

Thomas More Reader: Memorabilia: Personal Remembrances: Part Four

93. "The Examination into Richard Hunne's Death"

[From *A Dialogue concerning Heresies* ; Works, pp. 234b-238b]

"I suppose," quoth he, "that this opinion is rather grown another way; that is, to wit, by the reason that the clergy, though the law serve them not, therefore do yet indeed take all translations out of every layman's hand. And sometimes with those that be burned or convicted of heresy they burn the English Bible without respect, be the translation old or new, bad or good."

"Forsooth," quoth I, "if this were so then were it in my mind not well done. But I believe ye mistake it. Howbeit, what ye have seen I cannot say, but myself have seen and can shew you Bibles fair and old, written in English, which have been known and seen by the Bishop of the dioceses and left in laymen's hands, and women's too, such as he knew for good and Catholic folk, that used it with devotion and soberness. But of truth all such as are found in the hands of heretics they use to take away. But they do cause none to be burned as far as ever I could wit, but only such as be found faulty. Whereof many be set forth with evil prologue or glosses maliciously made by Wycliffe and other heretics. For no good man would, I ween, be so mad to burn up the Bible, wherein they found no fault, nor any law that let it to be looked on and read."

"Marry," quoth he, "but I have heard good men say that even here in London not many years ago in the days of the Bishop that last died they burned up as fair Bibles in English as any man hath lightly seen and thereto as faultless for ought that any man could find, as any Bible is in Latin. And yet besides this they burned up the dead body of the man himself, whom themselves had hanged in the Bishop's prison before, making as though the man had hanged himself. And of the burning of his body had they no color but only because they found English Bibles in his house wherein they never found other fault, but because they were in English."

"Who told you this tale?" quoth I.

"Forsooth, divers honest men," quoth he, "that saw it, and specially one that saw the man hanging in the Bishop's prison ere he was cut down. And he told me that it was well and clerkly proved that the Chancellor and his keepers had killed the man first, and then hanged him after. And that they had laid heresy to him only for hatred that he sued a *praemunire* against divers persons for a suit taken about a *mortuary* in the audience of the Archbishop of Canterbury. And then they proved the heresy by nothing else but by the possession of a good English Bible, and upon heresy so proved against him whom they had hanged, lest he should say for himself they burned up the holy scripture of God and the body of a good man therewith. For I have heard him called a very honest person and of a good substance."

"Forsooth," quoth I, "of good substance he was; I think well worth a thousand marks. And of his worldly conversation among the people I have heard none harm. But surely as touching his faith toward Christ methinketh I may be bold to say that he was not honest. And as touching truth in

words he that hath told you this tale was not so honest indeed as methinketh ye take him for."

"Why," quoth he, "do ye know the matter well?" "Forsooth," quoth I, "so well I know it from top to toe that I suppose there be not very many men that knoweth it much better. For I have not only been divers times present myself at certain examinations thereof but have also divers and many times sunderly talked with almost all such except the dead man himself, as most knew of the matter: which matter was many times in sundry places examined. But specially at Baynard's Castle one day was it examined at great length and by a long time every man being sent for before and ready there all that could be found that anything could tell or that had said they could anything tell in the matter. And this examination was had before divers great Lords spiritual and temporal and other of the King's honorable Council sent thither by his Highness for the nonce of his blessed zeal and princely desire born to the searching of the truth. Whereunto his gracious mind was much inclined and had been by a right honorable man informed that there was one had shewed a friend of his that he could go take him by the sleeve that killed Hunne, for Richard Hunne was his name whom ye speak of. I was also myself present at the judgment given in Paul's whereupon his books and his body were burned. And by all these things I very well know that he of whom ye have heard this matter hath told you tales far from the truth."

"In good faith," quoth your friend, "he told me one thing that ye speak of now: that there was one that said he could go take him by the sleeve that killed Richard Hunne, and that he did so indeed before the Lords and came even there to the Chancellor and said: 'My Lords, this is he.' But when he was asked how he knew it, he confessed that 'it was by such an unlawful craft as was not taken for a proof. For it was, they say, by necromancy.' And the bishops that were there would have had that man burned too for witchcraft. And told me also that there was another which had seen many men that had hanged themselves: a man that had been long in office under divers of the King's almsgivers to whom the goods of such men as kill themselves be appointed by the law, and his office, as deodands to be given in alms. This man, as I have heard say, shewed unto the Lords by such experience as he had good and plain tokens by which they perceived well that Hunne did never hang himself. I have heard also that a spiritual man and one that loved well the Chancellor and was a laborer for that part yet could not deny before all the Lords but that he had told a temporal man and a friend of his that Hunne had never been accused of heresy if he had never sued the *praemunire*. And by Saint Mary that was a shrewd word. Howbeit, indeed it went not so near the matter as the other two things did."

