

Thomas More Reader: Countryfolk Stories and Animal Fables: Part Two

15. "The Old Sage of Sandwich Haven"

[From *A Dialogue concerning Heresies* : Works, pp. 277a-278a].

And now where they lay for a proof that God were not contented with battle made against infidels, [with] the loss and minishment of Christendom since that guise began, they fare as did once an old sage Father Fool in Kent, at such time as divers men of worship assembled old folk of the country to commune and devise about the amendment of Sandwich Haven.

At which time as they began first to ensearch by reason and by the report of old men there about what thing had been the occasion that so good an haven was in so few years so sore decayed, and such sands risen, and such shallow flats made therewith, that right small vessels had now much work to come in at divers tides where great ships were, within few years passed, accustomed to ride without difficulty; and some laying the fault to Goodwin Sands, some to the Lands End, by diverse owners in the Isle of Thanet out of the channel, in which the sea was wont to compass the Isle and bring the vessels round about it, whose course at the ebb was wont to scour the haven, which now the sea excluded thence, for lack of such course and scouring is choked up with sand, as they thus alleged, divers men, divers causes.

Then start[ed] up one good old father and said, "Ye masters, say every man what he will, cha marked this matter well as some others, and, by God, I wot how it waxed nought well enough. For I knew it good and have marked so chafe when it began to wax worse." "And what hath hurt it, good father?" quoth the gentlemen. "By my faith, master," quoth he, "yonder same Tenterdon Steeple and nothing else, that by the mass chalde twere a fair fish-pole." "Why, hath the steeple hurt the haven, good father?" quoth they. "Nay, byr Lady, master," quoth he "iche cannot tell you well why, but chote well it hath. For, by God, I knew it a good haven till that steeple was builded, and, by the Mary mass, cha marked it well it never throve since."

And thus "wisely" spake these holy Lutherans, which sowing schisms and seditions among Christian people lay the loss thereof to the withstanding of the Turks' invasion and the resisting of his malice, where they should rather (if they had any reason in their heads) lay it to the contrary.

NOTES

(1) **Sandwich Haven** was a port some twelve miles east of Canterbury, the presumed landing place of Julius Caesar, Hengist and Horsa, and of St. Augustine of Canterbury. It became useless as a harbor in Elizabethan times because the passage of the Wantsum river became choked with sand. Apparently it was fast filling up during More's day. **Goodwin Sands** is a shoal off the coast of Kent between the Isle of Thanet (no longer an island) and South Foreland (not far from Sandwich Haven), notorious for its shifting sands. **The old "sage"** speaks in south-east Kentish

dialect, a form of dialect used frequently by sixteenth-century dramatists. "'Cha" "chave" (I have), "cholde" (I would), "chote" (I wot)—are all examples of the aphetic form of *Ich* plus the verb. Compare More's use of *northern* dialect in his tale of "The Court of "Pie-Sir-William-Pounder" (see No. 99). **The steeple of Tenterden** church was about 322 feet high, visible for miles in all directions. The steeple became popular in sixteenth-century proverbs connoting stupidity.

More's tale of the "wise" old man was re-told by Bishop Hugh Latimer in his "Last Sermon preached before Edward VI, at Lent, Westminster," (*Sermons* , ca. 1550, p. 216).

(2) **The Turks' invasion** : The accession of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in 1520 was the prelude to major assaults by the Turks in the Balkans and the Mediterranean lands. By 1529 Turkish armies had overrun Hungary and laid siege to Vienna. (See No. 31)

16. "Sandwich Haven, Revisited"

[From *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* ; Works, p. 709a-b]

But now sith God hath himself written these conclusions so fully in their hearts, Tyndale needeth not, it seemeth, to make them so long a sermon. But as though he feared yet for all his words that God had not so fair written it but that some of them could not read it, he goeth forth with his collation of a great length and teacheth them after his fashion what is very ' worshipping, and then a long process of images, pilgrimages, sacraments, and ceremonies. In all which long sermon, he saith at length nothing; but either such as is so commonly known already that a man may hear his wife tell much to her maid, or else so foolish that a very noddypoll nidiot ' might be ashamed to say it; or finally, so false and blasphemous, as scanty the devil durst teach it, saving that in the end he gathereth a little his five wits well about him and expoundeth there the words of the poor Kentishman (which I rehearse in my dialogue concerning Sandwich Haven destroyed through Tenterden Steeple). And there to knit up all his whole sermon with, he concluded against me that of very truth the building of Tenterden Steeple and other steeples and churches in the realm have been indeed the very destruction both of Sandwich Haven and Dover Haven, and all the other havens of England; and of all the good besides that by good policy might in any wise have come and grown to the realm.

