BOOK 1, CHAPTER 15

The King Pressures the Legate, the Pope Remands the Case to Himself, and Wolsey is Arrested

Seeing that Campeggio was unwilling to bring the matter to a close, each day finding new excuses and delays, the king sent Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk, and Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk, with a huge retinue to where the legates were seated in the tribunal, to beg them in their own names and in the king’s to conclude: to dispense and liberate the king, and soothe the tormented royal conscience. Wolsey kept silent, though he was seated in the first place, for he was overcome with terror. Campeggio took charge [tomò la mano] and attempted to placate them, but the dukes would have none of it, and forcefully pressed him to render judgment that very day, or the next at the very latest. When the cardinal replied that he could not possibly do so, the infuriated duke of Suffolk pounded the table before the legates and shouted, “By the blessed host, neither legate nor cardinal has ever brought any good to England!” Thus spoke the wretched duke, drunk with wine, or with the venom of his frenzied rage, or with his ambition and his desire to please the king. Yet, how our Lord was to punish the pride and flattery with which these dukes sought to win the king’s favor, taking as his instrument the king himself and his children—especially the daughter born to the marriage they so desired—is manifest in the calamities that befell them and their houses. The dukes left the court fuming with rage, and stirred up the king, already scorched in the flames of his lust, feeding the fire with yet more wood.

When the pope learned of what had happened, he accepted the queen’s perfectly just appeal and remanded the case to himself, to be heard in the Rota,

1 Sander, De origine ac progressu, 66–71.
2 Thomas Howard (1473–1554), third duke of Norfolk, a leading proponent of the king’s marriage to Anne Boleyn (his niece).
3 Fletcher, following Cavendish, dates this incident to July 31, 1529, when Campeggio announced that, as per the Roman legal calendar, the legatine court would adjourn until October. Fletcher, Cardinal Wolsey, 152.

The wording of Suffolk’s outburst varies from writer to writer: Sander seems to be following Harpsfield: “The Duke of Suffolk, giving a great clappe on the table with his hand, did swear that there was never cardinall that did good in England, and forthwith departed in great anger.”

ordering the legates to proceed no further. As soon as the queen heard of this, she sent to the king through his councilor, Thomas More, a man famous for learning and virtue (as has been said), to inform him of the pope’s mandate and to learn whether he wished to be officially notified of the summons, when, and by whom. Though the king was inwardly perturbed, he dissembled for the moment, answering that he was already aware of it; that it was not his will to be personally notified of the summons, but that the legates might be informed; that he was pleased the matter should be heard in Rome, as a place common to all parties and above suspicion; and that he would strive to have it settled there for good. The king said all this most humbly, for he hoped that the pope would revoke his order; with this dream he sustained himself and felt less aggrieved. Notice was given to the legates by several of the queen’s lawyers and one of the king’s, who publicly stated that the king’s will was that the matter should proceed no further in England, but rather be decided and concluded in Rome.

The legates complied with His Holiness’s orders and began to hope that King Henry would accept better advice, when the pope suddenly directed Cardinal Campeggio to return to Rome with all speed. The king was dumbfounded, as though he had been struck, and lost all hope of achieving his goal; his fury knew no bounds. Recalling that Wolsey had been the first instigator of the divorce, he began to heap the blame upon him, to rage against him, to abhor him—and to show this openly. There were many in King Henry’s court who hated Wolsey (as there are men in every great prince’s court who take exception to those with influence and power), some out of envy, others out of their own ambitions or grievances, and others out of chagrin that a lowborn man

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4 Through the summer of 1529, Clement came under increasing imperial pressure to advocate the divorce case to himself, and equally vigorous pressure from the English ambassadors not to do so. On September 1, the pope wrote to the two legates in England, advocating the matter to Rome. L.P., 4:5966.

5 Henry wrote to Clement VII on September 30, 1529, protesting Campeggio’s peremptory recall: “On the return to your Holiness of cardinal Campeggio, we could have wished, not less for your sake than our own, that all things had been so expedited as to have corresponded to our expectations, not rashly conceived, but owing to your promises. As it is, we are compelled to regard with grief and wonder the incredible confusion which has arisen. If the Pope can relax Divine laws at his pleasure, surely he has as much power over human laws. Complains that he has often been deceived by the Pope’s promises, on which there is no dependence to be placed; and that his dignity has not been consulted in the treatment he has received. If the Pope, as his ambassadors write, will perform what he has promised, and keep the cause now advoked to Rome in his own hands, until it can be decided by impartial judges, and in an indifferent place, in a manner satisfactory to the King’s scruples, he will forget what is past, and repay kindness by kindness, as Campeggio will explain.” Ibid., 4:5966.