"Yes, in good faith," quoth I, "all three like near when they were all heard. But of truth many other things were there laid that upon the hearing seemed much more suspicious than these. Which yet when they were answered always lost more than half their strength. But as for these three matters I promise you proved very trifles and such as if ye had heard them ye would have laughed at them seven years after."

"I beseech you," quoth he, "let me hear how they proved."

"I am loath," quoth I, "to let you, and lose your time in such trifles. Howbeit, sith you long so sore therefore rather than ye should lose your child for them, ye shall have them all three as shortly as I can:

"First, ye must understand that because the coming together of the Lords from Greenwich to Baynard's Castle for the trying out of the matter should not be frustrate, " there was such diligence done before, that every man that aught had said therein was ready there against their coming. Where they began with the first point that ye spake of, as the special motion whereupon the King's Highness had sent them thither. Wherefore after the rehearsal made of the cause of their coming, the greatest temporal Lord there present said unto a certain servant of his own standing there beside: 'Sir, ye told me that one shewed you that he could go take him by the sleeve that killed Hunne. Have ye brought him hither.'" 'Sir,' quoth he, 'if it like your Lordship, this man it was that told me so (pointing to one that he had caused to come thither).' Then my Lord asked that man, 'How say ye, Sir, can ye do as ye said ye could?' 'Forsooth, my Lord,' quoth he, 'an it like your Lordship, I said not so much; this gentleman did somewhat mistake me. But indeed I told him that I had a neighbor that told me that *he* could do it.' 'Where is that neighbor,' quoth my Lord?' 'This man, sir,' quoth he, bringing forth one which had also been warned to be there. Then was he asked whether he had said that *he* could do it. 'Nay, forsooth,' quoth he, 'my Lord, I said not that *I* could do it myself, but I said that one told me that *he* could do it.' 'Well,' quoth my Lord, 'who told *you* so?' 'Forsooth, my Lord,' quoth he, 'my neighbor here'.

"Then was *that* man asked, 'Sir, know you one that can tell who killed Richard Hunne?' 'Forsooth,' quoth he, 'an it like your Lordship I said not that I knew one surely that could tell who had killed him, but I said indeed that I know one which I thought verily could tell who killed him.' 'Well,' quoth the Lords at the last, 'yet with much work we come to somewhat. But whereby think you that *he* can tell?' 'Nay, forsooth, my Lord,' quoth he, 'it is a woman. I would she were here with your Lordships now.' 'Well,' quoth my Lord, 'woman or man, all is one. She shall be had wheresoever she be.' 'By my faith, my Lords,' quoth he, 'an she were with you she would tell you wonders. For, by God, I have wist her to tell many marvelous things ere now.' 'Why,' quoth the Lords, 'what have you heard her told?' 'Forsooth, my Lords,' quoth he, 'if a thing had been stolen she would have told who had it. And therefore I think she could as well tell who killed Hunne as who stole a horse.' 'Surely,' said the Lords, 'so think all we, too, I trow. But how could *she* tell it, by the devil?' 'Nay, by my troth, I trow,' quoth he, 'for I could never see her use any worse way than looking in one's hands.'

"Therewith the Lords laughed and asked, 'What is she?' 'Forsooth, my Lords,' quoth he, 'an Egyptian, " and she was lodged here at Lambeth, but she is gone over seas now. Howbeit I trow she be not in her own country yet, for they say it is a great way hence and she went over little more than a month ago.'"

"Now, forsooth," quoth your friend, "this process came to a wise purpose; here was a great post well-thwitten to a pudding prick."

"But, I pray you, to what point came the second matter of him that had been in office under so many of the King's almoigners that he knew by his own experience, and proved, that Richard Hunne had not hanged himself."

