

DIALOGUE CONCERNING TYNDALE: BK. 3. CH. 6-14

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

The author showeth that the person (Blincy) abjured for his own wordly honesty and for the more fruit of his preaching, if he be suffered to preach time to come, a were much better for him openly and willing to confess the truth. And that now by the standing still in the denial, he both shameth himself, and should, if he preached, slander the word of God.

IT is, quod he, peradventure better thus. For then should he slander himself and the word of God also, if he should hereafter preach again.

Nay, Mary, quod I, then should he rather deliver himself from slander and the word of God also. For then should every man see the devil cast clean out of his heart, and hope that he should be from thenceforth a very good man. Where now thinking him to persevere in a proud perjury, we can none other think but that he must needs be very nought still, though we should hereafter hear him preach never so well. And that were a sore slander to the word of God that men should see him, whom they hear preach well, so proud an hypocrite and therewith so foolish too that, for a false hope of his own estimation preserved, he laboureth as much as in him is to make the world ween that twenty true men were forsworn against him. Wherein, while there is no man so mad to believe him, he loseth (if he preach in this plight) all his wide purpose; and winneth nothing but the contrary—that is double shame of his proud perjury and high malicious mind, instead of the praise that he looketh and preacheth for.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

The Messenger moveth a question if a man be sworn by a judge to say the truth of himself in a crime whereof he is had suspect, whether he may not lawfully on his oath swear untruth, where he thinketh cannot be proved against him. Whereunto the author answereth that he is bounden upon peril of perjury to say and confess [the] truth. And the much more sin and folly both was it then for the man that thus was abjured to forswear himself in the thing that he wist well would be proved, and a shameless folly to stand still by his perjury when he saw the matter so clearly proved in deed. And with this finisheth he the matter of his [Blincy's] abjuration.

I

IN good faith, quod he, I begin in this matter to be of your mind. For the matter being so plain and clearly proved, it was and is both sin and folly to stand in the denying. But there cometh a thing in my mind, though it be somewhat out of our matter, wherein I would be glad to hear what ye think.

What thing is that, quod I?

Mary, quod he, I have heard some well learned men say, if a man were accused of a fault that were true indeed, yet if it be secret and cannot be proved in an oath put unto him he, may and ought to swear nay, because that of secret and unknown things no man can be his judge. For only God is judge of man's heart. And if he should confess it where

IT IS SIN FOR A MAN TO DEFAME HIMSELF

he needeth not before no competent judge, that is to wit his secret fault openly before men whereof only God is judge, then should he defame himself and that were great sin. For holy scripture saith, *Curam habe de bono nomine*, Take heed of thy good name. ¹ *Et melior est nomen bonum quam divitiae multae*, Better is a good name than much riches. ² And it sayeth also, *Maledictus homo qui negligit famam suam*, ³ Accursed is the man that careth not what men say of him. And therefore I have heard some well learned men say, that in this case a man may boldly deny the matter upon his oath, be it never so true, so that it be so secret as it be not able to be proved by witness.

Forsooth, quod I, it is a large and a long matter to speak of perjury. But, as for this point, I hold it in my mind little question. For I hold this once for a sure and an infallible conclusion, that a man may never lawfully be forsworn. Mary, truth it is that a man's oath receiveth interpretation and is not alway bounden precisely to the words. As if a judge would swear me generally in a court to make true answer to such things as should be asked of me, and after mine oath given, he would ask me certain questions of matters nothing belonging to him. I were not by mine oath bounden to make him answer, forasmuch as no such thing was in mine oath intended. And therefore if a priest that had heard a man's confession were called before a judge and sworn for a witness, he **WHETHER A PRIEST MAY SWEAR THAT HE KNOWETH NOT THAT HE HEARD IN CONFESSION**

might boldly swear he knew nothing of the matter. Not for the common gloss that the confession was not made to him as to himself but as to God's minister, but for that the law dischargeth him of showing any such thing, no less than if his oath were given him in this manner, "What know ye of this matter out of confession?" For else if there were a tyrant that would compel him by express words to swear what he knew by the man's confession, the confessor had in my mind no remedy but to tell him plainly, "Sir, I will not swear for you nor in such matter make you any answer to die therefor, nor for anything that I know in the man for this matter though I told you all his whole confession anon, but for the evil that should grow by such a precedent. For if I should now excuse an innocent, swearing truly that I heard no such things in his confession, I should in some other cause either be forsworn, or by my refusing to swear, I should make the man the more suspect, in that I refuse to swear as much for him as I did for another. And therefor will I not make any answer in this for the peril that may fall in other." And with this answer or such other must he plainly refuse to swear, what pain so ever he should endure therefore. And in likewise if any judge would give an oath to any person to tell him the truth of any crime, which were so secret as the judge had never heard anything thereof, but would for his only pleasure know by the man's oath whether there were peradventure any such thing or not, the party may deny to swear or to make him answer therein. But on the other side, if he be denounced or detected unto him, either by common fame or other information, with such conjectures and likelihoods as the law giveth the judge authority to give the party an oath for the further search of

the matter, there is he plainly bounden upon pain of eternal damnation without covering or cautell
to show and disclose the plain truth and to have more respect to his soul than to his shame. For
as for those texts which you alleged be far from this point. For they none other mean but that a
man should in his living avoid not only sin but also all occasions whereby men might have
reasonable cause falsely to defame him. And it was never meant of the shame that a man taketh
of his own confession for his sin committed in deed. For by that he loseth not his good name, but
getteth his good name among good folk. And as for of evil men's words, there is no reckoning.
But surely, as I say, if a man had been all ill as a devil, and after repenting his sin would, for part
of his penance, willingly offer himself to the sufferance of open shame, there were no good
christian man that would after that like the man the worse, but a great deal the better. And if all
such open confession were sin, there was much sin used among good folk many day in Christ's
church, when it was much better than it is now. Lo, Acham, that had committed sacrilege
whereof is written in Josue, was exhorted by Josue to confess his fault openly, and give glory to
God that had detected him by lots. And so did he, and meekly suffered for his sin as well the
shame and wonder of the world, as the pain and bitterness of death. And therefore I no more
doubt of that thief but that he is a glorious saint in heaven than I doubt of that thief that Christ
promised paradise, hanging on the cross. And surely if men's old faults were still their infamy
after their amendment, then was Saint Peter little beholden to Saint Matthew and other of his
fellows that have slandered him in their gospels, telling how shamefully after all his crakes he
forsook his master and forswore him both. If a good man wax nought, the better he was, the more
sin it is and the more shame also. And it is not then in reason on the other side if a noughtie man
wax good, the worse he was, the better is for him and the more worship also. Our Lord saith
himself that for one sinner coming again to grace there is more joy in heaven than upon almost
an hundred, good folk that never sinned. And reckon we then that man shamed by the knowledge
of his sin here among sinful men, whose humble confession and meek amendment winneth him
so much worship in heaven? Trust me truly, when a man hath done evil, if he be duly sworn, it is
a worshipful shame and a joyful sorrow to confess the truth. And good folk, though they abhor
the sin, yet love they and commend the man as one that was nought and is good. And the shame
that he conceiveth in his heart afore the world getteth him great honour afore God, and the short
glowing heat in his cheeks speedily burneth up and wasteth the never wasting fire of hell
standing him further instead of great part of his purgatory. And therefore to the point that we
speak of, without long process, I tell you plainly my mind, that no man can be excused from the
peril of endless damnation, that would,