And thus with this goodly quip against me for his *qui cum Patre* , lacking no more but an exhortation in the end that men should therefore pull down Tenterden Steeple, and so should Sandwich Haven amend; and pull down all the churches in the realm, and so should need no more policy to make a merry world: the good godly man maketh an end of his holy sermon, and gaspeth a little and galpeth ' and getteth him down off the pulpit.

NOTES

(1) **"qui cum Patre"** : The words are taken from the liturgical prayer, " *Jesum Christum qui cum Patre et Spiritu Sancto vivit et regnat in unitate perfecta, Deus in saecula saeculorum.* " William Tyndale concluded or rather "knit up all his whole sermon" with a kind of spiritual resolution, appealing to one's faith and not (in regards to the Tenterden Steeple) to one's reason.

17. "A Stumbling Horse"

[From *The Debellation of Salem and Bizance*; Works, p. 1139]

I wot well the best horse were he which were so sure of foot that, run he never so fast, would never in his life neither fall nor stumble. But sith we can find none so sure, that horse is not much to be misliked which that with courage and pricking forth in haste, happening, for all his four feet, sometimes to catch a fall, getteth up again lightly by himself without touch of spur or any check of the bridle. No, nor yet that horse to be cast away neither that getteth up again apace with the check of them both. Now like as with the best kind can I not compare, so of the third sort at the leastwise will I never fail to be, that is, to wit, rise and reform myself when any man shew me my fault.

And as near as I can, will I search them; and as soon as I spy them, before any man control them, arise and, as I now do, mine own self reform them. Which kind is, you wot well, next unto the best. But yet on the other side of all mine adversaries could I never hitherto find anyone, but when he catcheth once a fall (as each of them hath caught full many) there lieth he still tumbling and toltering 'in the mire, and neither spur nor bridle can none inch prevail; but as though they were not fallen in a puddle of dirt but rubbed and laid in litter under the manger at their ease, they whine and they bite, and they kick and they spurn at him that would help them up. And that is yet a fourth kind, the worst, ye wot well, that can be.

NOTES

(1) See CW 10, pp. 319-322 for "More's Correction of his own error in the *Debellation*". More added four pages to the *Debellation* to correct an error; these pages were printed between the errata and the colophon of *The Answer to a Poisoned Book* (sigs. N4-N6) and reprinted (on an extra leaf) after the end of *The Answer to a Poisoned Book* in some copies of the English Works of 1557, as in the case of the copytext for this *Reader*.

18. "Wilkin's Wager with Simkin"

[From *A Dialogue concerning Heresies* : Works, pp. 215b-216b]

If it so were that Wilkin had laid a wager with Simkin that a certain way named between them [was] usual "enough for men and horse both—there had gone of late often an horse or two—and that he would so clearly prove it that it could not be the contrary; [and] if Simkin said and laid his wager the contrary and then they both should choose us for judges and we coming all four into the way, Wilkin would shew us on the ground part in the clay and part peradventure in the snow the print of horse feet and of men's feet also by a long way ten miles together, and yet will, till they come at a water where as went away by ship, no man can tell who nor whither—it forceth "not for our wise case, but now, if Wilkin would say that he had won his wager—for lo, here ye see the print of the horse feet all this way [with] shoes and all with the very nails in them, so that it may be none otherwise but horse hath gone here. If Simkin after all this would say the

wager were his, for it is not proved that any horse had gone there (for it might be that they were geldings or mares)—here were we fallen in a great question of the law: whether the gray mare may be the better horse or not; or whether he have a wise face or not that looketh as like a fool as an ewe looketh like a sheep.

"And in this question, if the parties demurred ¹² in our judgment, we might ask advice further of learned men and judges." "We might," quoth he, "by suit (to be sure of the matter) make it an Chequer Chamber case. Or, saving the *praemunire*, we might have it tried in the *Rota* at Rome." "Very well," quoth I, "so that I see well by your wit and mine together, one shift ¹³ or other we should find for a small end therein, if the doubt were in that point. But now, if Simkin sticked ¹⁴ not thereto but would say thus: 'Lo, here ye see the men have gone this way: and how can ye then be sure that any horse went here?'" "For I put case ¹⁵," saith he, "that these men which went here had horse shoes in their hands made fast upon long steels ¹⁶, and always as they went pricked them down hard in the ground." "Tut," quoth he, "this were a wise invention." "Verily," quoth I, "to me it would not seem very gay ¹⁷. But now if Simkin were contentious and would say the wager were his except it be so proved that it can be none otherwise but that horses have of late gone there and then will say to us, 'Lo, sirs, as ye see it, it may be otherwise. For men might make with their hands all the prints of horse shoes in the ground. 'And then if we be sure thereof while we can not say nay but 'it might be so.' And then would still press upon us with this question, 'May it not be so?'" "It may," quoth he, "by possibility be so." "Then," quoth I, "when we grant him once that it may be so then will he by and by ¹⁸ put case that it were so. And then if we grant him his case once for the possibility then will he shortly conclude that the other part is not so surely proved, as it must be if Wilkin should win the wager. What should we say to him now? To whom should we give the wager." "In faith," quoth he, "I wot ner ¹⁹ what to say to him. And the matter is so mad that as for the wager, what I would give Wilkin I wot ner. But as for Simkin, except he better impugned the proof, if the wager were but a butterfly I would never award him one wing." "Surely," quoth I, "and you shall rule that matter for me. For if ye give him nought he getteth as little of me. But now what if he wax angry that his proper invention were no more set by nor his wit no more regarded, and would thereupon help forth his part with his oath and swear upon a book that himself saw when the men made those prints in the ground with horse shoes holden in their hands? What would ye then say?" "Marry," quoth he, "then would I say, and swear too, that beside the loss of his wager he had, like a false foolish knave, lost his honesty and his soul too." "In good faith," quoth I, "and for ought I see yet I durst be bold to swear with you. And then setting Wilkin alone with Simkin disputing their sophisms ²⁰ themselves, let us return home again to our own matter."