"Forsooth," quoth I, "he was called in next. And then was he asked whereby he knew it. But would God ye had seen his countenance. The man had of likelihood said somewhat too far, and was much amazed and looked as though his eyes would have fallen out of his head into the

Lords' laps. But to the question he answered and said that he saw that very well, for he saw him both ere he was taken down and after.

"What then,' quoth the Lords, 'so did there many more, which yet upon the sight could not tell that.' 'No, my Lords,' quoth he, 'but I have another insight in such things than other men have.' 'What insight,' quoth they?' 'Forsooth,' quoth he, 'it is not unknown that I have occupied a great while under divers of the King's almoigners and have seen and considered many that have hanged themselves, and thereby if I see one hang I can tell anyone whether he hanged himself or not.' 'By what token can you tell?' quoth the Lords. 'Forsooth,' quoth he, 'I cannot tell the tokens but I perceive it well enough by mine own sight.'

"But when they heard him speak of his own sight, and therewith saw what sight he had, looking as though his eyes would have fallen in their laps, there could few forbear laughing, and said, 'We see well surely that ye have a sight by yourself.' And then said one Lord merrily, 'Peradventure as some man is so cunning by experience of jewels that he can perceive by his own eye whether a stone be right or counterfeit though he can not well make another man to perceive the tokens, so this good fellow, though he can not tell us the marks, yet he hath such an experience in hanging that himself perceiveth upon the sight whether the man hanged himself or no.'

"Yea, forsooth, my Lord,' quoth he, 'even as your Lordship saith. For I know it well enough myself; I have seen so many by reason of mine office.' 'Why,' quoth another Lord merrily, 'your office hath no more experience in hanging than hath an hangman: and yet *he* cannot tell.' 'Nay, Sir,' quoth he, 'an it like your Lordship, he meddleth not with them that hang themselves, as I do.' 'Well,' quoth one of the Lords, 'how many of them have ye meddled with in your days?'

"With many, my Lord,' quoth he. 'For I have been officer under two almoigners, and therefore I have seen many.' 'How many?' quoth one of the Lords. 'I cannot tell,' quoth he, 'how many, but I wot well I have seen many.' 'Have ye seen,' quoth one, 'an hundred?' 'Nay,' quoth he, 'not an hundred.' 'Have ye seen four score and ten?'

"Thereat a little he studied, as one standing in a doubt and that were loath to lie, and at last he said that he thought nay, not fully four score and ten. Then was he asked whether he hath seen twenty. And thereto without any sticking he answered, 'Nay, not twenty.' Thereat the Lords laughed well to see that he was so sure that he had not seen twenty and was in doubt whether he had seen four score and ten. Then was he asked whether he had seen fifteen. And thereto he said shortly, 'Nay.' And in likewise, of ten. At the last they came to five, and from five to four. And there he began to study again. Then came they to three, and then for shame he was fain ¹³ to say that he had seen so many and more too. But when he was asked, 'When?', 'Whom?', and 'In what place?', necessity drove him at last unto the truth, whereby it appeared that he never had seen but one in all his life, and that was an Irish fellow called Crook Shank, whom he had seen hanging in an old barn.

"And when all his cunning ¹⁴ was come to this he was bidden walk like himself. ¹⁵ And one said unto him, 'That because he was not yet cunning enough in the craft of hanging it was pity that he had no more experience thereof by one more.'"

"Forsooth," quoth your friend, "this was a mad fellow. Came the third tale to as "wise" a point?"
"Ye shall hear," quoth I:

"The temporal man that had reported it upon the mouth of the spiritual man was a good worshipful man and for his truth and worship was in great credit. And surely the spiritual man was a man of worship also and well known both for cunning and virtuous[ness]. And therefore the Lords much marvelled, knowing them both for such as they were that they should be like to find either the one or the other either make an untrue report or untruly deny the truth. And first the temporal man before the Lords in the hearing of the spiritual persons standing by said, 'My Lords all, as help me God and holidom, "Master Doctor here said unto me [from] his own mouth that if Hunne had not sued the *praemunire* he should never have been accused of heresy.' 'How say you, Master Doctor,' quoth the Lords. 'Was that true, or else why said you so?' 'Surely, my Lords,' quoth he, 'I said not all things so, but marry, this I said indeed, that if Hunne had not been accused of heresy he would never have sued the *praemunire* .' 'Lo, my Lords,' quoth the other, 'I am glad ye find me a true man. Will ye command me any more service?' 'Nay, by my troth, quoth one of the Lords, not in this matter, by my will. Ye may go when ye will, for I have espied good man; so the words be all one, it maketh no matter to you which way they stand: but all is one to you, a horsemill and a millhorse, drink ere ye go, and go ere ye drink.' 'Nay, my Lords,' quoth he, 'I will not drink, God yield you.' " And therewith he made courtesy " and went his way, leaving some of the Lords laughing to see the good plain old honest man how that as contrary as their two tales were yet when he heard them both again he marked no difference between them but took them both for one because the words were one."

