

**Thomas More's Report to the 1531 Parliament;  
Thomas More Refuses to Receive the Emperor's Letters:  
Report by Eustace Chapuys to Emperor Charles V**

From *Letters and Papers 5*, #171, 2 April 1531. <sup>1</sup>

-- London, 2<sup>nd</sup> April [1531]

After the duke of Norfolk had given me some hope of obtaining the contract for corn which I asked for, he told my man that in consequence of the incessant rains here they were afraid of a famine, and that the King therefore would not grant my request, for which he was sorry. The same denial was made to a German, and I think it is reasonable, for corn is much risen in price. Since the ecclesiastics have obtained exemption from the *praemunire*, the laity, understanding that the King would make his account to draw from them a large sum, insisted that the King should give them a similar exemption, showing that they had not incurred a forfeiture; and if they had, that, in consideration of the large sums of money they had given him heretofore, they ought to be absolved. As the King would not listen to them for some days there was great murmuring among them in the Chamber of the Commons, where it was publicly said in the presence of some of the Privy Council that the King had burdened and oppressed his kingdom with more imposts and exactions than any three or four of his predecessors, and he ought to consider that the strength of the king lay in the affections of his people. And many instances were alleged of the inconveniences which had happened to princes through the ill treatment of their subjects. On learning this the King granted the exemption, which was published in Parliament on Wednesday last, without any reservation. There were five or six whom the King would not have pardoned. One of these is a dean, of the Queen's council, who has always assisted in her process against the King. On Thursday, when the memory of this exemption was fresh, **the Chancellor set forth by command that there were some who had said that the King pursued this divorce out of love for some lady, and not out of any scruple of conscience; and this was not true, for he was only moved thereto in discharge of his conscience, which, through what he had read and discovered from doctors and universities, was in bad condition by his living with the Queen, as would appear by the seals of the universities, which he would show them, of which they should understand the tenor and substance by what Brian Tuke would read to them.** Tuke then proceeded to read them in English with a loud voice. This act passed first in the assembly of prelates and lords; and when all was read, the bishops of Lincoln and London, seeing that the three principal prelates of the Queen's Council were not there, and thinking the others would not dare to utter a word, proceeded to dispute in favor of the King. The bishops of St. Asaph and of Bath protested that that was not the place to discuss this question, and that the time was too short to demonstrate the justice of the Queen's cause; and therefore they would not amplify or declare the matter beyond demonstrating that what the others alleged in behalf of the King made directly against him. Norfolk, knowing that Lincoln and London would get the worst of it, and that by entering into a discussion the credit of the said seals would be impaired, interrupted, saying that the King had not sent the said documents to discuss the matter, but only for the purpose propounded by the Chancellor. **Hereupon some one asked the Chancellor for his opinion; on which he said that he had many times already declared it to the King; and he said no more.** When Talbot was

similarly interrogated, he said it was not for him to give an opinion on the subject, and he would refer himself to those to whom knowledge and judgment belonged. When the matter was thus finished in the House of Lords, the Chancellor, with the dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, the bishops of London and Lincoln, Brian Tuke, and many others, descended to the hall of the Commons, where the whole thing was read and set forth as before the Lords; except that the Chancellor added that the King had wished them to be advertised of this matter that when they returned to their houses they might inform their neighbors of the truth. When the reading was over, the bishops of London and Lincoln, with great ceremony, took it on their conscience that the marriage of the King and Queen was more than illegal, London alleging that when your Majesty was in Bologna the university determined the affair, and that there were many doctors in Italy who had not dared to write in the matter for fear of your Majesty, as he would prove by their own letters, which he had in his lodging; and that John Majoris, a great doctor of Paris, who had composed a book on this question in favor of the dispensing power of the Pope, had confessed to him that he had so concluded in order more to please the Pope, and favor the authority of the Holy See; and many such lies he set forth, which very few people will believe in, for most men know the chafferer, and know well that the bishopric makes him talk so. The Chancellor and the others retired without a word from the Commons, who rather showed displeasure and regret at this than anything else; and, so far as I can learn, the King is mistaken if he thinks that by these helpers he has justified his intentions with the people, for they are less edified than ever....

**I have sent to tell the Chancellor that I have letters for him from your Majesty** , and I wished to visit him. **He begged me** for the honor of God **to forbear** , for although he had given already sufficient proof of his loyalty **that he ought to incur no suspicion** , whoever came to visit him, yet, considering the time, he ought to abstain from everything which might provoke suspicion; and if there were no other reason, **such a visitation might deprive him of the liberty which he had always used in speaking boldly in those matters which concerned your Majesty and the Queen.** He said he would not hold them in less regard than his life, not only out of the respect which is due to your Majesty and the Queen, but also for the welfare, honor, and conscience of his master, and the repose of his kingdom. With regard to the letter he begged me earnestly that I would keep it as it is till some other time, for if he received it he must communicate it, and he hoped a more propitious time would come for its acceptance, begging me to assure you of his most affectionate service.

Hoping to have a summary of the proceedings in Parliament to send you, “nen ferey dimportance heure mention” (*sic*). The Queen lately left Richmond, where she left the Princess, and she is now at Greenwich, in great spirits at having escaped the determination of Parliament on the divorce, of which she was always afraid. She has nothing now to fear, except the Pope should delay the process, for which she has determined to write expressly to his Holiness. It is rumored that the King, being doubtful of the sentence, and seeing he can obtain no further delay, has sent powers to dispute the plea, making his account that he shall be able to prolong it to the death of the Pope, and then he may have some better chance. As I have written to you, he might retard the definitive sentence five or six years, but the moment he has consented to the jurisdiction of the Pope, his Holiness might renew the brief which he decreed at Bologna, and drive the lady from court, and then there would be no need here to wait for another sentence. I have written to May.

*Signed:* “Eustace Chapuys.”

<sup>1</sup> Great Britain. *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*. Ed. J.S. Brewer and James Gairdner. London: Longmans and Co., 1882.