had been associated with the previous king's financial exactions, but they were in general resented and distrusted by the bishops and older nobility. They were charged with the unlikely crime of 'constructive treason' against the young king, and were duly executed. It is not at all clear that Henry played any part in what was essentially judicial murder, but his formal approval was still necessary. He would employ the same methods, for removing his enemies, in another period of his reign.

Henry was in any case of uncertain temper. He had the disposition of a king. He could be generous and magnanimous, but he was also self-willed and capricious. The Spanish ambassador had intimated to his master that 'speaking frankly, the prince is not considered to be a genial person'. The French ambassador, at a later date, revealed that he could not enter the king's presence without fear of personal violence.

An early outbreak of royal temper is suggestive. In the summer of 1509 a letter arrived from the French king, Louis XII, in reply to one purportedly sent by Henry in which the new king had requested peace and friendship. But Henry had not written it. It had been sent by the king's council in his name. The youthful monarch then grew furious. 'Who wrote this letter?' he demanded. 'I ask peace of the king of France, who dare not look me in the face, still less make war on me!' His pride had been touched. He looked upon France as an ancient enemy. Only Calais remained of the dominion that the English kings had once enjoyed across the Channel. Henry was eager to claim back his ancient rights and,

from the time of his coronation, he looked upon France as a prize to be taken. War was not only a pleasure; it was a dynastic duty.

Yet the pleasures of peace were still to be tasted. He had inherited a tranquil kingdom, as well as the store of treasure that his father had amassed. Henry VII bequeathed to him something in excess of £1,250,000, which may plausibly be translated to a contemporary fortune of approximately £380,000,000. It would soon all be dissipated, if not exactly squandered. It was rumoured that the young king was spending too much time on sports and entertainments, and was as a result neglecting the business of the realm. This need not be taken at face value. As the letter to the French king demonstrated, the learned bishops preferred their master to stay away from their serious deliberations.

There were in any case more immediate concerns. Katherine of Aragon had at the end of January 1510 gone into painful labour. The result was a girl, stillborn. Yet Katherine remained evidently pregnant with another child, and the preparations for a royal birth were continued. They were unnecessary. The swelling of her belly subsided, caused by infection rather than fruitfulness. It was announced that the queen had suffered a miscarriage, but it was rumoured that she was perhaps infertile. No greater doom could be delivered upon an English queen. She disproved the rumours when she gave birth to a son on the first day of 1511, but the infant died two months later. Katherine may have been deemed to be unlucky, but the king would eventually suspect something much worse than misfortune.

Henry had already strayed from the marriage bed. While Katherine was enduring the strains of her phantom pregnancy in the early months of 1510, he took comfort from the attentions of Anne Stafford. She was one of the queen's ladies-in-waiting, and was already married. She was also a sister of the duke of Buckingham, and this great lord was sensitive of his family's honour. Anne Stafford was sent to a nunnery, and Buckingham removed himself from court after an angry confrontation with the king. Katherine of Aragon was apprised of the affair and, naturally enough, took Buckingham's part. She had been shamed by her husband's infidelity with one of her own servants. The household was already full of deception and division. Other royal liaisons may have gone

unrecorded. Mistress Amadas, the wife of the court goldsmith, later announced the fact that the king had come secretly to her in a Thames Street house owned by one of his principal courtiers.

Yet all sins of lust could be absolved. In the early days of 1511 Henry went on pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in Norfolk. It was reported that he trod, barefoot and in secret, along the pilgrims' road in order to pray for the life of his struggling infant boy. In the summer of the same year he made a pilgrimage to the shrine of Master John Schorne at North Marston in Buckinghamshire. Master Schorne was the rector of that village who had acquired a reputation for saintliness and whose shrine became a centre of miraculous healing. He was said to have conjured the devil into a boot.

In all matters of faith, therefore, Henry was a loyal son of the Church. In that respect, at least, he resembled the overwhelming majority of his subjects. The Venetian ambassador reported that 'they all attend Mass every day and say many paternosters in public – the women carrying long rosaries in their hands'. At the beginning of Henry's reign the Catholic Church in England was flourishing. It had recovered its vigour and purpose. In the south-west, for example, there was a rapid increase in church building and reconstruction. More attention was paid to the standards of preaching. Where before the congregation knelt on rush-covered floors, benches were now being set up in front of the pulpits.

It was the Church of ancient custom and of traditional ceremony. On Good Friday, for example, the 'creeping to the cross' took place. The crucifix was veiled and held up behind the high altar by two priests while the responses to the versicles were chanted; it was then uncovered and placed on the third step in front of the altar, to which the clergy now would crawl on their hands and knees before kissing it. Hymns were sung as the crucifix was then carried down to the congregation, who would genuflect before it and kiss it. The crucifix was then wreathed in linen and placed in a 'sepulchre' until it re-emerged in triumph on the morning of Easter Sunday. This was an age of carols and of holy days, of relics and pilgrimages and miracles.

The old faith was established upon communal ritual as much as theology. The defining moment of devotion was the miracle of

transubstantiation at the Mass, when the bread and wine were transformed into the body and blood of Christ. The religious life was nourished by the sacraments, which were in turn administered by a duly ordained body of priests who owed their primary allegiance to the pope. The faithful were obliged to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days, to fast on appointed days, to make confession and receive communion at least once a year. The most powerful of all beliefs was that in purgatory, whereby the living made intercession for the souls of the dead to bring a quicker end to their suffering; the old Church itself represented the communion of the living and the dead.

The saints were powerful intercessors, too, and were venerated as guardians and benefactors. St Barbara protected her votaries against thunder and lightning, and St Gertrude kept away the mice and the rats; St Dorothy protected herbs, while St Apolline healed the toothache; St Nicholas saved the faithful from drowning, while St Anthony guarded the swine. The supreme intercessor was the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, whose image was to be found everywhere surrounded by candles and incense.

The churches were therefore filled with images and lights. Those of London, for example, were treasure-chests of silver candlesticks and censers, silver crucifixes and chalices and patens. The high altar and the rood screen, separating the priest from the congregation, were miracles of art and workmanship. Images of Jesus and of the Holy Virgin, of patron saints and local saints, adorned every available space. They wore coronets and necklaces of precious stones; rings were set upon their fingers and they were clothed in garments of gold. Some churches even exhibited the horns of unicorns or the eggs of ostriches in order to elicit admiration.