"By my troth," quoth your friend, "these three things came merrily to pass, and I would not for a good thing, but I had heard them. For here may a man see that misunderstanding maketh misreporting. And a tale that fleeth through many mouths catcheth many new feathers: which when they be pulled away again, leave him as pilled " as a coot and sometimes as bare as a bird's arse."

NOTES

(1) **They burned up as fair Bibles** : Book-burnings in England were common during the decade following Martin Luther's publications of treatises critical of Pope and Church. On May 12, 1521 at St. Paul's Cross, his writings were burnt by order of Cardinal Wolsey; and a sermon was preached by Bishop John Fisher against Lutheran heresies. In February 1526 Henry ordered a public burning of Protestant books including Tyndale's *New Testament* , thereby infuriating Protestant reformers.

(2) **The Chancellor and his keepers** : I.e., Dr. Edward Horsey, Chancellor to Charles Joseph, Bishop of London in 1514; and, presumably, John Spalding, a bellringer—both of whom were accused by a coroner's jury of having murdered Richard Hunne.

(3) **Praemunire** : a suit in which the defendant argues that the issue of the case should be decided by a higher court, here, the King's Court, not the Ecclesiastical court. **mortuary** : a gift customarily given to the officiating priest following a burial.

(4) **Baynard's Castle** was built originally in 1066 on the north bank of the Thames in London (due South of St. Paul's); it was occupied by King Richard III. In More's days, having been rebuilt in 1487, it was converted to a place for holding major inquiries.

(5) **Richard Hunne** : In 1514 Hunne's infant son died shortly after baptism and he was buried by a Middlesex priest who assumed that he would be given the linen baptism cloth as a customary gift following the burial; but Hunne, probably disturbed over the loss of his child, flatly refused. The officiating priest then cited Hunne to Ecclesiastical court, but Hunne sued the priest, requesting the case be held under the jurisdiction of the King's Court. The King's Court decided on December 2 against Hunne, and he was committed to the Bishop's Prison, or Lollards' Tower, in London. After being examined again by the Bishop himself, he was returned to solitary confinement; and the following morning he was found "hanging upon a staple of iron in a girdle of silk, with fair countenance, his head combed, and his bonnet right sitting upon his head, and his eyes and mouth fair closed, without any staring, gaping or frowning....Whereby it appeareth plainly to us all that the neck of Hunne was broken, and the great plenty of blood was shed before he was hanged" (J. Gairdner, pp. 28f). The inquest returned a verdict of willful murder against Dr. Horsey. The Bishop appealed to Cardinal Wolsey, who obtained a royal pardon for Horsey; it was rumored that Horsey had paid the King 600 pounds to buy his pardon. After Hunne's death the Bishops of London, Durham and Lincoln pronounced sentence of heresy on the dead man and ordered his body exhumed and burned at Smithfield. Sir Thomas More claims that Hunne was detected of heresy long before he brought his suit against the priest, that he brought the suit only to stop the heresy proceedings against him, and that when his suit was thrown out of the King's Court, Hunne hanged himself in despair. More was prompted to write at length in two of his polemical works (*Heresies* and *Supplication*) by Simon Fish's charge that Richard Hunne, an honest man, was no heretic, and he would be still alive had he not commenced action of *praemunire* (F.F. Furnivall, pp. 9-12). Oddly enough, no other non-reformation topic resulted in such a lengthy digression in More's polemical treatises; and it included three merry tales! Ironically, the issue polarized Protestants and Catholics, and made a "heretic" out of a simple Merchant Taylor who was merely grief-stricken and furious over the loss of his infant son and wished to keep a simple piece of cloth in remembrance of his dead child.