IT IS DAMNABLE TO CONVEY A FAULT BY ANY CAUTELL

upon boldness of any doctor's opinion, hide or cover his fault by any cautell, after a lawful oath
given him to tell the plain truth therein. And whoso will say the contrary, be must needs hold
plain against the law, and say that no judge may lawfully give an oath to the party. For whereof
should the oath serve if the party might lawfully forswear himself? And also if the judge may not
lawfully give him the oath, then may be refuse to swear, and may not first swear then and say
false which every man must upon damnation eschew though he folily (foolishly) take an oath
where he lawfully might refuse it.

Forsooth, quod he, methinketh ye take the sure way.

Well, quod I, if this be so in one that is sworn where the matter as he thinketh cannot be well
proved, how far wrong went the man [Bilney] that we spake of to forswear himself in a matter of

preaching, that he wist well was so open that it would be plainly proved what sin was therein, and what shame and folly thereto was there to stick still in his perjury, when he saw the matter already proved so clearly, and by so many, so good, so honest, and so indifferent, that he could nothing now win by the denying but evil opinion, and almost a despair of his amendment in all that ever heard him?

In good faith, quod he, all this is very truth, and therefore we shall let him alone till God send him better mind.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

The author showeth why the New Testament of Tyndale's translation was burned. And showeth for a sample certains words evil, and of evil purpose changed.

BUT now, I pray you, let me know your mind concerning the burning of the new Testament in English which Tyndale lately translated, and, as men say, right well; which maketh men much marvel of the burning.

It is, quod I, to me great marvel that any good Christian man having any drop of wit in his head, would anything marvel or complain of the burning of that book, if he know the matter. Which whoso calleth the new Testament calleth it by a wrong name, except they will call it Tyndale's Testament or Luther's Testament. For so had Tyndale, after Luther's counsel, corrupted and changed it from the good and wholesome doctrine of Christ to the devilish heresies of their own, that it was clean a contrary thing.

That were marvel, quod your friend, that it should be so clean contrary. For to some that read it, it seemed very like.

It is, quod I, nevertheless contrary; and yet the more perilous. For like as to a true silver groat as a false copper groat is, never the less contrary [is it] though it be quick silvered all over; but so much the more false in how much it is counterfeited the more like to the truth; so was the translation so much the more contrary, in how much it was craftily devised like; and so much the more perilous, in how much it was to folk unlearned more hard to be discerned.

Why, quod your friend, what faults were there in it?

To tell you all that, quod I, were in a manner to rehearse you all the whole book wherein there were founden and noted wrong and falsely translated above a thousand texts by tale.

I would, quod he, fain hear some one.

He that should, quod I, study for that, should study where to find water in the sea. But I will show you for example two or three such as every one of the three is more than thrice three in one.

That were, quod he, very strange except ye mean more in weight, for one can be but one in

number.

Surely, quod I, as weighty be they as any lightly can be. But I mean that every one of them is more than thrice three in number.

That were, quod he, somewhat like a riddle.

This riddle, quod I, will soon be read. For he hath mistranslated three words of great weight and every one of them is, as I suppose, more than thrice three times repeated and rehearsed in the book.

Ah, that may well be, quod he, but that was not well done. But, I pray you, what words be they?

MARK THESE THREE WORDS

The one is, quod I, this word (priests). The other the Church. The third Charity. For Priests whereso ever he speaketh of the Priests of Christ's Church, he never calleth them Priests but always Seniors. The Church he calleth alway the congregation, and Charity he calleth love. Now do these names in our English tongue neither express the things that be meant by them, and also there appeareth (the circumstances well considered) that he had a mischievous mind in the change.

For first, as for priests and priesthood, though that of old they used commonly to choose well elderly men to be priests, and therefore in the Greek tongue priests were called *presbiteri*, as we might say, elder men; yet neither were all priests chosen old, as appeareth by Saint Paul writing to Tymotheus, *Nemo juventutem tuam contemnat*. Let no man contemn thy youth, nor every elder man is not a priest. And in our English tongue this word (senior) signifieth nothing at all; but is a French word used in English more than half in mockage, when one will call another my Lord, in scorn. And if he mean to take the Latin word *senior*, that word in the Latin tongue never signified a priest, but only an elder man. By which name of elder men, if he would call the priests Englishly, then should he rather signify their age than their office. And yet the name doth in English plainly signify the aldermen of the cities and nothing the priests of the church. And thus may we perceive that rather than he would call a priest by the name of a priest, he would seek a new word he neither wist nor cared what.

Now where he calleth the church alway the *congregation*, what reason had he therein? For every man well seeth that though the church be indeed a congregation, yet is not every congregation the church but a congregation of christian people, which congregation of christian people hath been in England alway called and knowen by the name of the church: which name what good cause or colour could he find to turn into the name of congregation, which word is common to a company of christian men or a company of Turks?

Like wisdom was there in the change of this word (*charity*) into love. For though charity be always love, yet is not, ye wot well, love alway charity.

The more pity, by my faith, quod your friend, that ever love was sin. And yet it would not be so much so taken if the world were no more suspicious than they say that good Saint Francis was, which, when he saw a young man kiss a girl once in way of good company, kneeled down and

held up his hands unto heaven, highly thanking God that charity was not yet gone out of this wretched world.

He had, quod I, a good mind and did like a good man that deemed all thing to the best.

So say I too, quod he, but how far be folk fallen from the good mind now? Men be nowadays waxen so full of mistrust, that some man would, in faith, ween his wife were nought if he should but find her in bed with a poor frere.

Forsooth, ye be a wanton, quod I. But yet in earnest how like you the change of these words?

Surely, quod he, very nought. And that it was not well nor wisely done, there will, I trow, no good wise man deny. But yet whether Hichins had in the translation thereof any malicious purpose or not therein, will I (till I see further) play Saint Francis' part, and judge the man no worse than the matter requireth.

First, quod I, would ye that the book should go forth and be read still in that fashion?

Nay, in good faith, quod he, that would I not if he use it so very often.

With that word, quod I, ye hit the nail on the head. For surely, if he changed the common known word into the better, I would well allow it. If he changed it into as good, I would suffer it. If somewhat into worse, so he did it seldom, I would wink at it. But now when he changeth the known usual names of so great things into so far the worse, and that not repeateth seldom, but so often and so continually inculketh * that almost in the whole book his lewd change he never changeth. In this manner could no man deem other, but that that man meant mischievously—scant * such a good silly soul as would ween all were well when he found his wife where ye said right now. If he called charity by the bare name of love—I would not stick thereat. But now whereas charity

CHARITY

signifieth in Englishmen's ears, not every common love, but a good, virtuous and well-ordered love, he that will studiously flee from that name of good love, and alway speak of 'love,' and alway leave out 'good,' I would surely say that he meaneth nought.