The human representatives of the Church were perhaps more frail. Yet the condition of the clergy was sound, as far as the laws of human nature allowed. Incompetent and foolish priests could be found, of course, but there was no general debasement or corruption of the clerical office. More men and women were now in religious orders than at any time in the previous century, and after the invention of printing came a great flood of devotional literature. In the years between 1490 and 1530, some twenty-eight editions

of the *Hours of the Blessed Virgin* were issued. The religious guilds, set up to collect money for charity and to pray for the souls of the dead, had never been so popular; they were the institutional aspect of the religious community.

There were eager reformers, of course, who wished for a revival of the Christian spirit buried beneath the golden carapace of ritual and traditional devotion. It is in fact a measure of the health of the Church at the beginning of the sixteenth century that such fervent voices were heard everywhere. In the winter of 1511 John Colet stepped into the pulpit, at his own cathedral church of St Paul's in London, and preached of religious reform to the senior clergy of the realm. He repeated his theme to a convocation of clergy in the chapter-house of Canterbury. 'Never', he said, 'did the state of the Church more need your endeavours.' It was time for 'the reformation of ecclesiastical affairs'. The word had been spoken, but the deed was unthinkable. What Colet meant by 'reformation' was a rise in the quality and therefore the renown of the priesthood.

He despised some of the more primitive superstitions of the Catholic people, such as the veneration of relics and the use of prayer as a magical charm, but he had no doubt on the principles of faith and the tenets of theology. On these matters the Church was resolute. In May 1511 six men and four women, from Tenterden in Kent, were denounced as heretics for claiming among other things that the sacrament of the altar was not the body of Christ but merely material bread. They were forced to abjure their doctrines, and were condemned to wear the badge of a faggot in flames for the rest of their lives. Two men were burned, however, for the crime of being 'relapsed' heretics; they had repented, but then had taken up their old opinions once more. The Latin secretary to Henry, an Italian cleric known as Ammonius, wrote with some exaggeration that 'I do not wonder that the price of faggots has gone up, for many heretics furnish a daily holocaust, and yet more spring up to take their place'.

The career of Ammonius himself is testimony to the fact that the Church was still the avenue for royal preferment. This was a truth of which Thomas Wolsey was the supreme embodiment. Wolsey arrived at court through the agency of Bishop Foxe, the lord privy seal, and seems almost at once to have impressed the

young king with his stamina and mastery of detail. By the spring of 1511 he was issuing letters and bills directly under the king's command, thus effectively circumventing the usual elaborate procedures. He was still only dean of Lincoln, but he was already advising Henry in affairs international and ecclesiastical.

He had the gift of affability as well as of industry, and was infinitely resourceful; he did what the king wanted, and did it quickly. The king's opinions were his own. Wolsey was, according to his gentleman usher, George Cavendish, 'most earnest and readiest in all the council to advance the king's only will and pleasure, having no respect to the case'. He was thirty-eight years old, and a generation younger than the old bishops of the council. Here was a man whom the young king could take into his confidence, and upon whom he could rely. Wolsey rose at four in the morning, and could work for twelve hours at a stretch without intermission. Cavendish relates that 'my lord never rose once to piss, nor yet to eat any meat'. When he had finished his labours he heard Mass and then ate a light supper before retiring.

Wolsey therefore became the instrument of the king's will, and no more forcefully than in the prosecution of Henry's ambitions against France. In November 1511 Henry joined a Holy League with the pope and with his father-in-law, Ferdinand of Spain, so that they might with papal approval attack France. Henry longed for war, and of course an excuse for combat could always be found. In this instance the incursion of French troops into Italian territories was cited as the reason for hostilities. In the following month a Christmas pageant was devised for the king at the house of the black friars in Ludgate, in which were displayed an artificial lion and an antelope. Four knight challengers rode out against men in the apparel of 'woodwoos', or wild men of the forest. It was a spectacle in praise of battle. A few months later it was decreed by parliament that all male children were obliged to practise the skills of archery.

Contrary advice was being given to the king at this juncture. The bishops and statesmen of the royal council advised peace against the hazard and cost of war with the French. Many of the reformist clergy were temperamentally opposed to warfare, and regretted that a golden prince of peace should so soon become a

ravaging lion of war. Colet declared from the pulpit of St Paul's that 'an unjust peace is better than the justest war'. Erasmus, the Dutch humanist then resident at Cambridge, wrote that 'it is the people who build cities, while the madness of princes destroys them'.

Yet the old nobility, and the young lords about the king, pressed for combat and glory in an alliance with Spain against the old enemy. Katherine of Aragon, who had assumed the role of Spanish ambassador to the English court of her husband, was also in favour of war against France. In this she was fulfilling the desire of her father. It was an unequal balance of forces, especially when it was tilted by Henry's desire for martial honour. He desired above all else to be a 'valiant knight' in the Arthurian tradition. That was the destiny of a true king. What did it matter if this were, in England, the beginning of a run of bad harvests when bread was dear and life more precarious? The will of the king was absolute. Had he not been proclaimed king of France at the time of his coronation? He wished to recover his birthright.

In April 1512 war was declared against France; a fleet of eighteen warships was prepared to take 15,000 men to Spain, from where they were to invade the enemy. In the early summer the English forces landed in Spain. No tents, or provisions, had been prepared for them. They lay in fields and under hedges, without protection from the torrential rain. The season was oppressive and pestilential, a menace augmented by the hot wine of Spain. The men wanted beer, but there was none to be found.

It also soon became apparent that they had been duped by Ferdinand, who had no intention of invading France, but merely wanted his border to be guarded by the English troops while he waged an independent war against the kingdom of Navarre. His words were fair, one English commander wrote back to the king, but his deeds were slack. Dysentery caused many casualties and, as a result of disease and poor rations, rumours and threats of mutiny began to multiply. In October 1512 the English sailed back home. 'Englishmen have so long abstained from war,' the daughter of the emperor Maximilian said, 'they lack experience from disuse.' The young king had been dishonoured as well as betrayed. Henry was furious at the hypocrisy and duplicity of his father-in-law, and

seems in part to have blamed Katherine for the fiasco. A report soon emerged in Rome that he wished to 'repudiate' his wife, largely because she had proved incapable of bearing him a living heir, and to marry elsewhere.

