

Thomas More Reader: Clerical Satire and Apocrypha: Part Five

58. "An Over-familiar Priest"

[From *A Dialogue concerning Heresies* ; Works, p. 127a-b]

As the poor man said by the priest, "If I may be homely to tell you a merry tale by the way—."
"A merry tale," quoth I, "cometh never amiss to me."

"The poor man," quoth he, "had found that priest over-familiar with his wife, and because he spake it abroad and could not prove it, the priest sued him before the Bishop's official for diffamation, where the poor man upon pain of cursing was commanded that in his parish church he should upon that Sunday at high mass time stand up and say, 'Mouth, thou liest.' Whereupon for fulfilling of his penance, up was the poor soul set in a pew, that the people might wonder on him and hear what he said. And there all aloud (when he had rehearsed what he had reported by the priest) then he set his hands on his mouth and said, 'Mouth, Mouth, thou liest.' And by and by thereupon he set his hand up on both his eyes and said, 'But eyes, eyes,' quoth he, 'by the mass, ye lie not a whit.' And so, sir, indeed and ye bring me those witnesses, they will not lie a whit."

Howbeit, sir, and though this be true, as in good faith I believe and am sure that it is, yet am I never the more bounden by reasons to believe them that would tell me a miracle. For though this thing be incredible to him that heareth it and strange and marvelous to him that seeth it, yet is it a thing that may be done. Be he that telleth me a miracle telleth me a thing that cannot be done."

59. "The Friar and the Wife in a Red Hood"

[From *The Debellation of Salem and Bizance* ; Works, pp. 948b-949b]

Now goeth this man further and sheweth that mine answer to his words which you read in the 29th chapter of mine *Apology* be very dark, by the reason that I use therein so often this word "some-say," which is, he saith, done after a railing fashion. But as you know well, good readers, I have taken that word "Some-say," of his book, in which I read it so often that it falleth sometimes into my pen ere I be aware.

And as for the railing fashion, if I durst be bold to tell so sad a man a merry tale, I would tell him of the friar that, as he was preaching in the country, spied a poor wife of the parish whispering with her pewfellow, and he falling angry thereto, cried out unto her aloud, "Hold thy babble, I bid thee, thou wife in the red hood!" Which, when the housewife heard, she waxed as angry again, and suddenly she started up and cried out unto the friar again [so] that all the church rang thereon: "Marry, sir, I beshrew his heart that babbleth most of us both. For I do but whisper a word with my neighbor here and thou hast babbled there all this hour."

And surely, good readers, save for setting of the word of God in this good man's sermons, I durst well in the same word, "Some-say," beshrew ' him, and beshrew him again, that most hath railed therewith, of this good man or me.

For read my words there when ye will, and you shall find that I with that word do but in a manner play with him. But, by Saint Mary, he, how well so ever he meant, his words with his many "Some-says" bring good men in slander and obloquy ' of the people, and peradventure in peril too, with untrue surmised tales of mishandling folk for heresy, and all-colored ' under "Some-says" to make the lies seem somewhat likely. Such shrewd "Some-says," lo, be no merry sporting but be sad and earnest rude railings indeed.

NOTES

(1) **mine Apology:** i.e., *The Apology of Sir Thomas More, Knight* (1533).

(2) This tale of a babbling wife is proverbial. More's version of it appears in *A.C. Mery Talys* (1525; 1567) as the tale "Of the friar in the pulpit that bad the woman leave her babbling." **Some-say** ": see No. 5.

60. "A Talkative Nun and a Quarrelsome Housewife"

[From *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* ; Works, pp. 1169b-1170b]

[Anthony] "Forsooth Cousin, many words (if a man were very weak) spoken, as you said right now, without enterpausing ' would peradventure at length somewhat weary him. And therefore wished I the last time after you were gone, when I felt myself (to tell the truth) even a little weary that I had not so told you still a long tale alone but that we had more often enterchanged " words and parted the talking between us, with often enterparling " upon your part in such manner as learned men use between the persons whom they devise, disputing in their feigned dialogues.

