

Thomas More Reader: Memorabilia: Personal Remembrances: Part Three

89. "A Child-servant is Whipped"

[*The Apology of Sir Thomas More Knight* ; Works, pp. 900b-901b]

But I suppose in good faith that this Pacifier hath of some facility of his own good nature been easy to believe some such as have told him lies, and hath been thereby persuaded to think that many other folk said and knew that thing that some few told him for very truth. And surely they that are of this new brotherhood be so bold and so shameless in lying that whoso shall hear them speak and knoweth not what sect they be of shall be very sore abused by them.

Myself have good experience of them. For the lies are neither few nor small that many of the blessed brethren have made; and daily yet make by me.

Divers of them have said that of such as were in my house while I was Chancellor, I sued to examine them with torments, causing them to be bound to a tree in my garden and there piteously beaten.

And this tale had some of those good brethren so caused to be blown about that a right worshipful friend of mine did of late within less than this fortnight tell unto another near friend of mine that he had of late heard much speaking thereof.

What cannot these brethren say that can be so shameless to say thus? For of very truth, albeit that for a great robbery or a heinous murder, or sacrilege in a church with carrying away the pyx¹ with the blessed sacrament, or villainously casting it out, I caused sometimes such things to be done by some officers of the Marshalsea² or some other prisons, with which ordering of them by their well-deserved pain and without any great hurt that afterward should stick by them, I found out and repressed many such desperate wretches or else had not failed to have gone further abroad and to have done to many good folk a great deal much more harm. Yet, though I so did in thieves, murderers and robbers of churches, and notwithstanding also that heretics be yet much worse than all they, yet saving only their sure-keeping, I never did else cause any such thing to be done to any of them all in all my life, except only twain, of which the one was a child and a servant of mine, in mine own house (whom his father had ere ever he came with me nuzzled³ up in such matters and had set him to attend upon George Jaye or Gee, otherwise called Clerk, which is a priest, and is now for all that wedded in Antwerp—into whose house there the two nuns were brought which John Birt, otherwise called Adrian, stole out of their cloister to make them harlots).

This George Jaye [i.e., Joye] did teach this child his ungracious heresy against the blessed sacrament of the altar, which heresy this child afterward being in service with me began to teach another child in my house, which uttered his counsel. And upon that point perceived and known, I caused a servant of mine to stripe⁴ him like a child before mine household for amendment of himself and example to such others.

NOTES

(1) The **child servant** was Dick Purser, son of John Purser, who was one of the men who furnished bond for John Byrt (Taft, p. 315.) The other person flogged was no doubt the Bedlam rogue (see below, No. 90).

(2) **George Joye** (1495?-1553), controversial Protestant reformer and translator, is best known for his questionable ethics in republishing and revising without authority the text of Tyndale's *New Testament*. To his credit he was the first to translate into English and publish a considerable portion of the *Old Testament*. (C.C. Butterworth and A.G. Chester explore Joye's achievements and somewhat hectic career.) More saw Joye simply as another Protestant heretic, but Joye antagonized not only supporters and prelates of the English Catholic Church but also his former friend and Protestant co-worker, William Tyndale. Although Joye had assisted him in preparation of his *New Testament* for the press, he later was accused by Tyndale of making unauthorized changes in the 1534 edition. Joye responded in 1534 with *An Apology...to Satisfye (if it may be) W. Tindale: to Pourge and Defende himself ...* [etc.]. (The treatise includes an intimate, detailed discussion of the process of seeing an early sixteenth-century work through the press, a treasure-trove of information on the nature of early Tudor printing and publishing.) More claims here that Joye insinuated his doctrines into his own household through his teaching of his child-servant, Dick Purser. If true, this would have occurred sometime between 1525, when Joye left the University of Cambridge, and November, 1527, when he was ordered to Westminster for examination for heretical opinions, after which he escaped detention and fled to the continent, presumably to Antwerp. More's occasional, unsubstantiated attacks on Joye's character forced Joye to retaliate in 1534 with *The Subversion of Moris false Foundacion: where upon he Sweteth to Set faste and Shove under his shameles Shoris to Underproppe the Popis Chirche: Made by George Ioye. Moros in Greke is stultus in Latyn / a fool in Englysshe*. (See also an excellent summary biography of Joye by J.B. Trapp, CW 9, pp. 363-368).