Yet he refused to accept the humiliation in Spain, and at once began planning for a military expedition under his own leadership. He would lead a giant campaign, and emulate Henry V in the scale of his victories. Henry summoned his nobles, and their armed retainers, as their feudal master. The days of Agincourt were revived. He soon restored Thomas Howard to his father's title of duke of Norfolk and created Charles Brandon, his partner in the jousts, duke of Suffolk; the two warlords were thereby afforded sufficient dignity. If he were to imitate the exploits of the medieval king, however, he would need men and materials. Wolsey in effect became the minister of war. It was he who organized the fleet, and made provisions for 25,000 men to sail to France under the banner of the king. Henry now found him indispensable. He was made dean of York, another stage in his irrepressible rise.

The main body of the army set sail in the spring of 1513, followed a few weeks later by the king. He landed in Calais with a bodyguard of 300 men and a retinue of 115 priests and singers of the chapel. His great and ornate bed was transported along the route eastward, and was set up each night within a pavilion made from cloth of gold. The king had eleven tents, connected one with another; one was for his cook, and one for his kitchen. He was escorted, wherever he walked or rode, by fourteen young boys in coats of gold. The bells on his horse were made of gold. The most elaborate of the royal tents was decorated with golden ducats and golden florins. He was intent on displaying his magnificence as well as his valour. Henry had allied himself with the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, whose nominal empire comprised most of central Europe, but he also wished to claim imperial sovereignty for himself. He had already caused to be fashioned a 'rich crown of gold set with full many rich precious stones' that became known as the Imperial Crown; it would in time signify his dominion over the whole of Britain, but also over the Church within his domain.

The fighting in France itself was to a large extent inconsequential. In the summer of 1513 the English forces laid siege to the

small town of Théroouanne in the county of Flanders; a body of French cavalry came upon them, exchanged fire, and then retreated. They rode away so hard that the encounter became known as the battle of the Spurs. Henry himself had remained in the rear, and had taken no part in the action. It was not a very glorious victory, but it was still a victory. When Théroouanne itself eventually submitted, the king's choristers sang the *Te Deum*.

The English infantry and cavalry moved on to besiege Tournai, a much bigger prize that Edward III had failed to capture in the summer of 1340. It fell within a week of the English arrival. Henry established a garrison in Tournai and strengthened its citadel; he also demanded that Thomas Wolsey be appointed as bishop of the city. Three weeks of tournaments, dances and revels marked the victory in which the courts of Maximilian and Henry freely mingled. The king then sailed back to England in triumph.

Yet the cost of the brief wars was enormous, comprising most of the treasure that Henry VII had bequeathed to his son. Wolsey persuaded parliament to grant a subsidy, in effect a tax upon every adult male, but this proved of course unpopular and difficult to collect. It became clear enough that England could not afford to wage war on equal terms with the larger powers of Europe. The French king had three times as many subjects, and also triple the resources; the Spanish king possessed six times as many subjects, and five times the revenue. Henry's ambition and appetite for glory outstripped his strength.

The true palm of victory, in 1513, was in any case to be found elsewhere. The Scots were restive, and ready once more to confirm their old alliance with the French. It was feared that James IV was prepared to invade England while its king was absent on other duties. And so it proved. Katherine herself played a role in the preparations for battle. She wrote to her husband that she was 'horribly busy with making standards, banners and badges', and she herself led an army north. Yet the victory came before she arrived. James IV led his soldiers over the border but, under the command of the elderly earl of Surrey, the English forces withstood and defeated them. James himself was left dead upon the field, and John Skelton wrote that 'at Flodden hills our bows and bills slew all the flower of their honour'; 10,000 Scots were killed.

The torn surcoat of the Scottish king, stained with blood, was sent to Henry at Tournai. Katherine wrote to her husband with news of the victory, and declared that the battle of Flodden Field 'has been to your grace and all your realm the greatest honour that could be, more than if you should win the crown of France'. Henry was truly the master of his kingdom.

2

All in scarlet



Richard Hunne was a wealthy merchant whose infant son Stephen died in the spring of 1511. The rector of his parish church in Whitechapel, Thomas Dryffield, asked for the dead baby's christening robe as a 'mortuary gift'; this was a traditional offering to the priest at the time of burial. Hunne declined to follow the custom. A year later he was summoned to Lambeth Palace, where he was judged to be contumacious; he still refused to pay what he considered to be an iniquitous fee. When he entered his parish church for vespers, at the end of the year, Dryffield formally excommunicated him. 'Hunne,' he shouted, 'you are accursed, and you stand accursed.'

This was a serious matter. No one was permitted to engage in business with Hunne. He would be without company, because no one would wish to be seen with an excommunicate. He would also of course be assigned to the fires of damnation for eternity. Yet Hunne struck back, and accused the rector of slander. He also challenged the legality of the Church court that had previously deemed him guilty. The case then entered the world of law, where it remained suspended for twenty-two months. In the autumn of 1514 the Church authorities raided Hunne's house, and found a number of heretical books written in English. He was taken to the Lollards' Tower in the west churchyard of St Paul's where in the

winter of that year he was found hanged. The bishop of London declared that the heretic had, in a mood of contrition and guilt, committed suicide. Hunne's sympathizers accused the Church of murder. In the words of John Foxe, the martyrologist, 'his neck was broken with an iron chain, and he was wounded in other parts of his body, and then knit up in his own girdle'.

Even before Hunne's corpse was being burned at Smithfield, as a convicted and 'abominable' heretic, a coroner's inquest was convened to judge the manner of his death. In February 1515 the jury decided that three clerics – among them the bishop of London's chancellor, William Horsey – were guilty of murder. The bishop wrote immediately to Thomas Wolsey and called for an inquiry by men without bias; he told Wolsey that Londoners were so 'maliciously set in favour' of heresy that his man was bound to be condemned even if he were 'as innocent as Abel'.