NOTES

1) **Simkin** : More presumably coined the name "Simkin" for his rustic's friend using the diminutive form of *Simon*, a fool or simpleton (cf. his joke about the names of towns, "Silly soul Simkin Salem, and his right honest neighbor, brother Byzance," in his attack on Christopher St.-German in his *Debellation of Salem and Bizance* [Works, p. 962]), The original source of the name "Wilkin" may perhaps be found in the "only true fabliau in English before Chaucer," the "Tale of Dame Siriz," in which a lecherous priest, Wilekin, pays Siriz, a go-between, in order to try to satisfy his lust with a chaste merchant's wife. In criticizing More's argument, William Tyndale alludes to these rustics when he says More "jesteth out the matter with Wilkin and

Simken (as he doth Hunne and every thing)" in *An Answere unto Sir Thomas Mores Dialogue* , 1530, f. 91 v.

(2) **whether the gray mare may be the better horse or not:** a proverbial allusion to the perennial debate as to whether the wife or the husband "rules the roost."

(3) **Chequer Chamber** was a court of appellate jurisdiction which decided cases of doubtful law whether to take a case from a lower to a higher court. It was originally confined to cases affecting revenue. **Saving the praemunire** : i.e., were it not for the law which prohibits one from obeying any other authority than that of the Crown. **Rota** : Presumably More refers to the *Sacra Romana Rota*, a tribunal of ten prelates that served as a court of appeal in the Vatican City. At the time of writing the *Heresies* (1528) More was obviously not alluding to Parliament's Act of Succession (November, 1534) which declared Henry VIII to be the only supreme head on earth of the Church of England.

19. "Filthy Hogs and Fierce Dogs"

[From *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* ; Works, p. 586a-b]

Tyndale: Howbeit there be swine that receive no learning, but to defile it; and there be dogs that read all good learning with their teeth?

More: If there be such swine and such dogs, as indeed there be, as Our Saviour himself witnesseth in the gospel; if this, I say, be truth as it is that Tyndale telleth us now, then is it false that Tyndale told us afore, that is, to wit, that all standeth in teaching. For those swine and those dogs will be nought for all the good teaching. And then to keep such from doing harm we must not only teach and preach but unto such as will be like swine we must yoke them for breaking hedges and ring them for wrooting ²¹, and have bandogs ²² to drive them out of the corn with biting, and lead them out by the ears.

And if there be such dogs, as indeed there be, that rend all good learning with their teeth, then standeth not all the pith of good living in good teaching. For what availeth to teach them that will not learn, but rend all good learning with their teeth? And, therefore, to such dogs men may not only preach but must with whips and bats beat them well, and keep them from tearing of good learning with their dogs' teeth, yes, and from barking both; and chastise them and make them couch-quail ²³ till they lie still and hearken what is said unto them. And by such means he both swine kept from doing harm, and dogs [that] fall sometimes so well to learning that they can stand up upon their hind feet and hold their hands afore them prettily like a maid; yes, and learn to dance-to after their master's pipe—such an effectual thing is punishment; whereas bare teaching will not suffice.

And who be now more properly such dogs than be these heretics that bark against the blessed sacraments and tear with their dogs' teeth the Catholic Christian faith and godly expositions of the old holy doctors and saints? And who be more properly such hogs than these heretics of our days, of such a filthy kind as never came before, which in such wise defile all holy vowed

chastity that the very ²⁴ pure scripture of God they tread upon with their foul dirty feet, to draw it from all honest chastity into an unclean, shameful liberty of friars to wed nuns! And therefore unto these hogs and these dogs the pith of good living standeth not all in teaching. For no good thing will they learn without biting and beating. Yet goeth Tyndale further and sheweth more kinds of folk to whom, for all his other words, all the pith of good living standeth not in teaching.