In good faith, quod he, so is it not unlikely.

That, quod I, when ye see more ye shall say it is much more than likely. For now it is to be considered that at the time of this translation, Hychens * was with Luther in Wittenberge, and set certain glosses in the margin, framed for the setting forth of the ungracious sect.

By Saint John, quod your friend, if that be true that Hychens were at that time with Luther, it is a plain token that he wrought somewhat after his counsel, and was willing to help his matters forward here. But whether Luther's matters be so mad as they be made for, that shall we see hereafter.

Very true, quod I, but as touching the confederacy between Luther and him, is a thing well

known and plainly confessed by such as have been taken and convicted here of heresy, coming from thence, and some of them sent hither to sow that seed about here, and to send word thither from time to time how it sprang. But now the cause why he changed the name of *charity*, and of the *church*, and of *priesthood*, is no very great difficulty to perceive. For since Luther and his fellows, among other

LUTHER'S HERESIES

their damnable heresies, have one that all our salvation standeth in faith alone, and toward our salvation nothing force of good works, therefore it seemeth that he laboureth of purpose to minish the reverent mind that men bear to charity, and therefore he changeth the name of holy virtuous affection into the bare name of *love* common to the virtuous love that man beareth to God and to the lewd love that is between flecke and his make. ¹¹ And for because that Luther utterly denieth the very catholic church in earth, and saith that the church of Christ is but an unknown congregation of some folk here two and there three, no man wot where, having the right faith, which he calleth only his own new forged faith; therefore Hychens in the new Testament cannot abide the name of the *church*; but turneth it into the name of *congregation*--- willing that it should seem to Englishmen, either that Christ in the gospel had never spoken of the church, or else that the church were but such a congregation as they might have occasion to say that a congregation of such some heretics were the church that God spake of.

Now as touching the cause why he changed the name of *priest* into *senior*, ye must understand that Luther and his adherents hold this heresy that all holy order is nothing. And that a priest is nothing else but a man chosen among the people to preach; and that by that choice to that office, he is priest by and by without any more ado, and no priest again whensoever the people choose another in his place; and that a priest's office is nothing but to preach. For as for saying mass, and hearing of confession, and absolution thereupon to be given, all this, he saith, that every man, woman, and child may do as well as any priest.

Now doth Hychens therefore, to set forth this opinion withal after his master's heresy, put away the name of priest in his translation, as though priesthood were nothing. Wheresoever the scripture speaketh of the Priests that were among the Jews, there doth he in his translation call them still by the name of priests. But wheresoever the scripture speaketh of the priests of Christ's church, there doth he put away the name of priest in his translation, because he would make it seem that the scripture did never speak of any priests different from laymen among Christian people. And he saith plainly, in his book of obedience, ¹² that priesthood and all holy orders among Christian people be but feigned inventions, and that priests be nothing but officers chosen to preach, and that all the consecration whereby they be consecrate is nothing worth. And for this cause, in all his translation wheresoever he speaketh of them, the name of priest which to us in our own tongue hath alway signified an

A PRIEST

anointed parson, and with holy orders consecrated unto God, he hath changed into the name of *senior*, no word of our language, but either used half in mockage when we speak French in sport, *dieu vous garde senior*, or at the furthest, nothing betokening but elder. So that it is easy to see what he meant in the turning of these names.

In good faith, quod your friend, it seemeth verily that he meant not well.

Surely, quod I, ye would well say so if ye saw all the places which I shall cause you to see when he will, and ye shall soon judge them yourself. For it were too long to rehearse them all now. Nor these have I not rehearsed you as for the chief but for that they came first to mind. For else I might shortly rehearse you many things more as far out of tune as these be.

For he changeth commonly the name *grace* into this word *favour* ; whereas every favour is not grace in English for in some favour is there little grace. *Confession* he translath into *knowledge*. *Penance* into *repentance*. *A contrite heart* he changeth into *a troubled heart*. And many more things like; and many texts untruly translated for the maintenance of heresy, as I shall show you some when we look in the book. Which things we shall not now reason upon for they be not worthy to be brought in question. But I tell you this much only, for this cause, that ye may perceive that he hath thus used himself in his translation to the intent that he would set forth Luther's heresies and his own thereby. For, first, he would make the people believe that we should believe nothing but plain scripture, in which point he teacheth a plain pestilent heresy. And then would he with his false translation make the people ween further that such articles of our faith as he laboureth to destroy, and which be well proved by holy scripture, were in holy scripture nothing spoken of, but that the preachers have all this fifteen hundred year misreported the gospel and englished the scripture wrong, to lead the people purposely out of the right way.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

The author showeth another great token that the translation was perilous and made for an evil purpose.

But to the intent ye shall yet the less doubt what good fruit was intended by this translation, and easily judge yourself whether it was well worthy to be burned or not, ye shall understand that there hath been, since that time, another book made in English, and imprinted, as it saith, in Almain, a foolish railing book against the clergy, and much part made in rhyme, but the effect thereof was all against the mass, and the holy sacraments. In this book the maker railleth upon all them that caused Tyndale's translation of the new testament to be burned, saying that they burned it because that it destroyed the mass. Whereby ye may see that he reckoned the translation very good for their purpose toward the destruction of the mass.

By Saint Mary mass, quod your friend, the book is a shrewd gloss for the other. For it showed a cause for which it was well worthy to be burned, and the maker with it, if it were made to destroy the mass. But who made that second book ?

Forsooth, quod I, it appeareth not in the book. For the book is put forth nameless, and was in the beginning reckoned to be made by Tindal. And whether it so were or not, we be not yet very sure. ¹³ Howbeit since that time Tyndale hath put out in his own name another book entitled *Mammona*, ¹⁴ which book is very *Mammona iniquitatis*, a very treasury and well-spring of wickedness. And yet hath he since put forth a worse also named *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, ¹⁵ a book able to make a Christian man that would believe it, leave off all good Christian

virtues, and lose the verity of Christendom. In the preface of his first book, called *Mammona*, he saith that one Friar Jerome made the other book that we talk of, which friar Jerome giving up his order of the Friar Observants came to him where he was, showing him that he would cast off his habit, and leave his religion, and essay now to serve God, and that afterward he left him and went unto Roy, ¹⁶ which is as I think ye know, another Appostita ¹⁷ by whose counsel Tyndale saith the Friar Jerome made the book; wherein Tyndale saith he misliketh his rhymes and his over much railing. And saith also that he feareth lest friar Jerome shall not well prove all that he promiseth in the book.

Why, quod your friend, is that all the fear that he findeth in himself, and all the fault that he findeth in the friar and his book?