The king then ordered an inquiry, to take place at Baynard's Castle on the north bank of the Thames by Blackfriars, where the bishop of London took the opportunity of condemning the members of the jury as 'false perjured caitiffs'. Henry then intervened with a decision to pardon Horsey and the others; he instructed his attorney to declare them to be not guilty of the alleged crime. Horsey then left London, and travelled quickly to Exeter. This might have seemed to be the end of the matter.

Yet there were important consequences. Three years before, in the parliament of 1512, a bill had been passed requiring that 'benefit of clergy' be removed from those in minor orders convicted of murder; the 'benefit' had meant that clerics would be tried in Church courts and spared the penalty of death. Minor orders represented the lower ranks of the clergy, such as lector or acolyte. In the charged circumstances of the Hunne affair, this measure acquired new significance. The abbot of Winchester now declared to the Lords that the Act of 1512 stood against the laws of God and the freedoms of the Church. The text upon which he preached came from the First Book of Chronicles, 'Touch not mine anointed'.

Henry Standish, warden of the mendicant friars of London and one of the king's spiritual advisers, disagreed. He asserted that no act of the king could be prejudicial to the Church, and that

the Church effectively came under the king's jurisdiction. A fundamental issue was raised. Could a secular court call the clergy to account? Could a temporal leader restrain a bishop ordained by God? Standish was summoned to appear before a convocation of the senior clergy, to answer for his opinions, and he appealed to the king for protection.

A great conference of learned men, including all the judges of the land, met at Blackfriars in the winter of 1515 and after much deliberation took the part of Henry Standish; they accused the senior clergy of *praemunire*, by which was meant the appeal to a foreign court or authority. The foreign authority, in this case, was the pope and the papal court. Thomas Wolsey – made a cardinal only three months before – offered a formal submission to the king, and asked him to submit the case to Rome. This might seem an oddly inappropriate response, but it is likely that Wolsey and the king were working together. All now waited for the king's verdict. It was time for Henry to give judgment in the affair of Henry Standish.

He addressed an assembly of lawyers and clergy at Baynard's Castle in November and made the following declaration. 'By the ordinance and sufferance of God we are king of England, and the kings of England in time past have never had any superior but God alone. Wherefore know you well that we shall maintain the right of our crown and of our temporal jurisdiction as well in this point as in all others.' The opinions of Standish were upheld.

This could perhaps be seen as the first movement of the great reformation of the sixteenth century, but the king was saying nothing new. The Statute of Provisors, in 1351, spoke of the 'Holy Church of England' in the reign of Edward III as distinct from 'the pope of Rome'. Richard II, at the end of the fourteenth century, was declared to be absolute emperor within his dominion. In 1485 Chief Justice Hussey declared that the king of England was answerable only to God and was superior to the pope within his realm. In fact Henry VII had repeatedly challenged the status of the Church by citing senior clergy for *praemunire*; he made it clear that he did not want another sovereign power within his kingdom, and in the appointment of bishops he preferred lawyers to theologians. The pope did not intervene.

It was perhaps odd that in his letter to Wolsey the bishop of London should accuse his flock of being altogether heretical, but under the circumstances it was a pardonable exaggeration. The bishop was simply adverting to the fact that among Londoners there was a long and persistent tradition of anti-clericalism. There had always been calls for the Church to be reformed or to come under the command of the king, and the clergy had been under attack from at least the fourteenth century. The parliaments of the 1370s and 1380s wished to remove clerics from high office, and in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 the archbishop of Canterbury was beheaded by the mob. The clergy, high and low, were accused of fornication and adultery; they spent their time hawking and hunting; they wore their hair long, and they lounged in taverns; they carried swords and daggers. It was a familiar litany of complaint, taken up in an earlier century by Chaucer and by Langland. Yet such abuse, such strident denunciations, were natural and inevitable in the case of an ancient institution. The Church of Rome was always in need of renovation and renewal.

The king had spoken, on a winter's day in Baynard's Castle, and Wolsey knelt before him. Yet the prelate had already become mighty. In the autumn of 1515, at the king's urgent request, Pope Leo X had conferred the red hat of a cardinal upon him. From this time forward he dressed in scarlet. He was the king's cardinal rather than the pope's cardinal, however, and thus could only assist the cause of royal supremacy. At the end of this year Wolsey was also appointed by Henry to be his new lord chancellor, the leading minister of the realm and holder of the Great Seal. He dominated the council of the king. All dispatches, to local justices or to ambassadors, now passed through his hands. No act of policy could be formulated without his active engagement. No senior post could be filled without his intervention. 'Were I to offer to resign,' he said, 'I am sure neither the king nor his nobles would permit it.'

In his command of domestic and international affairs, he needed much subtlety and dexterity. The death of Ferdinand of Spain in February 1516, and the succession of his grandson Charles at the age of sixteen, posed delicate problems of balance and influence. Charles's own titles bear evidence of the complexities of continental politics. He had been nominal ruler of Burgundy for

ten years, and assumed the crown of Spain as Charles I; three years later, he became ruler of the Holy Roman Empire as Charles V. His lands, in the south and centre of Europe, comprised the Habsburg inheritance that would dominate English foreign policy for the next hundred years. Another young monarch also claimed the ascendancy. Francis I had assumed the crown of France in 1515, at the age of twenty, and within nine months he had taken an army into northern Italy and captured Milan. This was a feat that Henry could only dream of accomplishing.

On May Day 1515, Henry asked for details about Francis from a Venetian envoy. 'Talk with me awhile,' he said. 'The King of France, is he as tall as I?' There was very little difference. 'Is he as stout?' No, he was not. 'What sort of legs has he?' They were thin or 'spare'. At this point the king of England opened his doublet, and placed his hand on his thigh. 'Look here. And I also have a good calf to my leg.' He said later that Francis was a Frenchman, and therefore could not be trusted.

Until the death of Henry these three young monarchs would vie for mastery, or at least temporary supremacy, and the international history of the time consists of their moves and counter-moves. There were treaties and secret agreements, skirmishes and wars, invasions and sieges. Europe became their playing field. In their respective courts, hunts and jousts and tournaments became the theatrical expression of power. But when three young men fight, the results are always likely to be bloody.