20. "The Man who would kill all Bandogs"

[From *The Debellation of Salem and Bizance* ; Works, pp. 992b-993b]

If it had come in this good man's head to devise a law and write a book therefore to kill up ²⁵ all the bandogs ²⁶ throughout all the realm (wherein his time as unwisely as it were bestowed had not yet been so ill spent as it hath been in this) and then would lay for the cause that bandogs do spend victuals ²⁷ and will sometime bite folk, too; if I would then write against his wise book and say that he might by that reason kill up hounds and greyhounds and all (for they must eat, too, and sometimes bite children, too), but likewise yet as they may not yet for all that be forborne ²⁸, both for the pleasure that they do and also for that they help to take us some such beasts of venery as men eat and hunt, and kill also such other beasts and vermin, as else would destroy much victuals. So the bandogs may not be forborn neither, for they both defend husbandmen's houses from thieves and help folk home with their beasts, too, sometimes, such as would not else come home. Now might this good man by this reason that he useth here write again and defend his politic device ²⁹ against bandogs and therein answer me thus:

"First, that for defence of folks' houses there shall need no bandogs at all, for men may make their servants watch or make fast all their doors; and when thieves would break in, defend their houses themselves. And as for such beasts as would not come home, if they be not over-heavy they may bear them home, and those that be too heavy to be born home, tie ropes to their tails and draw them home." And then might he say yet a little farther, and that is this, that he marvelled much that I could for shame and fear of mine own conscience resemble and liken together gentle hounds or goodly greyhounds to such ill-favored mastiffs. And then to prove them very far unlike, put ³⁰ his differences and his diversities, and say a mastiff hath, you wot well, a great jolt ³¹ head and a great muzzle and a thick boisterous ³² body; whereas a greyhound hath a proper head with a goodly small, long snout and fair long slender sides, and the hounds yet much less like, too. And thereupon might he there conclude (as he now concludeth here) and say thus:

"And thus it appeareth that Master More can neither prove the mastiffs to be like to the greyhounds nor to the other gentle hounds neither, and that for the causes before remembered. Wherefore it seemeth that though all bandogs and mastiffs were clearly put away, yet men's houses should be defended well enough and their beasts brought home well enough too, so they should, lo!"

Now if he really triumphed upon this and thought he had avoided me well, I could no farther go therein in good faith but let him take that glory to him. And surely with any wise man that readeth over here in this chapter, both his words and mine, and one after another considereth

wherefore I resemble them together, shall find, I dare boldly warrant, that with his differences and his diversities he winneth like worship in this.

NOTES

(1) More reveals a thorough understanding and love of dogs in this rhetorical passage. He was known to have kept many animals about his house in Chelsea, and he often gave dogs as gifts to friends.

(2) **Bandogs** : John Caius, the well-known physician, wrote an interesting treatise on dogs in which he described the bandog as "vast, huge, stubborn, ugly and eager; of a heavy and burthenous body, and therefore but of little swiftness; terrible and frightful to behold, and more fierce and fell [cruel] than any Arcadian cur (notwithstanding they are said to have their generation of the violent lion)", (*Of English Dogs* , 1576, p. 25). Caius also noted that Henry VII had commanded that if any of these "ill-favored, rascal curs" should assault the King's valiant lion, they should be straightway "hanged."

- ¹ *They lay* : i.e., the Lutherans give, present
- ² Custom
- ³ *Commune and devise* : converse together and resolve; invent
- ⁴ Change
- ⁵ Clear out (a channel)
- ⁶ True
- ⁷ *noddypoll nidiot* : blockhead idiot
- ⁸ ³ Gives up
- ⁹ *Tumbling and toltoring*: stumbling and floundering
- ¹⁰ Common
- ¹¹ Matters
- ¹² Entered an objection
- ¹³ Means, device
- ¹⁴ Persisted
- ¹⁵ *Put case* : suppose
- ¹⁶ Steel rods
- ¹⁷ Brilliant; humorous; plausible
- ¹⁸ *By and by*: immediately
- ¹⁹ *Wot ner*: know not
- ²⁰ Clever (but fallacious) arguments
- ²¹ *For wrooting*: i.e., in order to prevent their digging
- ²² up the soil with their snouts
- ²³ Ferocious dogs
- ²⁴ Cower
- ²⁵ True
- ²⁶ *Kill up*: get rid of
- ²⁷ Huge fierce dogs
- ²⁸ *Spend victuals*: eat up food wastefully
- ²⁹ Put away, shunned

²⁹ *Politic device* : i.e., "wise", shrewd, scheme or plan

³⁰ Introduce

³¹ Large, clumsy

³² Massive