Professor Marius devotes Chapter 8 (pp. 123-141) in his exhaustive biography, *Thomas More* , to the Richard Hunne affair. He claims that Londoners believed Bishop Richard FitzJames and his Chancellor, Dr. William Horsey, actually murdered (or had murdered?) Hunne and tried to make his death look like suicide. This case, he continues, sounded the first blast or trumpet for Protestant Reformation in sixteenth century England. More took the Church's view and tried to absolve the clergy. Marius provides a full if gruesome report of the probable murder of Hunne in his jail cell (pp. 130-131, especially); and, more importantly, the universal reaction to his supposed murder. More twisted the story, belittling the inquest. More "did distort the facts," claiming Hunne was a Lollard heretic.

Sister Anne M. O'Donnell has kindly provided me with the most recent discovery relating to the Hunne affair. W.R. Cooper ("Richard Hunne," *Reformation* 1 (1996): 221-50) "retrieved the report of the inquest on Hunne's death from the Public Record Office in 1988 and read it with infra-red light. He discovered a disposition from the servant of Charles Joseph, who confessed how he tried to kill Hunne by thrusting a wire up his nose [into his brain]. From the state of

Hunne's body, the jury concluded that he was dead before he was hanged." Does this gruesome find conclude The Case of Richard Hunne?

(6) '**An Egyptian**' : Gipsies, or "outlandish people," travelling about going from shire to shire, were apparently becoming a nuisance by 1530 when an Act was proclaimed against them (22^o Hen. VIII. c. 10 [*Statutes of the Realm* , Vol. III, p. 327]).

(7) **great...pudding-prick** : i.e., a windmill post whittled down to a mere pin (a matter of seeming importance deflated to nothing). A pudding-prick was used to fasten a sack of pudding. The proverb is admirably suited as a "wise text" for the exposé of this witness's credulity.

(8) **bare as a bird's arse** : By ending his discussion of the Hunne case with merry tales and three amusing proverbial expression More presumably intends to ridicule the Protestants' charge that Hunne was no heretic and was indeed murdered.

94. "Richard Hunne: Murder or Suicide?"

[From *The Supplication of Souls* ; Works, pp. 298b-299a]

And of such as have heard of the matter and known it well, he shall find enough, and especially we think, the King's grace himself, whose Highness he is so homely^u to ask that question and appoint him his answer himself, that of all five things which he hath here in so few lines affirmed, there is not one true, but lies every one. For first to begin, where he leaveth, when he saith that the clergy have since the death of Richard Hunne promoted Doctor Horsay with benefice upon benefice four times as much as 600 pounds. The plain untruth of this point may every man soon know, that will soon inquire. For he liveth yet at Exeter and there liveth upon such as he had before without that new heap of benefices given him by the captains of his kingdom for killing of Richard Hunne, or thank^u either, save only of God for his long patience in his undeserved trouble.

But to the end that ye may see how little this man forceth^u how loud he lie: consider that he saith that the clergy gave unto Doctor Horsay, after he came out of prison, benefice to the value of four times as much as 600 pounds. Now if this be true, then hath Doctor Horsay had in benefices besides all such as he had before his trouble, the value of 2400 pounds. We trust that the man, his substance and his livelihood is so well known that we need not to tell that the beggars' proctor in this point hath made one loud lie. Another is that he saith that Hunne was kept in plea^u in the spiritual law for a matter determinable in the King's court: for the matter was for a mortuary which by plain statute is declared to pertain to the spiritual law.

The third is that Hunne was honest, except heresy be honest. The fourth is that Doctor Horsay and his accomplices murdered him in prison: for thereof is the contrary well known, and that the man hanged himself for despair, despite, and for lack of grace.

We might and we would lay for the fifth, the payment which he speaketh of the 600 pounds, with which money he would men should ween that he bought his pardon. Wherein he layeth a good

great sum to the end that folk well witing ⁊ that Doctor Horsay was not like to have so much money of his own, should ween therewith that the clergy laid out the money among them, and then gave him benefices whereof he might pay them again. But this layeth he from himself, and sheweth not to whom, for he saith it is said so. And yet were it no wrong that it were accounted his own, till he put it better from him, and prove of whom he heard it.