(3) **John Birt** (or Byrt) presumably was an associate of the Antwerp reformers, "perhaps connected with the publishing trade there. We know only that he went sometimes under the fraternal name of Adrian, presumably so that he could carry out errands for the 'brethren' without having his identity disclosed" (Butterworth and Chester, p. 113). More refers to him again in the *Confutation* as "John Byrt otherwise calling himself Adrian, otherwise John Bookbinder, and yet otherwise now I cannot tell you what."

90. "The Bedlam Rogue"

[From *The Apology of Sir Thomas More Knight*; Works, p. 901b]

Another was one which, after that he had fallen into that frantic heresy fell soon into plain open frenzy besides. And albeit that he had therefore been put up in Bedlam and afterwards by beating and correction gathered his remembrance to him and began to come again to himself, being thereupon set at liberty and walking about abroad, his old fancies began to fall again in his head. And I was from divers good holy places advertized^s that he used in his wandering about to come

into the church and there make many mad toys and trifles, ' to the trouble of good people in the divine service. And specially would he be most busy ' in the time of most silence, while the priest was at the secrets of the mass about the levation. * And if he spied any woman kneeling at a form, if her head hung anything low in her meditations, then would he steal behind her and, if he were not letted, would labor to lift up all her clothes and cast them quite over her head.

Whereupon, I being advertised of these pageants ' and being sent unto and required by very devout religious folk to take some order with him, caused him as he came wandering by my door to be taken by the constables and bound to a tree in the street before the whole town; and there they striped " him with rods therefore till he waxed weary and somewhat longer. And it appeared well that his remembrance was good enough save that it went about in grazing " till it was beaten home. For he could then very well rehearse his faults himself and speak and treat very well, and promise to do afterward as well. And verily, God be thanked, I hear none harm of him now.

NOTES

(1) **Bedlam** : the aphetic name of St. Mary of Bethlehem, a London hospital for the insane located near the parish church of St. Buttolph in Bishopsgate ward, outside the City and close to Shoreditch, which was the site of various kinds of entertainment. Normally it was the family who cared for the mad person, but if his behavior became dangerous he was often turned out to fend for himself, and thus became linked with vagrants and beggars, and often he roamed about the countryside like Shakespeare's Poor Tom finding food wherever he could get it. In London, lunatics were thrown in jail or, if lucky, were admitted to the hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem, which was used to house the insane after 1403. In 1523 a former Lord Mayor of London provided in his will that a sum of money should be given towards the purchase of patronage in the hospital; in 1546 the citizens acquired control of it and in the following year were given an official crown charter.

91. "Mad Cliff"

[From *The Debellation of Salem and Bizance* ; Works, p. 935b]

And therefore with this good reason of his, he putteth me in remembrance of an answer that a man of mine made once much after the same fashion. I had sometime one with me called Cliff, a man as well-known as master Henry Patenson. " This Cliff had been many years mad, but age had taken from him the rage so that he was meetly well-waxen harmless among folk.

Into Cliff's head came there sometimes in his madness such imaginations against images as these heretics have in their sadness. " For like as some of them (which after[wards] fled and ran away and some fell to theft and were caught) pulled down of late upon London bridge the image of the blessed martyr Saint Thomas, so Cliff upon the same bridge upon a time fell in talking unto an image of Our Blessed Lady, and after such blasphemous as the devil put then in his mouth (and now-a-days bloweth out by the mouths of many heretics—which, seem they never so sad be yet more mad than he—), he set hand upon the child in her arm and there broke off the neck.

And afterwards when honest men, dwellers upon the bridge, came home to mine house and there blamed Cliff before me and asked him wherefore he broke off the child's neck in Our Lady's arm—when Cliff had heard them—he began to look well and earnestly upon them and, like a man of sadness and gravity, he asked them, "Tell me, this, among you there, have you not set on his head again?" "No, quoth they," we cannot." "No?" quoth Cliff, "by the mass, it is the more shame for you. Why speak you to me of it, then?"

And even thus answereth me now this good man, which, where his seditious "Some-says" set forth division and break the child's neck, reckoneth it a shame for me to find any fault with him for the breaking, but if myself could glue it together again.

NOTES

(1) **St. Thomas à Becket**, Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor under Henry II, was murdered in his cathedral on December 29, 1170. It is ironic that More here comments upon the vandalism of an image on London bridge of the "blessed martyr Saint Thomas" when only two years later (1535) he should be executed on the day before the celebration of the translation of the relics of St. Thomas à Becket and his own head should be thrust on the bridge for his refusal to sign the Oath of Allegiance to the Act of Succession; four centuries later (in 1935) *he* was canonized Saint Thomas More by the Church he defended and for which he died.