The emergence of these three powerful sovereigns also altered the whole balance of European power and, in particular, led inevitably to the relative decline in the authority of the pope. The power of kings was considered to be supreme, dominating Church and nobility. Charles and Francis were always to be engaged in contention, since their territories were adjacent one to another, and it was Henry's part to derive maximum benefit from their rivalry. They were not always engaged in open hostility, however, but tried to benefit from convenient betrothals and dynastic marriages. The birth of a daughter to Henry, on 18 February 1516, at last gave him a pawn in the great game. Nevertheless, Princess Mary was a severe disappointment to her father; he had hoped and prayed for a son and heir, but he disguised his dismay. 'We are both young,'

he said, 'if it be a girl this time, by the grace of God, boys will follow.' In this he was mistaken.

In the spring of 1517 a bill was posted upon one of the doors of St Paul's, complaining that 'the foreigners' were given too much favour by the king and council and they 'bought wools to the undoing of Englishmen'. This helped to inspire the riots of 'Evil May Day' in which the radicalism or insubordination of the London crowd became manifest. At the end of April a preacher had called upon Englishmen to defend their livings against 'aliens', by whom he meant the merchants from Florence and Venice, from Genoa and Paris. Wolsey had sent for the mayor on hearing news that, as he put it, 'your young and riotous people will rise and distress the strangers'. A disturbance of this kind was deeply troubling for an administration that had no police force or standing army to enforce its will.

The mayor denied any rumours of sedition but on the evening of 30 April 2,000 Londoners – with apprentices, watermen and serving men at their head – sacked the houses of the French and Flemish merchants. They also stormed the house of the king's secretary and threatened the residents of the Italian quarter. Wolsey, wary of trouble despite the assurances of the mayor, called in the armed retainers of the nobility as well as the ordnance of the Tower. More than 400 prisoners were taken, tried and found guilty of treason. Thirteen of them suffered the penalty of being hanged, drawn and quartered; their butchered remains were suspended upon eleven gallows set up within the city.

In a suitably elaborate ceremony the other rioters, with halters around their necks, were brought to Westminster Hall in the presence of the king. He was sitting on a lofty dais, from which eminence he condemned them all to death. Then Wolsey fell on his knees and begged the king to show compassion while the prisoners themselves called out 'Mercy, Mercy!' Eventually the king relented and granted them pardon. At which point they cast off their halters and, as a London chronicler put it, 'jumped for joy'.

It had been a close-run thing, but there is no disguising the

real scorn and even hatred between the court and the citizens. The nobility distrusted and despised the commonalty, a feeling returned in equal measure. It was believed, with some reason, that the bishops and the clergy took the nobles' part; the city's animus against them would play some role in the religious changes of later years. London itself had the capacity to stir riot and breed dissension, and was a constant source of disquiet to the king and his council.

Two or three weeks after the riots, a distemper fell upon the city and the country. In the early summer of 1517 a fever, accompanied by a profuse and foul-smelling sweat, began its progress. It was accompanied by sharp pains in the back and shoulders before moving to the liver; lethargy and drowsiness ensued, with a sleep that often led to death. Swift and merciless, it became known as the sweat or the sweating sickness; because it seems only to have attacked the English, in cities such as Calais and Antwerp, it was called '*sudor Anglicus*' or 'the English sweat'. It was also called 'Know Thy Master' or 'The Lord's Visitation'. Tens of thousands died. A physician of the time, Dr Caius, described how it 'immediately killed some in opening their windows, some in playing with children in their street doors; some in one hour, many in two, it destroyed; and at the longest to them that merrily dined, it gave a sorrowful supper'. A chance encounter in the street, a beggar knocking at the door, a kiss upon the cheek, could spell death.

The houses themselves might harbour the pestilence. Erasmus complained that the floors of English dwellings were covered with rushes that harboured 'expectorations, vomitings, the leakage of dogs and men, ale-droppings, scraps of fish and other abominations not to be mentioned'. Whenever there was a change in the weather, vapours of foul air were exhaled. In the streets the open sewers rolled their stagnant and turbid discharge down to the Thames.

In the summer of that year Thomas Wolsey himself fell sick of the sweat, with many of his household dying. Yet he was robust and determined. He could shake off any sickness without permanent injury to his strong constitution. On his recovery he made a pilgrimage to Walsingham; when he had faced death, he had made

a vow to pray at the shrine of Our Lady there, a replica of the house in Nazareth where Gabriel had appeared to Mary. After he had meditated and fasted, he continued with the business of the realm.

In the spring of the previous year he had spoken at length, to Henry and to the council, of the inefficiencies and enormities in the administration of justice. He was not a lawyer and had no training in the law, but his intelligence and self-reliance easily surmounted any doubts about his ability. He had decided, with the king, to reinforce the procedures of the law by means of a body known as the Star Chamber; in its judicial capacity, the king's council met in a chamber the roof of which was studded with stars.

Under the stars the lord chancellor could question and punish, in particular, the great ones of the realm. 'I trust,' he wrote, 'to learn them next term the law of the Star Chamber.' He punished lords for maintaining too many retainers, and knights for 'bearing' (bearing down on) their poorer tenants; he investigated cases of perjury and forgery; he regulated prices and food supplies, on the understandable assumption that scarcity might provoke riot. One of the principal functions of the chamber was to suppress or punish public disorder. He investigated the behaviour of the sheriffs. In the previous reign the Star Chamber had heard approximately twelve cases a year; under the direction of Wolsey it heard 120 in the same period.

Wolsey had his own court, too, known as the court of Chancery. This was a civil rather than a criminal court, where disputes over such matters as inheritance and contract were resolved. The plaintiffs could state their case in the vernacular, and defendants were obliged to appear by means of a 'subpoena writ'. It was an efficient way of hearing appeals against judgments in common law. It also provided a method by which the cardinal could keep a tight grip upon the business of the land. Wolsey went in procession to Westminster Hall each day, with two great crosses of silver carried before him together with his Great Seal and cardinal's hat; he dressed in crimson silk with a tippet or shoulder cape of sable. In his hand he carried an orange, hollowed out and filled with vinegar, pressed to his nose when he walked through

the crowd of suitors awaiting him. 'On [*sic*] my lords and masters,' his attendants called out, 'make way for my Lord's Grace!' John Skelton described his behaviour in the court of Chancery itself:

And openly in that place
 He rages and he raves
 And calls them cankered knaves . . .
 In the Star Chamber he nods and becks . . .
 Duke, earl, baron or lord
 To his sentence must accord.

