



THOMAS WOLSEY AND THOMAS CROMWELL steered Henry's ship of state for twenty-two years. Wolsey, born a butcher's son in Ipswich, became one of the most powerful ministers of all time. At the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1519 he was attended by 300 servants, but failure to secure Henry's divorce brought about his downfall in 1529. Cromwell was Henry's chief adviser from 1532 onwards until destroyed in 1540 by the unlucky Cleves marriage. He is shown here in his mid-forties as a man of business, plainly dressed, and seated at a green-baize table.

apparent, and the queen showed an increasing tendency to plumpness and piety. The succession of Mary as queen in her own right would be without precedent, and, to a sixteenth-century mind, the guarantee of a disputed succession, a civil war, or, at least, domination by a foreign power through marriage. It seemed for a moment in 1525 as if Henry toyed with the idea of grooming for the succession his illegitimate son by Mary Blount: the six-year-old boy was created duke of Richmond and Lord High Admiral, and invested with the order of the Garter. But, in the end, Henry turned towards the thought of divorce and remarriage. Discussion of suitable candidates commenced.

When the question of obtaining a divorce from the papacy was first raised, there was no reason to believe it hopeless. There was, at the least, a respectable case in canon law that the marriage to Catherine had been invalid from the outset. Leviticus 20: 21 was a heavy text: marriage to a deceased brother's wife was specifically prohibited and the couple were warned that they would be childless. Catherine maintained that her marriage to Arthur had never been