92. "Davy, the Dutchman"

[From *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*; Works, p. 728a-b]

But he made me therewith remember a like matter of a man of mine, done seven years afore—"one Davy, a Dutchman, which had been married in England and, saying that his wife was dead and buried at Worcester two years before while he was in his country, and giving her much praise and often telling us how sorry he was when he came home and found her dead, and how heavily he had made her bitter prayers at her grave, [he] went about (while he waited upon me at Bruges in the king's business) to marry there an honest widow's daughter.

And so happened it that even upon the day when they should have been made handfast and insured "together, was I advertised "from London by my wife's letter that David's wife was alive and had been at my house to seek him. Whereupon I called him before me and others and read the letter to him.

"Marry, master," quoth he, "that letter saith, methink, that my wife is alive." "Yea, beast," quoth I, "that she is." "Marry," quoth he, "then I am well apaid, " for she is a good woman." "Yea," quoth I, "but why art thou such a naughty, wretched man that thou wouldst here wed another? Didst not thou say she was dead?" "Yes, marry," quoth he, "men of Worcester told me so." "Why," quoth I, "thou false beast, didst not thou tell me and all my house that thou were at her grave thyself?" "Yes, marry, master," quoth he, "so I was, but I could not look in, ye wot well!"

And as Davy thought himself safely defended against falsehood by that he could not look into his

wife's grave to see whether she were in it or no, so thought Webbe himself surely defended from any reproof of perjury because I could not look into [his] breast to see whether he remembered the counsel so studiously taken with Necton the day before, or no.

And in like manner hopeth Tyndale himself, sure with his feeling faith against all redargution ¹⁸ of his false heresies, because he seeth that no man can look into his own breast but himself and find what he feeleth written there.

But now as Davy, my man, was bewrayed ¹⁹ by my wife's letter, and as Webbe was bewrayed by Robert Necton, so is Tyndale much more clearly bewrayed and his counsel uttered by almighty God Himself.

NOTES

(1) **in the King's business** : During the year 1520 relations between Francis I of France and Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire worsened, Francis provoking war and Charles replying with counter-threats. England's policy was unsuccessful in pacifying the two rulers. After playing the role of peacemaker Henry was appalled when open hostilities between the leaders appeared imminent, and he decided that Cardinal Wolsey should go to Calais ostensibly to mediate between the two powers, but in fact he was ordered to employ deception instead of diplomacy; he was told to conclude an offensive alliance with Charles against France. Wolsey took Sir Thomas More with him on his mission. In August, 1521, after a few days in conference with the French, Wolsey and his party left for Bruges where a secret treaty with Charles against Francis was concluded; the next day they returned to Calais to continue pleasant talks with the French. More surely was aware of the diplomatic fraud, though it is difficult to believe that he endorsed the deception. Perhaps More recalls that international deception in this merry tale of Davy's deception not only of his own wife but of his master, Sir Thomas More. Perhaps also More sees in that deception a symbol not only of Webbe's betrayal of his partner Richard Necton but of Tyndale's alleged attempt to deceive Catholics with his teachings and translations.

The editors of *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* include a merry note from G. Marc'hadour (*L'univers*, p. 313 n.) on Davy the Dutchman and Henry Patenson, his fool: "What with both Davy the Dutchman...and Patenson in his entourage, More's sojourn at Bruges 'ne fut pas de tout repos'" (CW 8, p. 1689).

(2) **My wife's letter** : This letter is not extant.

¹ Eucharist plate

² A prison located in Southwark, abolished in 1842

³ Nurtured, educated

⁴ Whip

⁵ Notified

⁶ *toys and trifles* : dallyings

⁷ Meddlesome

⁸ Elevation (of the Host)

⁹ I.e., tricks and games

¹⁰ Flogged

¹¹ *Went...grazing* : i.e., wandered freely (and forgetfully)

¹² *Henry Patenson* : More's household fool (See also No. 57)

¹³ (ironic) "wisdom"

¹⁴ *Seven years afore* : i.e., before the trial of Richard Webbe (see No. 86)

¹⁵ I.e., married

¹⁶ Notified

¹⁷ Pleased

¹⁸ Refutation

¹⁹ Found guilty, exposed