Howbeit, sith there is other store enough, we shall leave this lie in question between him and we wot nere whom else; and we shall for the fifth lay you that lie that he layeth forth himself; that is, to wit, where he saith that the Chancellor purchased the King's most gracious pardon for the murdering of Hunne. For this is the truth that he never sued any pardon therefore. But after that the matter had been by long time and great diligence so far forth examined that the King's Highness at length (as time always trieth out the truth) well perceived his innocence, and there also that were accused and indicted with him. His noble grace, when they were arraigned upon that indictment and thereto pleaded that they were not guilty, commanded his Attorney-General to confess their plea to be true, which is the thing that his Highness as a most virtuous prince useth for to do when the matter is not only just but also known for just upon the part of the party defendant. Because that, like as where the matter appeareth doubtful he doth, as reason is, suffer it to go forth and letteth the truth be tried, so where he seeth and perceiveth the right to be on the other side, his Highness will in no wise have the wrong set forth or maintained in his name. Now when it was then thus indeed that neither the Chancellor nor any man else ever sued any charter of pardon for the matter, this is, then, the fifth lie that this man hath made in so few lines. Which things who so well consider cannot but marvel of the sore pithy point wherewith he knitteth up all his heavy matter, saying to the King: "Who is there of their kingdom that will not take courage to commit like offence, seeing the promotions that fall to such men for their offending?"

NOTES

- (1) **lies every one** : More refers to Simon Fish's charges (see No. 93, n.5).
- (2) **Doctor Horsay** : i.e., Doctor Edward Horsey, Bishop of London. (See also No. 93, n.2).
- (3) **as time always trieth out the truth**: Cf. John Heywood's *A Dialogue of Proverbs* [1546], ed. R.E. Habenicht, 11. 1903-1904:

"Let time try: time trieth truth in every doubt,
And deem the best, till time hath tried the truth out."

95. "Witnesses that do not Lie"

[From *A Dialogue concerning Heresies* ; Works, pp. 126a-127a]

Who would ween it possible that glass were made of fern roots? Now if those that ween it impossible by reason and never saw it done, believe no man that tell it them, albeit that it be no peril to their soul, yet so much have they knowledge the less and unreasonably stand in their error through the mistrusting of the truth.

It is not yet fifty years ago since the first man (as far as men have heard) came to London that ever parted the gilt from the silver, consuming shortly the silver into dust with a very fair water. Insofar forth that when the finers and goldsmiths of London heard first thereof they nothing wondered thereof but laughed thereat as at an impossible lie, in which persuasions if they had continued still they had yet at this day lacked all that cunning. ²⁵ Yet will I not say nay but that a man may be too light in belief and be by such examples brought into belief too far. As a good fellow and friend of mine late in talking of this matter of marvels and miracles, intending merrily to make me believe for a truth a thing that could never be, first brought in what a force the fire hath that will make two pieces of iron able to be joined and cleave together, and with the help of the hammer be made both one, which no hammering could do without the fire, which thing because I daily see, I assented. Then, said he further, that it was more marvel that the fire shall make iron to run as silver or lead doth, and make it take a print. ²⁶ Which thing I told him I had never seen, but because he said he had seen it, I thought it to be true. Soon after this he would have me to believe that he had seen a piece of silver of two or three inches about and in length less than a foot drawn by man's hand through straight holes made in an iron, till it was brought in thickness not half an inch about, and in length drawn out I cannot tell how many yards. And when I heard him say that he saw this himself, then I wist well he was merrily disposed.

"Marry," quoth your friend, "it was high time to give him over when he came to that." "Well," said I, "what if I should tell you now that I had seen the same?" "By my faith," quoth he, "merrily I would believe it at leisure when I had seen the same, and in the meanwhile I could not let you to say your pleasure in your own house, but I would think that ye were disposed merrily to make me a fool."