Yea, in good faith, quod I, every whit.

Then, findeth he, quod your friend, no fault in his apostasy?

No more, quod I, than I show you.

Nor findeth he, quod your friend, no fault in that the friar's book saith that the new testament of Tyndale was burned because it destroyed the mass?

Never a whit, quod I, more than you hear.

And feareth he, quod your friend, nothing else but lest the friar should fail of performing of somewhat that his book promiseth?

That is all, quod I, and what he promiseth therein, in faith, I remember not. But it seemeth whatsoever it be, Tyndale would it were well performed.

He had, quod your friend, much more cause as methinketh to fear lest men should reckon high default in his translation, in that he nothing answereth to those words of the friar's book, wherein he saith that the new testament that was burned did destroy the mass.

Ye say, quod I, very truth, in my mind, and so would he of likelihood if himself had not meant as the friar said. But surely for the translation I shall show you so many texts in such wise corrupted, that ye shall not I suppose greatly doubt what he meant in his doing. And therewithal I showed your friend a book with the places ready noted, which book I had by license a little before lent unto me for the nonce. Wherein he saw so many corruptions, and of such manner sort, that albeit upon some we somewhat reasoned in the way, yet at the last himself said hoe, and verily confessed that the book in such wise translated was very nought and nothing metely to be read.

THE TENTH CHAPTER

The author showeth that the translation of Tyndale was too bad to be mended.

But yet he said that the faults might be by some good men amended, and then the book printed again if nothing letted but that.

Surely, quod I, if we go thereto, the faults be, as ye see, so many and so spread through the whole book, that likewise as it were as soon done to weave a new web of cloth as to sow up every hole in a net. So were it almost as little labour and less to translate the whole book all new, as to make in his translation so many changes as needs must be, ere it were made good; beside this that there would no wise man, I trow, take the bread which he well wist was of his enemies hand once poisoned, though he saw his friend after scrape it never so clean.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

The Messenger findeth fault with the clergy in that he saith they have made a constitution provincial that no Bible in English should be suffered. And in this chapter, incidently, the Messenger much reproveth the living of the clergy. Whereunto the author somewhat showeth his mind, deferring for the while his answer to the objection made against the constitution.

Sir, quod your friend, I will not greatly stick with you in that oint. But surely the thing that maketh in this matter the clergy most suspect, and wherein, as it seemeth, it would be full hard to excuse them is this, that they not only damn Tyndale's translation (wherein there is good cause) but over that do damn all other, and as though a layman were no Christian man, will suffer no layman have any at all. But when they find any in his keeping, they lay heresy to him therefore. And thereupon they bum up the book, and sometime the good man withal, alleging for the defence of their doing a law of their own making and constitution provincial, whereby they have prohibited that any man shall have any upon pain of heresy. And this is a law very provincial, for it holdeth but here. For in all other countries of Christendom the people have the scripture translated into their own tongue, and the clergy there findeth no such fault therein. Wherefore either our people be worst of all people, or else our clergy is worst of all clergies. But, by my troth, for ought that I can see here, or perceive by them that have been elsewhere, our lay people be as good and as honest as be anywhere. And if any be otherwise, the occasion and example cometh of the clergy, among whom we see much more vice than among ourself. Whereas they should give us example of virtue and the light of learning, now their examples, what they be, we see. And as for learning, they neither will teach us but seldom, and that shall be but such things as pleaseth them, some glosses of their own making, nor suffer us to learn by ourself, but by their constitution ^{is} pull Christ's gospel out of Christian people's hands, I cannot well see why, but lest we should see the truth. The Jews be not letted to read their law, both learned and lewd. And yet are there in the old testament things for unlearned folk far more strange and perilous than in the new. And why should then our laymen be forboden the gospel but if that will make us worse than Jews? Wherein I can, in good faith, see no excuse they can find. For the scripture is to

SCRIPTURE

good folk the nourishes of virtue; and to them that be nought it is the means of amendment. And therefore while the clergy doth withdraw it [from] us--if our souls be in good health, they take away our food; if our souls be sick they take away the medicine. And therefore, as I said, the fault is not in the damning of Tyndale's translation, but in that they have by an express law forboden that we should have any at all.

Your words, quod I, be somewhat pignant and sharp. But surely they prick somewhat more the men than the matter. For where ye touch in effect two things; one, the constitution provincial, by which ye think the clergy of this realm have evil prohibited all translations of scripture into our tongue; another, the vice of the clergy in general; the first point which indeed toucheth our matter, I can and will with few words answer you. But as for the other which toucheth the men, as where ye accuse the clergy in their persons of very vicious living as men much worse than ye say that we be, and yet as though their owne faults were too few, charge them with ours too, whereof ye call them the cause, in this point will I keep no schools with you, nor enter into disputations thereof, nor gladly meddle with the matter. For as I told you in the beginning, since we talk but of men's learning, I will not meddle of men's living, nor in that treating of this matter either praise or dispraise any man's manner, except some such as are for their heresies and evil doctrine cast out of Christ's church and through all Christendom damned and diffamed already by their own obstinate malice. But yet where ye speak of other countries, making an argument that our clergy is the worst of all other, I wot well the whole world is so wretched that spiritual and temporal everywhere all be bad enough, God make us all better. But yet for that, I have myself seen and by credible folk have heard, like as ye say by our temporality, that we be as good and as honest as anywhere else; so dare I boldly say that the spirituality of England, and specially that part in which ye find most fault, that is to wit that part which we commonly call the secular clergy, is in learning and honest

COMPARISONS BE ODIOUS

living well able to match and (saving the comparisons be odious, I would say further) far able to overmatch number for number the spirituality of any nation Christian.

I wot well there be therein many very lewd and nought. And surely wheresoever there is a multitude it is not without miracle well possible to be otherwise. But now if the bishops would once take unto priesthood better laymen and fewer (for of us be they made) all the matter were more than half amended. ¹⁹

Now where ye say that ye see more vice in them than in ourself, truth it is that everything in them is greater because they be more bounden to be better. But else, the things that they misdo be the selfsame that we sin in ourself, which vices that as ye say we see more in them than in ourself, the cause is I suppose, for we look more upon theirs than on

A FABLE

our own, and fare as Aesop saith in a fable that every man carrieth a double wallet on his shoulder, and in to the one that hangeth at his breast he putteth other folks' faults--and therein he toteth ²⁰ and poreth often. In the other he layeth up all his own and swingeth it at his back---which himself never listeth to look in, but other that come after him cast an eye into it among. Would God we were all of the mind that every man thought no man so bad as himself. For that were the way to mend

A WAY TO AMEND

both them and us.