But yet in that point I soon excused you and laid the lack even where I found it, and that was even upon mine own neck. For I remembered that between you and me it fared as it did once between a nun and her brother:—

Very virtuous was this lady, and of a very virtuous place—a close religion "—and therein had been long, in all which time she had never seen her brother, which was in like wise very virtuous too, and had been far off at an University and had there taken the degree of Doctor in Divinity. When he was come home he went to see his sister, as he that highly rejoiced in her virtue. So came she to the grate that they call (I trow) the locutory and, after their holy watch-word spoken on both the sides after the manner used in that place, the one took the other by the tip of the finger (for hand would there none be wrung " through the grate) and forthwith began my lady to give her brother a sermon of the wretchedness of this world, and the frailty of the flesh, and the subtle sleights of the wicked fiend; and gave him surely good counsel (saving somewhat too long) how he should be well wary in his living, and master well his body for saving of his soul. And yet ere her own tale came all at an end, she began to find a little fault with him and said, 'In

good faith, brother, I do somewhat marvel that you that have been at learning so long and are Doctor, and so learned in the law of God, do not now at our meeting (while we meet so seldom) to me that am your sister and a simple unlearned soul, give of your charity some fruitful exhortation; and as I doubt not but you can say some good things yourself.' 'By my troth, good sister,' quoth her brother, 'I cannot for you, for your tongue hath never ceased, but said enough for us both.'

"And so, Cousin, I remember that when I was once fallen in " I left you little space to say ought between. But now will I therefore take another way with you: for I shall of our talking drive you to the one-half."

[Vincent] "Now forsooth, uncle, this was a merry tale, but now if you make me talk that one-half then shall you be contented far otherwise, then. There was of late a kinswoman of your own— but which, will I not tell you, guess her, an you can. Her husband had much pleasure in the manner and behavior of an other honest man and kept him therefore much company. By the reason whereof he was, at his mealtime the more oft from home.

"So happened it on a time that his wife and he together dined or supped with that neighbor of theirs. And then she made a merry quarrel to him for making her husband so good cheer out a-doors that she could not have him at home. 'Forsooth, Mistress,' quoth he (as he was a dry, " merry man), 'in my company nothing keepeth him but one thing: serve you him with the same and he will never be from you.' 'What gay thing may that be,' quoth our Cousin, then. 'Forsooth, Mistress,' quoth he, 'your husband loveth well to talk, and when he sitteth with me I let him have all the words.' 'All the words?' quoth she. 'Marry, that am I content, he shall have all the words with good will, as he hath ever had. But I speak them all myself and give them all to him; and for ought that I care for them, so shall he have them still. But otherwise to say that he shall have them all, *you* shall keep him still, rather than he get the half.'" "

[Anthony] "Forsooth, Cousin, I can soon guess which of our kin she was. I would we had none therein (for all her merry words) that less would let their husbands to talk."

NOTES

(1) **The quarrelsome housewife** is probably an allusion to More's second wife, Alice, who was known for her talkativeness and for her highly individualistic nature (see No. 11).

61. "Pilgrimages to Holy Shrines"

[From *A Dialogue concerning Heresies* ; Works, p. 140a]

But the most part that cometh, cometh for no devotion at all, but only for good company to babble thitherward and drink-drunk " there, and dance and reel homeward. And yet here is not all: For I tell you nothing now of many a naughty-pack, " many a fleck-and-his-make " that maketh their images-meetings " at these wholesome-hallows. " And many that seemeth an honest housewife at home hath help of a bawd to bring her to mischief as she walketh abroad about her

pilgrimages.

I heard once when I was a child the good Scottish Friar, Father Donold, whom I reckon surely for a saint, if there be any in heaven. I heard him preach at Paul's Cross that Our Lady was a virgin, and yet at her pilgrimages be made many a foul meeting. And loud he cried out, "Ye men of London, gang on yourselves with your wives to Willesdom in the devil's name, or else keep them at home with you with sorrow!"

[*IN MARGIN : Mark this ye Londoners!*]

And surely so many good men ween it were best, considering that these voyages been but wandering about vanity or superstitious devotion, and the next door to idolatry when men have their affections, instead of God, bound to blocks and stones.

NOTES

(1) In the first paragraph alone of this selection, More presumably coins five word-compounds in a rhetorical tour de force: *drink-drunk*, *naughty-pack*, *fleck-and-his-make*, *images-meetings*, and *wholesome-hallows*.