"Well," said I, "what if there would besides me 10 or 20 good honest men tell you the same tale, and that they had all seen the thing done themselves?" "In faith," quoth he, "sith I am sent hither to believe you, I would in that point believe yourself alone as well as them all." "Well," quoth I, "ye mean you would believe us all alike? But what would you then say if one or twain of them would say more?" "Marry," quoth he, "then would I believe them less." "What if they would," quoth I, "shew you that they have seen that the piece of silver was overgilt, ²⁷ and the same piece being still drawn through the holes, the gilt not rubbed off, but still go forth in length with the silver so that all the length of many yards was gilded of the gilding of the first piece not a foot long?" "Surely, Sir," quoth he, "those twain that would tell me so much more, I would say were not so cunning in the maintenance of a lie as was the pilgrim's companion which, when his fellow had told at York that he had seen of late at London a bird that covered all Paul's churchyard with his wings, coming to that same place on the morrow, said that he saw not that bird, but he heard much speech thereof, but he saw in Paul's churchyard an egg so great that ten men could scant move it with levers, this fellow could help it forth with a proper ²⁸ sideways. But he were no proper underpropper of a lie that would minish his credence with affirming all the first and setting a louder ²⁹ lie thereto." "Well," said I, "then I have espied, if ten should tell you so, ye would not believe them." "No," quoth he, "not if twenty should." "What if an hundred would," quoth I, "that seem good and credible?" "If they were," quoth he, "ten thousand, they were not of credence be with me, when they should tell me that they saw the thing that myself knoweth by nature and reason impossible. For when I know it could not be done, I know well that they lie all, be they never so many that say they saw it done." "Well," quoth I, "sith I see

well ye would not in this point believe a whole town, ye have put me to silence that I dare not now be bold to tell you that I have seen it myself. But surely, if witnesses would have served me, I ween I might have brought you a great many good men that would say and swear too that they have seen it themselves. But now shall I provide me tomorrow peradventure a couple of witnesses, of whom I wot well ye will mistrust neither." "Who be they," quoth he, "for it were hard to find whom I could better trust than yourself, [to] whom whatsoever I have merrily said I could not in good faith but believe you in that you should tell me earnestly upon your own knowledge. But ye use (my master saith) to look so sadly when ye mean merrily, that many times men doubt whether ye speak in sport when ye mean good earnest."

"In good faith," quoth I, "I mean good earnest now, and yet as well as ye dare trust me I shall, as I said, if ye will go with me, provide a couple of witnesses of whom ye will believe any one better than twain of me, for they be your near friends, and ye have been better acquainted with them and such as I dare say for them be not often wont to lie." "Who be they," quoth he, "I pray you." "Marry," quoth I, "your own two eyes! For I shall, if you will, bring you where ye shall see it in London. And as for iron and latten * to be so drawn in length ye shall see it done in twenty shops almost on one street." "Marry, Sir," quoth he, "these witnesses indeed will not lie."

NOTES

(1) **glass were made of fern roots?:** "One of the necessary elements of glass manufacture is soda or some other alkali. In Venice, the center of European glass production in More's day, the marshy ferns growing abundantly in the lagoons were discovered to be rich in alkali and so were used in the making of Venetian glass" (CW 9, p. 618, n. to p. 66/23).

(2) **finers** : i.e., refiners. In 1488-9 The Act of 4⁰ Hen.VII. c.2 (*Statutes of the Realm* , II, p. 526f) accuses refiners of debasing metal, of parting of gold and silver by fire and water. Silver so refined "they do allay...in divers manners" so that men "get no fine silver when they need it for their money."

¹ I.e., the Messenger of the Dialogue

² *Bishop's prison* : i.e., the Lollards' Tower

³ *no color* : i.e., no objection or pretext

⁴ *Praemunire* : see note 3

⁵ Privately, individually

⁶ *For the nonce* : for the express purpose

⁷ *Take...sleeve* : i.e., detain him

⁸ Dispensers of alms

⁹ I.e., chattels (given to the poor)

¹⁰ *Lose your child* : i.e., lose your eagerness (to hear tales)

¹¹ Ineffectual, fruitless

¹² ² I.e., gypsy

¹³ Obligated

¹⁴ (Ironic) learning

¹⁵ *Walk like himself* : i.e., be off (like the fool he was)

- ¹⁶ I.e., anything holy
¹⁷ *God yield you* : i.e., may God prove it to you
¹⁸ *Made courtesy* : i.e., bowed
¹⁹ Bald
²⁰ I.e., rude
²¹ Consent, approval
²² Cares
²³ *Kept in plea* : i.e., held in (ecclesiastical) court
²⁴ Knowing
²⁵ Skill
²⁶ Design, impression
²⁷ Gilded over
²⁸ Prop, support
²⁹ More flagrant
³⁰ Brass-like metal