Now they blame us; and we blame them; and both blameworthy; and either part more ready to find others' faults than to mend their own. For in reproach of them we be so studious, that neither good nor bad passeth unreproved. If they be familiar, we call them light. If they be solitary, we call them fantastic. If they be sad, we call them solemn. If they be merry, we call them mad. If they be companionable ²¹ we call them vicious. If they be holy we call them hypocrites. If they keep few servants we call them niggards. If they keep many we call them pompous. If a lewd priest do a lewd deed, then we say, lo, see what sample the clergy giveth us, as though that priest were the clergy. But then forget we to look what good men be therein, and what good counsel they give us, and what good ensample they show us. But we fare as do the ravens and the carrion crows that never meddle with any quick flesh; but where they may find a dead dog in a ditch, thereto they flee and thereon they feed apace. So where we see a good man and hear and see a good thing, there we take little heed. But when we see once an evil deed, thereon we gape, thereof we talk and feed ourselves all day with the filthy delight of evil communication. Let a good man preach, a short tale shall serve us thereof and we shall neither much regard his exhortation nor his good examples. But let a lewd frere be taken with a wench, we will jest and rail upon the whole order all the year after, and say, lo, what sample they give us. And yet, when we have said, we will follow the same and then say we learned it of them, forgetting that we list not to hear and follow some other whose word and deed would give us light to do better, if we listed as well to learn the better as to follow the worse.

Indeed, quod he, because ye speak of light, they say that if a woman be fair, then is she young, and if a priest be good, then he is old. But yet have I seen a priest giving light to the people that was but very young.

Mary, quod I, God forbid else, ye may see that often and ye will.

Truly, quod he, it is pity that we see such light so seldom, being this wretched world in such darkness as it is. For I never saw it but once. Nor as it seemed few of the people neither. For in faith, they wondered as fast thereon as though they had never seen it before.

How happed that, quod I ?

Mary, quod he, it happed that a young priest very devoutly in a procession bare a candle before the cross for lying with a wench, and bare it light all the long way. Wherein the people took such spiritual pleasure and inward solace that they laughed apace. And one merry merchant said unto the priests that followed him, *sic luceat lux vestra coram hominibus*. Thus let your light shine afore the people. ²²

Forsooth, quod I, it were pity but that an evil priest were punished. But yet it is as much pity that we take such a wretched pleasure in the hearing of their sin and in the sight of their shame. Good it is for them to look on their faults; but for us were it better to look less to theirs and more unto our own. But surely many of us have such delight to hear of their harm, that it seemeth we be glad when one of them doth any such thing, as we may have occasion to see them punished or had in derision. Which wretched appetite and sinful affection yet is much worse and much more worthy the curse of God than the lewd mind of Cham which fell into the curse of his father Noe

for that he made a gaude ²³ and showed forth in scorn the secret members of his father, that of adventure lay and slept uncovered, which parts Sem, and Japhet, the blessed children reverently covered, going backward to him because they would not see him. ²⁴ And surely we have little cause to laugh at their lewdness. For undoubtedly if the clergy be nought we must needs

MASTER COLET

be worse, as I heard once master Colet the good Deane of Poules preach. For he said that it can be none other, but that we must ever be one degree under them. For surely, as he said, it can be no lie that our saviour saith himself which saith of them that they be the salt of the earth. And if the salt once appalle, ²⁵ the word must needs wax unsavoury. And he saith that they be the light of the world. And then if the light, saith he, be darked, how dark will then the darkness be, ²⁶ that is, to wit, all the world beside, whereof he called the clergy only the light. Howbeit though there be both among us and them very many naughte, whose faults be neither the faults of the temporalitie nor of the spiritualitie but of those lewd persons themselves; yet are, I trust, neither their part nor ours come to that point but that there be many good men among us; and as for among them I wot nere whether I may say many more or not; but surely, I think, many better.

I fear me, quod your friend, that those many be very few in comparison of the multitude.

I cannot, quod I, look into their hearts to see who is good, and who is bad, nor have the leisure if they were all knowen to go about and tell them by the polls, to see which side were the more. And therefore in the meanwhile I trust in God the better part is the greater. Howbeit, if there were indeed among them very few, yet think I verily that for those few all the world fareth the better and is in their virtue and prayer by God's great mercy maintained and upholden, as we find in scripture places more than one declaring plainly the profit that an whole sinful city, or sometime an whole region, taketh by the prayer of a few godly men. And no doubt is there but likewise as he that is in the clergy nought, is far the worse because he is therein, so he that therein is good, is for his clergy very far the better, and his prayer to God for himself and all other far the more available.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER

The author toucheth one special prerogative that we have by a priest, be he never so bad, in that his naughtiness cannot take from us the profit of his mass. Whereupon is by the Messenger moved a doubt, whether it were better to have fewer priests and better, with fewer masses; or more and worse, for to have the more masses. Whereunto the author answereth.

And be a priest never so nought, albeit that he do some way much harm both to himself and other, yet this advantage take we by the privilege and prerogative of his priesthood--beside the ministration

THE ADVANTAGE WE HAVE BY PRIESTHOOD

of the sacraments unto us, the goodness whereof his naughtiness cannot appayre ²⁷ --that he be never so vicious and therewith so impenitent and so far from all purpose of amendment that his prayers were afore the face of God rejected and abhorred, yet, that sacred sacrifice and sweet

oblation

THE SACRIFICE OF THE HOLY BODY OF CHRIST

of Christ's holy body, offered up by his office, can take none empaying^s by the filth of his sin, but highly helpeth to the upholding of this wretched world from the vengeance of the wrath of God, and is to God acceptable and to us as available for the thing itself, as though it were offered by a better man, though percase his prayers joined therewith neither much profit other, nor the oblation himself, as with whom God is the more greatly grieved in that, being so bad, he durst presume to touch it.

Marye, quod your friend, if this be thus, I marvel then why ye said right now that it were good to make fewer priests, that they might be taken only of the better, and the worse refused. For if their masses be so good for us, be themself never so nought, then seemeth it better for us to make yet more though they were yet worse, that we might have more masses.

That reason, quod I, will not hold. For though God of his goodness how bad so ever the priest be, well accepteth the oblation of Christ's holy body for other folk, yet is he with that priest's presumption highly discontented. And we never ought to seek our own commodity with our neighbour's harm. And also we should, of our duty to God, rather forbear the profit that ourself might attain by a mass than to see his majesty disreverenced by the bold presumption of such an odious minister as he hath forboden to come about him. Like as if ye sent a present unto a prince which were very pleasant unto him though the messenger much misliked him so far that he had been forboden the court, yet, if he were not ware thereof, your gift could not lose his thank, but his malapert boldness might peradventure be punished, and well were worthy to be. But on the other side if ye knew the messenger for such as the prince would not have come at him, ye would rather keep your present at home, and forbear the thank, than wittingly to send it by such a messenger, or else, though your present were very great, your thank would be very little. And surely in like manner wise whoso surely knoweth a priest to be nought, vicious and in deadly displeasure of God, should get, I think, little thank if he made him say mass. And therefore well shall the prelates do as much as they may to provide that God shall rather be more seldom presented with the pleasant present of the mass, than more offended with a displeasent messenger. And verily were all the bishops of my mind (as I know some that be) ye should not of priests have the plenty that ye have. » The time hath been when there were very few in a great city; and in a monastery of five hundred in one house, scantly would there four monks be bold to be priests. Then were all holy orders in high honour. Then find we that the degree of a deacon were a great thing, and of such dignity that when one of them went sometime in pilgrimage, he would not be knowen of his order, because he would not that folk should do him worship in the way. But as for nowadays if he be deacon, and priest too, he shall need to fear no such pride but rather rebuke and villany. Which though it have happened by the lack of virtue among them, and decay of devotion among us, yet hath much of all this gear growen up by the mean of so great a number of priests and so familiar among us. Which thing needs must minish on our part reverence and estimation toward them which we never have but in things rare and scarce. Gold would we not set by if it were as common as chalk or clay. And whereof is there now such plenty as of priests?