Throughout the other selections in this anthology there is abundant evidence of More's either creating new words or recording them for the first time from oral tradition or from writings now lost. According to the editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, [*O.E.D.*], over fifty words and phrases (or special senses of them) are shown to be the first examples recorded: all-to-rated (cf. *O.E.D.* all, adv. c 15, "scolded severely"); antiphrasis (sb.); anxiety (sb. 1); apology (sb.1, as title of work); bills (sb. 5 b, "drugs"); bitchery (sb.); bolteth (v. 8, fig., "shackles"); buckle-pit (sb. 5, comb.); Catholics (sb. 6); cob-nut (sb. 2); couch-quail (v., "to cower," from the game); disfashioneth ("mars"); dough-baken ("doughy"); drifts (sb. 5, "schemes"); Elects (sb. b 1, "chosen by God"); enterparling (vbl. sb. b, "interceding"); enterpausing (interpausing, vbl. sb. b, "pausing in midst of something"); evangelical (adj. 2 a, "Protestant"); exasperate (v. 4, "irritate"); fain (adj. 2 b, "obliged"); Father (sb. 6 e, "prefix for name of a priest"); fleck (as in fleck-and-his-make, sb. [4]); fobby (adj., ["flabby"]); frame (v. 6 b, "suit"); gay (adj. 5, "plausible"); galpeth (v. 2, "vomit"); giglot (sb. 1 c, "excessively merry man"); grazing (vbl. sb. 1 b, "to send to grass," i.e., set free); jolt head (sb. 1, "clumsy, heavy head"); in a mammering (vbl. sb. 2, "in doubt"); maribone (obs. for marrowbone, sb. 3, "the knees"; also sb. 6 adj., "child's game"); nidiot (sb., "idiot"); pacifier (sb.); pallet-chamber (cf. pallet, sb. 1 b comb., ["room for a straw bed"]); potheaded (adj., "stupid"); puling (ppl. a. 1, "whining"); quick and quething (cf. quethe, v. 1 b phr., "alive and able to speak"); redargution (sb. 2, "refutation"); rigged (cf. rig v. ² 3, "clothed"); sauce malapert (sb., "insolence"); scald (adj. 1, "scabby"); spurn-point (sb., "a game, prob. hop-scotch"); toltering (cf. tolter, v. dial. ppl. a, "jolting along": cf. also "walter and tolter"); truanting (vbl. sb.); underpropper (sb.); urchin-bitch (cf. urchin, sb. 8 b; also sb. 6 b, "ill tempered girl [or boy]"); winer (sb. 1, "vintner"). For six of these probably only the specific form was first used by More: bitchery, bolteth, couch-quail, pallet-chamber, scald, truanting.

Another twenty-five words and phrases (or particular senses of them) appear to be earlier uses than those first recorded by the *O.E.D.* Date of first recorded example is given in brackets:

amidmong (cf. amid , adj. b 5 comb., "in midst of" [1548]); angelical (adj. 2 [1577]); balling (i.e., bawling , cf. bawl , v. 2, "bellowing" [1570]); boisterous (adj. 2, "massive" [1596]); cast (v. 16, "find guilty" [1536]); cheverel (sb. 2 b fig., "flexible" [1583]); dry (adj. 14, "ironical," "humorous" [1542]); dumpish (adj., "dull" [1545]); ease (cf. v. 1 c, "relieve bowels" [c. 1440/1581]); gears (sb. 5 b, "genitals" [1675]); gorbely (sb. 2, "one with a large belly" [1530]); horsemill (sb. [1530]); Iceland cur (cf. Iceland ² [1576; c. 1618]); jest (sb. 9, "laughing-stock" [1598]); louder (cf. loud , adj. 2 d, "more flagrant" [1535]); in a mean (cf. mean , sb. 1 b, "with moderation" [1545]); millhorse (sb. [1552]); naughty-pack (sb. 1 [or 2]), "woman [or man] of bad character" [1530; 1539]); potting (vbl. sb., cf. pot , v. ³, "mocking" [1549]); Protestants (sb., "those who joined in protest at Spires, in 1529," [1539]); or "those opposed to Catholics" [1553]); or "Lutherans" [1539]); put salt on tail (cf. salt , sb. 2 c [1580]); secretly (adv. 2, "in concealment" [1535]); shotten-herring (cf. shotten , ppl. a. 2 b fig., "worthless (man)" [1596]); study (v. 2 f, "to search, cast about" [1551]); text-hand (sb., "fine large hand in writing" [1542]).

Ten words or phrases cannot be found listed in the *O.E.D.* , although each one is a derivative of a common word: bitched (? "swollen with contempt": cf. also Chaucer's bitched-bones , "dice"); drink-drunk ("excessively drunk"); fish-pole (cf. fishing-rod [1552]) or angle-rod [1523]); images-meetings (? i.e., those meetings intended for cohabitation); sistren ("sisterhood," sarcastic echo of brethren); stark ass (i.e., naked); tell him his pars vers (cf. No.5, n. 2); toot in his tail (? "take a good look at his bare behind"); wallward ; wholesome-hallows (? i.e., shrines [or relics of saints] that provide "cures" for pilgrims—in reference to fun-making pilgrims.).