He was resented by those whom he punished, but his ministrations seem to have been effective. In the late summer of 1517 he wrote to Henry with a certain amount of self-congratulation on the blessed state of the realm. 'Our Lord be thanked,' he said, 'it was never in such peace nor tranquillity.'

In this year, too, Wolsey established an inquiry into the causes of depopulation in the counties of England. The countryside had been changing for many generations, so slowly that the alteration had not been discernible until it was too late to do anything about it. By the time that the enclosure of land by the richer or more efficient farmers was recognized as a manifest injustice, it had become a simple fact that could not be reversed. A society of smallholders gave way to one of large tenant farmers with a class of landless labourers. So it is with all historical change. It proceeds over many decades, and many centuries, before becoming irrevocable.

Many tracts and pamphlets were written in the sixteenth century concerning the evils of enclosure. Thomas More's *Utopia* is in part directed against it. The enclosed land was used for the rearing of sheep rather than for the production of crops. More wrote that the sheep were now eating the people rather than the reverse. One shepherd took the place of a score of agricultural workers in the process, thus leading to the depopulation of large parts of the countryside. A bishop wrote to Wolsey that 'your heart would mourn to see the towns, villages, hamlets, manor places in ruin and decay, the people gone, the ploughs laid down'. When labourers were not needed, they moved on. The simple houses of the rural tenantry, once abandoned, were dissolved by

wind and rain; the walls crumbled, and the roofs fell, leaving only hillocks of earth to show where they had once stood. The village church might become a shelter for cattle. Yet it was hard, then and now, to identify the causes of this decay. The distress of the early sixteenth century may have been caused by a series of bad harvests and a steadily growing population, for example, rather than a suddenly accelerated rate of enclosure. A population of approximately three million was below the peak of the early fourteenth century, but it was increasing all the time.

Enclosure itself had been a fact of farming ever since the fourteenth century, when the 'pestilence' or 'black death' took a large toll upon the population. With the lowered demand for corn, the land had to be put to different uses. Fields lying idle were cheap, also, and a steady process of purchase began that continued well into the eighteenth century. There were barters and exchanges between farmers, with the wealthiest or the most resourceful getting the best of the bargain. Many of the once open fields were enclosed with hedges of hawthorn. It was estimated that the value of enclosed land was one and a half times that of the rest. The process could not be prevented or halted. It came to a crisis, as we shall see, a generation later.

The state of the realm was still very largely the state of an agricultural society. It was comprised of freeholders and leaseholders, customary tenants and labourers, all owing allegiance to their lord. Their houses were grouped closely together, with the fields stretching around them. It was a society immensely susceptible to the vagaries of the weather, where one bad harvest could spell disaster.

In what had always been a world of tradition and of custom, the previous ties of the manor system were now giving way to the new laws of the market. Custom was being replaced by law and contract. Communal effort was slowly supplanted by competition. 'Now the world is so altered for the poor tenant,' one contemporary wrote, 'that he stands in bodily fear of his greedy neighbour – so that, two or three years before his lease ends, he must bow to his lord for a new lease.' The larger farmers wished to sell their produce to the rising populations of the towns and the cities; the smaller farmers were reduced to subsistence agriculture, by which

they ate what they grew. Land was no longer the common ground of society, the management of which entailed social responsibilities. It had become a simple investment. So the customary rent for a tenant was replaced by what was known as the 'rack rent' or market rent. The process was very slow and very long, not really coming to an end until the eighteenth century. Yet the communal farming of the past, with its own co-operative rituals and customs, was not destined to endure. In this respect the movement of agriculture may be compared with the movement of religion.

There is indeed an affinity. The common fields along the coastal plains of Westmorland and Northumberland, for example, harboured an attachment to the old religion. The corn-growing villages of East Anglia and eastern Kent, engaged in the commercial production of food, were committed to the reform of faith. It seems clear enough that religious radicalism prospered in the eastern counties, and was held back in the north and in the west. Yet there are so many exceptions and special cases that even these generalizations are susceptible to doubt. The eastern part of Sussex espoused the new faith, for example, while the western part supported the old. It can only be said with some degree of certainty that the time of the 'new men' was approaching.

3

Heretic!



In 1517 or 1518 some Cambridge scholars began to meet at the White Horse tavern in that city where, like undergraduates before and since, they debated the intellectual issues of the time. The pressing matters of this time, however, were all concerned with religion; it was at the heart of sixteenth-century debate. Some of these scholars, with all the ardour of youth, were attracted to new and potentially subversive doctrines. Reform was in the air. Some of them wished to return to the simple piety of the movements known as the Poor Catholics or the Humiliati; they wished to eschew the pomp and ceremony of the medieval Church, and to cultivate what was called *devotio moderna*, 'modern devotion'. Others wished to return to the word of the Scriptures, and in particular of the New Testament.

The published work of Desiderius Erasmus had already brought a purer spirit into theological enquiry. While Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Queens' College, Cambridge, he completed a Greek and Latin translation of the New Testament which seemed destined to supersede the old 'Vulgate' that had been in use for a thousand years. Erasmus, by an act of historical scholarship, brought back something of the air of early Christian revelation.

He believed that the rituals and the formal theology of the Church were less important than the spiritual reception of the message

of the Scriptures; an inward faith, both in God's grace and in the redemptive power of His Son, was of more efficacy than conformity to external worship. 'If you approach the Scriptures in all humility,' he wrote, 'you will perceive that you have been breathed upon by the Holy Will.' By means of satire he also attacked the excessive devotion to relics, the too frequent resort to pilgrimages, and the degeneration of the monastic orders. He rarely mentions the sacraments that were part of the divine machinery of the orthodox faith.

He never advanced into heretical doctrine, but he was as much a dissolvent of conventional piety as Luther or Wycliffe. Without Erasmus, neither Luther nor Tyndale could have translated the Greek testament. He also entertained the hope that the Scriptures would be freely available to everyone, an aspiration that, at a later date, would be deemed almost heretical. One of the scholars who attended the meetings in the White Horse tavern, Thomas Bilney, declared that on reading Erasmus 'at last I heard of Jesus'. Bilney was later to be burned at the stake.