In faith, quod he, there is more plenty of priests than of good men and there be too many but if they were better chosen.

Doubtless, quod I, there would be more diligence used in the choice, not of their learning only, but much more specially of their living. For without virtue the better they be learned the worse they be, saving that learning is good store against God send them grace to mend, which else it would be then haply too late to look for, specially if the proverb were true, that ye spake of, that if a priest be good then he is old. But this is a very surety that it is not well possible to be without many very naught of that company whereof there is such a main multitude. The time was, I say, when few men durst presume to take upon them the high office of a priest, not even when they were chosen and called thereunto. Now runneth every rascal and boldly offereth himself for able. And where the dignity passeth all princes, and they that lewd be desireth it

THE DIGNITY OF PRIESTHOOD

for worldly winning, yet cometh that sort thereto with such a mad mind, that they reckon almost God much bounden to them that they vouchsafe to take it. But were I Pope . . .

By my soul, quod he, I would ye were, and my lady your wife Popesse too.

Well, quod I, then should she devise for nuns. And as for me, touching the choice of priests, I could not well devise better provisions than are by the laws of the church provided already, if they were as well kept as they be well made. But for the number, I would surely see such a way therein, that we should not have such a rabble, that every mean man must have a priest in his house to wait upon his wife, which no man almost lacketh now to the contempt of priesthood in as vile office as his horsekeeper.

That is, quod he, truth indeed, and in worse too, for they keep hawks and dogs. And yet, meseemeth, surely a more honest service to wait on a horse than on a dog.

And yet I suppose, quod I, if the laws of the church, which Luther and Tyndale would have all broken, were all well observed and kept, this gear should not be thus; but the number of priests would be much minished, and the remnant much the better. For it is by the laws of the church provided, to the intent no priest should unto the slander of priesthood be driven to live in such lewd manner or worse, there should none be admitted unto the priesthood until he have a title of a

NO MAN SHOULD BE ADMITTED UNTO PRIESTHOOD WITHOUT A TITLE OF A SUFFICIENT LIVING

sufficient yearly living, either of his own patrimony, or other wise. Nor at this day they be none otherwise accepted.

Why, quod he, wherefore go there then so many of them a begging?

Mary, quod I, for they delude the law and themselves also. For they never have grant of a living that may serve them in sight for that purpose but they secretly discharge it ere they have it; or else they could not get it. And thus the bishop is blinded by the sight of the writing; and the priest goeth a begging for all his grant of a good living; and the law is deluded; and the order is rebuked by the priest's begging and lewd living which either is fain to walk at rovers³⁰ and live upon trentals, or worse; or else to serve in a secular man's house, which should not need if this gap were stopped. For ye should have priests few enough if the law were truly observed that

none were made but he that were, without collusion, sure of a living already.

Then might it hap, quod he, that ye might have too few to serve the rowmes and livings that be provided for them, except the prelates would provide that orders were not so commonly given, but alway receive into orders as rowmes ³¹ and livings fall void to bestow them in, and no faster.

Surely, quod I, for aught I see suddenly, that would not be much amiss. For so should they need no such titles at all, nor should need neither run at rovers, nor live in laymen's houses, by reason whereof there groweth among no little corruption in the priest's manners by the conversation of lay people and company of women in their houses.

Nay, by our lady, quod he, I will not agree with you therein. For I think they cannot lightly meet with much worse company than themselves, and that they rather corrupt us than we them.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER

The Messenger moveth that it would do well that priests should have wives. Thereunto the author maketh answer.

But I would ween it would amend much part of this matter, if they might have wives of their own.

Mary, quod I, so faith Luther and Tyndale also, saving that they go

TYNDALE'S BOOKS ARE FURNISHED WITH LUTHER'S HERESIES

somewhat further forth. For Tyndale--whose books be nothing else in effect, but the worst heresies picked out of Luther's works, and Luther's worst words translated by Tyndale and put forth in Tyndale's own name--loth in his frantic book of obedience ³² (wherein he railleth at large against all popes, against all kings, against all prelates, all priests, all religious, all the laws, all the saints, against the sacraments of Christ's church, all against virtuous works, against all divine service, and finally, against all thing in effect that good is). In that book, I say, Tyndale holdeth that priests must have wives. And that he groundeth wisely upon the words of Saint Poule, where he writeth to Timotheus, *Oportet episcopum esse irreprehensibilem, unicus uxoris virum*. That a bishop must be a man unreprouable, and the husband of one wife. ³³ And that it must be considered whether he have well brought up his children, and well governed his household. By these words doth Tyndale, after Luther, conclude for a plain matter that priests must needs have wives, and that Saynt Poule would there should in no wise be none other priests but married folk. Is it not now a wonder with what spectacles Luther and Tyndale have spied this thing now in these words of saynt Poule? In which of so many great cunning fathers and holy sayntes as have often read and deeply considered those words before, there was never none that had either the wit or the grace to perceive that great special commandment these fifteen hundred year, till now that God hath at last by revelation showed this high secret mystery to these two goodly creatures, Luther and Tyndale--lest that holy frere should have lost his marriage of that holy nun, and Tyndal some good marriage that I think him toward. Tyndale nothing answereth in his book to

that point; but runneth and railleth over without reason and sayth that the scripture is plain therein for him. And ever he passeth over as though he heard it not that all the holy doctors that ever were in Christ's church, saying that the scripture, which he allegeth to be very plain for him, is very plain against him, as it is indeed. For sainte Poule in that place, forasmuch as yet at that time except none but young men should have been priests, which he thought not commonly convenient, else could they make no priests then, but such as either were or had been married, therefore the apostle having in the choice of priests, a special respect to chastity, and willing to go as near to no wife as might be, did ordain, as God had instructed him, that whosoever should be admitted to priesthood, should be the husband of

