

Henry VIII abbreviated

Act 3, Scene 2

Introspection

Situation: Seen as one who seeks “to gain the popedom” and through his writings having “brought the king to be your servant,” Cardinal Wolsey submits to taunting and mocking by several nobles. The hazing ends when Chamberlain says “press not a falling man too far.”

SUFFOLK: Lord Cardinal, the King’s further pleasure is that such a writ be sued against you, to forfeit all your goods, lands, tenements, and whatsoever. This is my charge.

NORFOLK: For your stubborn answer about the giving back the great seal to us, the King shall know it and, no doubt, shall thank you. So, fare you well.

WOLSEY: So, farewell to the little good you bear me.

All exit but Wolsey.

Wolsey to himself

Farewell? A long farewell to my greatness!
Man’s state of being is as a leafless
Tree where tender buds of hope soon blossom
Bearing blushing honors thick upon him;
Then comes the first killing frost that doth doom
His dream, nipping this thoughts-of-greatness whim,
And then he falls. I have ventured many
Summers swimming like young boys in a sea
Far beyond their depth. My high-blown pride at
Length broke under me and has left me to
The mercy of the uncivil stream that
Must forever hide me. That poor man who
Hangs on princes’ favors risks his ruin,
For if he falls he’ll never hope again.

Cromwell enters, standing amazed.

WOLSEY: Why, how now, Cromwell?

CROMWELL: I have no power to speak, sir.

WOLSEY: What, amazed at my misfortunes? Can thy spirit wonder a great man should decline? Why, well. I know myself now, and I feel within me a peace above all earthly dignities, a still and quiet conscience. The King has from these shoulders taken a load would sink a navy: too much honor.

CROMWELL: I am glad your Grace has made that right use of it.