Erasmus has conventionally been described as a 'humanist', although the word itself did not appear in this sense until the beginning of the nineteenth century. In general terms humanism, or the 'new learning' at the beginning of the sixteenth century, concerned itself with a renovation of education and scholarship by the pursuit of newly found or newly translated classical models. It brought with it a profound scepticism of medieval authority, and of the scholastic theology that supported it. The new learning opened the windows of the Church in search of light and fresh air. The somewhat commonplace anti-clericalism of the Lollards had become outmoded in an age of constructive criticism and renovation, and it seemed likely that the universal Church would be able to renew itself.

In the autumn of 1517 Martin Luther spoke out, lending a more fiery and dogmatic charge to the general calls for reform. He was close to Erasmus in many respects, but he quickly moved beyond him in his assertion of justification by faith alone. Faith comes as a gift from God to the individual without the interference of rituals and priests. The Church cannot, and should not, come between Christ and the aspiring soul. A person saved by the

sacrifice of Christ will be granted eternal life. Grace will lift the soul to heaven. For those not saved by faith, the only destination is the everlasting fire.

In a series of pamphlets Luther attacked the beliefs and hierarchies of the orthodox faith. The pope in Rome was the Antichrist. There were only two sacraments, those of baptism and holy communion, rather than the seven adumbrated by the Church. Every good Christian man was already a priest. Grace and faith were enough for salvation. The words of Scripture should stand alone. 'I will talk no more with this animal,' Cardinal Cajetan wrote after conferring with him in 1518, 'for he has deep eyes, and wonderful speculations in his head.'

Luther had been read and discussed in Cambridge ever since the monk had nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. The White Horse tavern was nicknamed 'Germany' as the Lutheran creed was discussed within its walls, and the participants were known as 'Germans'. They were, however, an eclectic group; among them were Thomas Cranmer and William Tyndale, Nicholas Ridley and Matthew Parker. Two of them became archbishops, seven became bishops, and eight became martyrs burned at the stake. This was an exhilarating, and also a dangerous, time.

The reading of Luther deepened the instinctive beliefs of some who debated in the White Horse. The doctrine of justification by faith alone has no parallel in Wycliffe, but many of the other anti-clerical doctrines had been expressed for the previous two centuries. Never before, however, had they been shaped with such cogency and coherence. The pulpit of the little Cambridge church of St Edward, King and Martyr, became the platform from which preachers such as Thomas Bilney, Robert Barnes and Hugh Latimer proclaimed the new truths. Faith only did justify, and works did not profit. If you can only once believe that Jesus Christ shed His precious blood, and died on the cross for your sins, the same belief will be sufficient for your salvation. There was no need for priests, or bishops, or even cardinals.

In the spring of 1518, at the urgent instigation of the king, Wolsey was appointed as papal legate; he became the representative of Rome at the court of which he was already chief minister. He

embodied everything that the reformers abhorred; he was the whore in scarlet. Whenever he made a submission as the pope's envoy he left the court and then ceremonially reappeared in his fresh role. Yet there was no disguising the fact that the Church and the royal council were now being guided by the same hand. The truth of the matter was not lost upon the king, who would at a later date assert his royal sovereignty over both. Wolsey taught Henry that it was possible to administer and effectively run the Church without the interference of any external power. The king would at a later date, therefore, take over the cardinal's role and in the process greatly enlarge it.

Wolsey's status as papal legate gave him additional power to reform the English Church. He began in the spring of 1519 by sending 'visitors' to various monasteries in order to record the conditions and habits of the monks, where of course they found various levels of disorder and abuse. The abbot brought his hounds into the church; the monks found solace in the tavern; the prior had been seen with the miller's wife. This had always been the small change of monastic life, and had largely become accepted as the way of the world. But Wolsey punished the principal offenders and sent out strict regulations or statutes to guide future conduct.

His severity did not of course prevent him from growing rich in his own manner with a collection of ecclesiastical posts. He was in succession bishop of Bath and Wells, bishop of Durham and bishop of Winchester; these were held in tandem with the archbishopric of York, and in 1521 he obtained the richest abbey of the land in St Albans. His tables groaned with gold and silver plate and the walls of his palaces were hung with the richest tapestries. Wolsey was without doubt the richest man in England – richer even than the king, whose income was curtailed by large responsibilities – but he always argued that his own magnificence helped to sustain the power of the Church.

At a slightly later date he suppressed some twenty-nine monastic houses and used their revenues to finance a school in Ipswich and a college, Cardinal's College, which he intended to build at Oxford. The obscure devotions of a few monks and nuns should not stand in the way of a great educational enterprise. He was interested in good learning as well as good governance; indeed they

could not properly be distinguished. So the work of the Church continued even as it was being denounced and threatened by the 'new men', otherwise called 'gospellers' and 'known men'.

At the end of 1520 the doctrines of Luther were deemed to be heretical and his books were banned. They 'smelled of the frying pan', resting on the fires of Smithfield and of hell itself. In the spring of the following year, Wolsey in a great ceremony burned Luther's texts on a pyre set up in St Paul's Churchyard. Yet it was already too late to staunch the flow of the new doctrines. The known men were, according to Thomas More, 'busily walking' in every alehouse and tavern, where they expounded their doctrines. More was already a privy councillor and servant of the court. The supposed heretics were present at the Inns of Court where fraternal bonds could be converted to spiritual bonds. They were 'wont to resort to their readings in a chamber at midnight'. They began to congregate in the Thames Valley and in parts of Essex as well as London. In the parish church of Rickmansworth, in Hertfordshire, certain people flung the statues and the rood screen upon a fire. It was a portent of later iconoclasm in England.

Luther's books came into the country, from the ports of the Low Countries and from the cities of the Rhineland, as contraband smuggled in sacks of cloth. Yet the tracts did not only reach the disaffected. They also reached the king. On 21 April 1521 Henry was seen to be reading Luther's *De Captivitate Babylonica Ecclesiae* ('On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church') and in the following month he wrote to Pope Leo X of his determination to suppress the heresies contained in that tract. Wolsey suggested to the king that he might care to be distinguished from other European princes by showing himself to be erudite as well as orthodox. So with the help of royal servants such as More the king composed a reply to Luther entitled *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*, 'In Defence of the Seven Sacraments'.