A PRIEST MUST BE THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE

one wife--meaning such as then had, or before had had, no more but one, and that never had had twain. He meant not, as mad Luther and Tyndale would now make the world so mad to believe, that a priest must needs have one, nor that he may never lack one, nor that he may have one after another, nor the only forbidding of twain at once: but he meant only that none should be admitted to priesthood but only such a man as never had had nor should have but only one: which is the thing that ever was and hath been by those words understanden. And not only where saint Poule taught but also through christendom, where the other apostles planted the faith hath it ever been so observed. Which is a plain proof that concerning the prohibition of any more wives than one, and the forbidding of bigamy by the wedding of one wife after another, was the special ordinance of God, and not of Saint Poule, whose epistles wherein he writeth anything of this matter, was, peradventure, not common to the hands of other apostles when they took yet the same order by the same spirit that taught it him. For this is certain that ever and everywhere in christendom the bigamy of two wives, each after

BIGAMY IS A LET TO TAKE HOLY ORDERS

other, hath been a let and impediment against the taking of holy orders; and hath of long time been a let, though the one wife had been married and buried before the man's baptism. And now these two wise men against the old holy fathers and cunning doctors, and against the continual custom of Christ's church, so many hundred years begun and continued by the spirit of God, have spied at last that saint Poule sayeth and meaneth that a priest *may* marry twice and have one wife after another; and that he *must* so have. For, by Tyndale, a priest must ever have one wife at the least. And surely if we leave the true understanding of saint Poule's words and believe Tyndale that it is there meant and commanded because of this word, *oportet*, that a priest must have one: then may Tyndale as for that place tell us that a priest is at liberty to have twenty at once or twain, and he will, because saint Poule sayeth no more but that the bishop must be the husband of one wife. Which words Tyndale may tell us be verified, if he be the husband of ten wives. For the husband of ten wives were the husband of one, as the father of ten children is the father of one, if the wives were as compatible as the children be, as it is no doubt but Luther and Tyndale would soon make them by scripture, if their own interpretation may be taken for authority, against the perceiving that God hath given to all good Christian people this fifteen hundred year. Now, as I say, upon Tyndale's taking, saint Poule should mean not that a priest should have but one wife (for that *but* is not in saint Poule's words) but he should mean that a priest *must* have one at the least, as though saint Poule had liefer that the priest had twenty, save for overcharging, yet it seemeth that Tyndale so take it indeed and that a priest might have divers wives at once, specially for the great reason that he setteth thereto. For whereas saint Poule, since there was at that time little choice to make priests of but married men, willed therefore that in the choice of the bishop there should be considered how he had governed his own household;

because he that had mistetched his wife and his children were unmete for a great cure. Therefore, saith Tyndale, that never should there any priest be made, but such as hath a wife and children and by the governance of them showed that he is mete to bear a rule, as though we never saw any man that never had wife, govern an household better than many that have had wife. And if the having and good ruling of a wife be so special a proof of a man mete to be a priest as Tyndale taketh it, then since saint Poule, after Tyndale's interpretation, cannot appear to forbid the having of divers together, best were it, after Tyndale, specially to make that man a priest that had many wives and all at once, and many children by each of them, if he guide them all well. For more proof is it of a wise gouvernour to rule well five wives than one, and forty children than four. But now that every child may see the wisdom of Tyndale and his master Luther in the construction of holy scripture, whereof he speaketh so much and understandeth so little, I beseech you consider like words of saint Poule in a much like matter. Saincte Paule, as he writeth to Timotheus that a bishop must be the husband of one wife, so writeth he also to him that no widow should be specially chosen and taken in to be founden of the goods of the church that were younger than sixty year, and that she should be one that had been the wife of one husband. Now set these two texts together, of the bishop and the widow, and consider the words of one wife in the one, and one husband in the other. If we shall, after Tyndale, take the one words for the bishop, that saint Poule should mean, not that he have or have had but one wife, but that he *must needs* have one wife, then must he likewise take the words spoken by saint Poule of the widow, as though saint Poule should mean not a widow which had never had more than one husband, but a widow that had had one husband, as though saincte Poule had nothing feared nor forbode but lest Timotheus should take in such a widow as never had no husband at all. Were not this wisely construed? Now if Tyndale will agree, as he needs must but if he be mad, that saint Poule in giving commandment that the widow should be such as had had one husband, meant thereby such one as never had had more than one, then must he needs grant, and his master Luther too, that saint Poule in likewise where he said that a bishop must be a good man and the husband of one wife, meant that he must never have, nor have had, any more than one---and *not* that he *must needs* have one, or that he must have one at the least, and might have many more than one, either each after other or all together and he list. And in this matter hath Tyndale no shift. For since this word *one*, in one wife and one husband, was not by saynct Poule set in for nought, it must needs signify, either that there should be no more but one, or that there should be one at the least. If he should mean that a bishop should have one wife at the least, and that the widow should have had one husband at the least, then would he rather that they should have more than so few, which every man seeth how foolish that construction is. Now if Tyndale will say that by this word *one* saint Poule meant there should be but one wife at once, and one husband at once, then did saint Poule so speak of the bishop as though he had said, "A bishop must be a good man and have but one wife at once." In which words, Tyndale had lost his purpose. For so were only a prohibition for any more than one, and no commandment, but a bare permission for one. And yet were it little to purpose, for, in saint Poule's days, a layman had but one wife at once. And the folly of this construction appeareth in the words spoken of saint Pole in the choice of the widow, wherein Tyndale would by this way make saint Poule to say thus: "Take and choose in, but such a widow as hath had but one husband at once"--as though the gyse " were in his days that wives might have two husbands at once.

In faith, quod your friend, I think saint Poule meant not so. For then had wives been in his time little better than grass widows be now. For they be yet as several as a barber's chair, and never take but one at once.

In faith, quod I, the folly of such folk doth well appear that seek in the scripture of God such new constructions against the very sense that God hath this fifteen hundred year so taught his whole church, that never was there Pope so covetous yet that durst dispense in this point, seeing that consent of Christ's church so full and whole therein, and the mind of saint Poule so clear to suffer only one, with utter exclusion of any more than one, that whosoever would construe him otherwise must needs fall into such open follies as Tyndale and Luther do. And thus ye see how substantially Tyndale and his master construe the scripture; and with what authority they confirm this noble new doctrine of theirs, by which they would condemn all christendom as breakers of the law of God as long as they suffer not any priest take a wife, or rather as long as they suffer him to be without a wife. For wives they must needs have, by Tyndale's tale, whether they will or no.

By my trowth, quod your friend, if Tyndale and Luther have none other hold than that place of saint Poule, they be likely to take a fall. But I think they say more than that.