62. "A Pilgrimage to Walsingham"

[From *A Dialogue concerning Heresies* ; Works, pp. 136b-137a]

[More] "But be it that among so many miracles as be daily told and written down at divers pilgrimages, between which miracles and other why ye put a difference we shall (as I said before) know further your mind hereafter. And be it also that of such as long have been reputed and still taken for true, yourself undoubtedly know some for very false, would ye therefore think that among all the remnant there were never *one* true? What if ye find some fair woman painted, whose color ye had weened were natural, will ye never after believe that any woman in the world hath a fair color of herself? If ye find some false flatterers that long seemed friendly, will ye take ever after all the world for such? If some prove stark hypocrites whom the world would have sworn good and godly men, shall we therefore mistrust all others for their sake and ween there were none good at all?"

"By my troth," quoth he, "I rode once in good company, and to say the truth, for good company, to Walsingham in pilgrimage, where a good fellow's horse so fell in halting ² that he was fain to hire another and let him go loose, which was so lean and so poor and halted sore that, empty as he was, he could scant keep foot with us. And when we had weened we should have left him behind, suddenly he spied a mare and forth he limped on three legs so lustly that his master's horse with four feet could scant overtake him. But when he caught him and came again he swore in great anger all the oath he might swear that he would trust halting Sir Thomas ² the worse while he lived." "What! was that halting Sir Thomas," quoth I? "Marry," quoth he, "their parish

priest (as he told us), was lean and as poor and as halting as his horse, and as holy, too. But since he would while he lived mistrust that halting priest for his halting horse, if I find an holy whoreson halt in hypocrisy I shall not fail while I live to trust all his fellows the worse." "Well," quoth I, "ye speak merrily, but I wot well ye will do better whatsoever ye say. Nor I am sure, though ye see some white sapphire or beryl so well counterfeit and so set in a ring that a right good jeweler will take it for a diamond, yet will ye not doubt for all that, but that there be in many other rings already set right diamonds indeed. Nor ye will not mistrust Saint Peter for Judas. Nor though the Jews were many so naughty ² that they put Christ to death, yet ye be wiser I wot well than the gentlewoman was which in talking once with my father when she heard say that Our Lady was a Jew, first could not believe it but said, 'What, ye mock, I wis: I pray you tell truth.' And when it was so fully affirmed that she at last believed it:—'And was she a Jew,' quoth she, 'so help me God and holidom, I shall love her the worse while I live.' I am sure ye will not so, nor mistrust all for some, neither men nor miracles."

[*IN MARGIN : A Merry Tale*]

NOTES

(1) A Priory near the coast of northern Norfolk, **Walsingham** was founded in the time of Edward the Confessor. It was a famous place of pilgrimage until its destruction in 1538. Henry VIII and Catherine made a pilgrimage there in happier days. Erasmus in fulfilment of a vow made a pilgrimage from Cambridge to Walsingham in 1511, but in 1524 he wrote "The Pilgrimage for Religion's Sake," a satiric colloquy on pilgrimages in general, and Walsingham in particular. He said he wanted "to reprove those who have tumultuously cast all images out of the churches, against those who are madly set upon Pilgrimages with a pretence of Religion." Even the Lady of Walsingham herself complains of Lutheran followers who beg her help in somewhat importunate desires: "They sometimes ask those things of a Virgin which a modest young man durst scarcely ask of a Bawd" (trans., H.M., p. 305).

¹ Defamation

² *By and by* : immediately

³ Obscure

⁴ Ridiculing

⁵ (Ironic) wise

⁶ Curse

⁷ Abuse, slander

⁸ Made to look well or plausible

⁹ Interpausing, pausing in the midst (of talking)

¹⁰ Interchanged, exchanged

¹¹ Intercession

¹² *Close religion* : i.e., cloister

¹³ Squeezed

¹⁴ *Fallen in* : i.e., begun to talk

¹⁵ *Drive...one-half* : i.e., insist you do your share of the talking

¹⁶ Unintentionally humorous

- ¹⁷ *Get the half* : i.e., get a chance to speak at all
- ¹⁸ Drunk to the point of intoxication
- ¹⁹ A gang of men and/or women of bad character
- ²⁰ (Contemptuous) lovers
- ²¹ I.e., ? those intended for cohabitation (therefore making "images" of themselves)
- ²² (Ironic) i.e., shrines that provide "cures"
- ²³ I.e., the Messenger of the *Dialogue*
- ²⁴ Limping
- ²⁵ *Sir Thomas* : proverbial title for an ordinary priest
- ²⁶ Wicked