It was not a brilliant or enthralling work, but it served its purpose. The pope professed to be delighted by it, and conferred on Henry the title of *Fidei Defensor*, 'Defender of the Faith'. It was not supposed to be inherited, but the royal family have used it ever since. Luther composed a reply to the reply, in the course of which he denounced Henry as 'the king of lies' and a 'damnable and

rotten worm'. As a result Henry was never warmly disposed towards Lutheranism and, in most respects, remained an orthodox Catholic.

The pope died two months after conferring the title upon the king, and there were some who believed that Wolsey himself might ascend to the pontificate. Yet the conclave of cardinals was never likely to elect an Englishman, and in any case Wolsey had pressing business with the Church in England alone. His visitations of the monasteries were only one aspect of his programme for clerical reform. He devised new constitutions for the secular or non-monastic clergy and imposed new statutes on the Benedictine and Augustinian monks. He guided twenty monastic elections to gain favourable results for his candidates, and dismissed four monastic heads.

In the spring of 1523 he dissolved a convocation of senior clergy at Canterbury and summoned them to Westminster, where he imposed a new system of taxation on their wealth. Bishops and archbishops would in the future be obliged to pay him a 'tribute' before they could exercise their jurisdictions. He proposed reforms in the ecclesiastical courts, too, and asserted that all matters involving wills and inheritances should be handled by him. The Church had never been so strictly administered since the days of Henry II. The fact that, in pursuit of his aims, Wolsey issued papal bulls, letters or charters sanctioned by the Vatican, served further to inflame the English bishops against him.

Yet he was protected by the shadow of the king. Wolsey was doing Henry's bidding, so that his ascendancy virtually guaranteed royal supremacy. There was no longer any antagonism between what later became known as 'Church' and 'State'; they were united in the same person. At this stage, however, the question of doctrinal reform did not arise, and Wolsey paid only nominal attention to the spread of heresy in the kingdom. He was concerned with the discipline and efficiency of the Church, and in particular with the exploitation of its wealth.

Wolsey's role as papal legate involved other duties. It was his responsibility as the pope's representative to bring peace to the Christian princes of Europe, as a preliminary to a united crusade

against the Turks. In matters of diplomacy the cardinal was a master and through 1518 he continued negotiations with Maximilian of the Holy Roman Empire, Francis of France and Charles of Spain. Their representatives came to London in the autumn of that year and swore a treaty of universal peace that became known as the Treaty of London. The cardinal had engineered it, and the cardinal took the credit. There was a passing allusion to the possibility of a crusade and the pope was named only as *comes* or 'associate' in the negotiations. 'We can see,' one cardinal wrote, 'what the Holy See and the pope have to expect from the English chancellor.'

The English chancellor was in the ascendant. In the fourteen years of his authority as lord chancellor he called only one parliament. When the Venetian ambassador first arrived in the kingdom, Wolsey used to declare to him that 'His Majesty will do so and so'. The phrase then changed to 'We shall do so and so' until it finally became 'I will do so and so'. Yet he was always aware of where the real power and authority lay; he remained in charge of affairs as long as he obeyed the king's will. The achievement of the cardinal, with the Treaty of London, was also the triumph of his sovereign. The king's honour was always the most important element in foreign calculations. Henry himself seemed pleased with the accomplishment. 'We want all potentates to content themselves with their own territories,' he told the Venetian ambassador, 'and we are satisfied with this island of ours.' He wrote some verses in this period that testify to his contentment.

The best ensue; the worst eschew;
My mind shall be
Virtue to use, vice refuse,
Thus shall I use me.

Yet he was considerably less contented when, in February 1519, the Holy Roman Emperor died and was succeeded in that title by his grandson Charles of Spain. At the age of nineteen Charles was now the nominal master of Austria, Poland, Switzerland, Germany and the Low Countries as well as Spain itself; he thus decided the fate of half of Europe.

The three young kings now engaged in elaborate ceremonies

of peace that could also be construed as games of war. In the summer of 1520 Henry set sail for France in the *Great Harry*, with a retinue of 4,000, on his way to meet the king of France. He sailed in splendour, and the place of their encounter became known as the Field of Cloth of Gold. The Vale of Ardres, close to the English enclave of Calais, had been decorated with pavilions and palaces, towers and gateways, artificial lakes and bridges, statues and fountains that gushed forth beer and wine. Henry was arrayed in what was called 'fine gold in bullion', while Francis in turn was too dazzling to be looked upon. Masses were combined with jousts and feats and wrestling matches, with the celebrations lasting for seventeen days. The event was described as the eighth wonder of the world. A rich tapestry had come to life. The importance of treaties lay not in their content but in the manner of their making. They were expressions of power rather than of amity.

Yet there were secret dealings behind the arras. Even before Henry sailed to France, Charles of Spain had arrived at Dover, to be greeted by Henry himself. Charles was escorted with great ceremony to Canterbury, where he met his aunt Katherine of Aragon for the first time. Three days of dancing and feasting also included hours of negotiation. After meeting the French king at the Field of Cloth of Gold, Henry moved on to Calais, where he colluded once more with Charles. All their plans were against France. Henry himself wished once more to claim the French crown as part of his inalienable birthright.

On these same summer nights, when sovereigns slept in their pavilions of gold, the London watch was searching for 'suspected persons'. They reported that a tailor and two servants played cards and dice until four in the morning, when the game was forcibly suspended and the players mentioned to the constable. In Southwark and Stepney, in pursuit of 'vagabond and misdemeanoured persons', the watch found many 'masterless men' living in ragged tenements. Ten Germans were taken up in Southwark. An 'old drab and a young wench' were found lying upon a dirty sheet in a cellar; on the upstairs floor Hugh Lewis and Alice Ball were 'taken in bed together, not being man and wife'. Anne Southwick was questioned in the Rose tavern at Westminster on suspicion of being a whore. Carters were found sleeping against the walls of a

tavern. Mowers and haymakers, makers of tile and brick, were duly noted as dwelling peaceably in the inns of the suburbs. Men and women went about their business, legal or otherwise. And so the summer passed.