Surely, quod I, Tyndale hath another reason indeed. He saith that chastity is an exceeding seldom gift, and unchastity exceeding perilous for that estate. And thereon he concludeth that priests must needs have wives. But now what if a man would deny him, though chastity be a great gift, that yet it is a seldom gift? For though it be rare and seldom in respect of the remnant of the people that have it not, yet is it not

CHASTITY INDEED IS NOT A SELDOM GIFT

seldom indeed, for many men have it. And Christ saith that all men take it not; ³⁵ but he saith not that no man taketh it; nor that few men take it. And highly he commendeth them that for his sake do take it. What inconvenience is it then to take into his special service men of that sort that he most specially commendeth? Or if we granted to Tyndale that few men can live chaste--which is plain false; for many have done and doth--but now if we did, I say, grant him that thing, though he might peradventure thereupon conclude that there should not be so many priests made and bounden to chastity as could not live chaste, yet could he not conclude, as he now concludeth, that no priest should be suffered to live chaste, but that every priest must needs have a wife. For this is his argument: Few men can live chaste; *ergo* every priest must take a wife. If we should impugn the form of this argument, Tyndale would rail and say we meddle with sophistry; and wise men would say we were idle occupied to labour to show that folly that so evidently showeth itself. And therefore we shall let his wise argument alone, since it sufficeth us that every man that any wit hath, may well see that upon his unreasonable reason, one of two things must needs follow, either that Christ in commending perpetual chastity did commend a thing not commendable; or else, if every priest must needs have a wife, then were it not lawful to make a priest of that sort that is of God's own mouth commended.

Surely, quod your friend, methink they go far therein to say that priests must needs have wives. But methink that this they might well say, and I too, that it is not well done to bind them with a law that they shall have none; but it may be well done to suffer them have wives that would, as they have in Wales. And I hear say that in Almain ³⁶ they find

IN WALES PRIESTS BE SUFFERED TO HAVE WIVES

great ease therein. For like as here the good wife keepeth her husband from her maids, so there the parson's wife keepeth her husband from all the wives in the parish.

As for Wales, quod I, ye be wrong informed; for wives have they not. But truth it is that incontinence is there in some place little looked unto, whereof much harm groweth in the country. And as for Almayn such part thereof as that is used in, which is only where Luther's sect is received, who so consider well what commodity hath come to them by such ungodly ways, I think shall have no great fantasy to follow them.

Well, quod he, let Wales and Almayn go, yet priests had wives of

IN GREECE PRIESTS HAVE WIVES

old when they were better than they be now--And yet have in Greece where they be better than they be here.

As for the priests of Greece, I will not dispraise them, quod I, for I know them not. But somewhat was not well there, that God hath suffered all that empire to fall into heathen men's hands. And yet be they there not so loose as ye reckon them. For though a wedded man taken there into the clergy be not nor cannot be put from his wife, but is there suffered to minister in the office of a priest, notwithstanding his marriage; yet, if he be unmarried at the time that he taketh priesthood, he then professeth perpetual continence, and never marrieth after, as I have learned by such as have come from thence.

Now where ye speak of old time, surely ye shall understand that there married not so many as ye would haply ween.

Peradventure, quod he, no more there would now. Some of them would have no wives though that law were set at large. For as a good fellow said once to his friends that marvelled why he married not, and thought him unnatural if he cared not for the company of a woman, he said unto them that he had liefer lose a finger than lack a woman.

But he had liefer lack the whole hand than have a wife. So if the priests

A MERRY SAYING

were at liberty, some of the worst sort would yet, I ween, rather have women than wives. But other that would be more honest, would, I suppose, be married. And yet would some peradventure live in perpetual continence, as few do now.

God forbid, quod I.

Well, quod he, they that would, were not restrained. But if I shall be bold to say what I think, it seemeth me surely a very hard thing that the church should make a law to bind a man to chastity maugre his teeth ^v to which God would never bind any man.

The church, quod I, bindeth no man to chastity.

That is truth, quod he, except a priest be a man.

Ye mistake the matter, quod I, as I shall show you after.

There would, quod he, many harms be avoided, and much good would there grow thereof, if they might have wives that would.

What good or harm, quod I, would come thereof, the proof would show; wherein we might be

the more bold to trust well, were it not that we now find it nought in Saxony, where we newly see it assayed. And as for that ye spoke of old time when the priests were better, surely--as I would, if ye had not stopped me, have said further before--we perceive well by writers of old time, that of those good men very few were married. And none in effect after the office taken. And many such as had wives before, willingly, with the assent of their wives, forbore the carnal use of them. And since the good or harm growing of the matter best appeareth by the proof, beside the experience that we have now in Saxony where this change is begun with an infinite heap of heresies, it is easy to see that the good fathers which gave their advice to the making of that law, with the thing almost received in general custom before, and with the consent of all christendom in effect that ratified and received it after, had a good proof thereof, and found this the best way before the law made, and therefore I will not dispute with you thereupon. But forasmuch as ye lay unreasonableness to their charge that made it, because they bind men, as ye reckon, against their will to chastity, somewhat were it that ye say, if the church compelled any man to be priest. But now when every man is at his liberty not to be priest but at his pleasure, how can any man say that the church layeth a bond of chastity in any man's neck against his will? The

THE CHURCH BINDETH NO MAN TO CHASTITY

church doth in effect no further but provide, that whereas men will, of their own minds, some live chaste and some will not, the ministers of the sacrament shall be taken of that sort only that will be content to profess chastity. Wherewith whoso findeth fault, blamed not only the clergy but also the temporality, which be and have been all this while partners in the authority of the making and conservation of this law. Whereof there can no man blame the provision, but if he be either in that heresy that he think that the cleanness of chastity is no more pleasant to God than the carnal use of matrimony, or else that he think it evil done to provide that the priests which shall serve God in his holy sacraments should be taken of the purest and most pleasant sort.

Whereunto the very paynims had such respect, that their priests durst

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not presume to the sacrifice of their mammettes but after certain time of corporal cleanness, kept from their wives, and some of them bounden to perpetual chastity with the loss of that part of their body wherewith they might do the contrary.

Yea, Mary, quod he, that was a good sure way.

It was, quod I, sure indeed, but not so good as this. For therefore would be lost the merit that good men have in resisting of the devil and the refraining of their fleshly motion. But as I would and was about to say, in the old law given to Moses, the priests of the temple for the

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time of their ministration forbare their own house and the company of their wives. And therefore they served the temple by course, as it well appeareth in the beginning of saynct Luke's gospel. ³⁸

So that

CHASTITY IS A MEET THING FOR PRIESTS

chastity was thought both to God and man a thing mete and convenient for priests among them which most magnified carnal generation. And then how much more specially now to the priests of Christ, which was both born a virgin, and lived and died a virgin himself, and exhorted all his to the same. ³⁹ Whose counsel in this point, since some be content to follow, and some to live otherwise, what way were, I say, more metely than to take into Christ's temple to serve about the

sacrament only such as be of that sort that are content and minded to live after the cleanness of Christ's holy counsel.

Truth, if they so would, quod he.

They say, quod I, that they will when they come thereto being already warned of the law. And to the intent that fewer should break it, therefore would I, as I said, have the better respect taken to the choosing. * And since it is hard to have so many so good, I would have the fewer made. But to say that the church bindeth men to chastity against their will, because they take not a priest but if he first professed chastity, is as far against reason, as if ye would say that they bind men to chastity against their will, because they will make no monks but such as will promise to live chaste. Which promise every man well woteth they make of their own minds, though the church will neither make monks nor priests but such as so will. And as touching whether the order of the church therein be better than the contrary, good men and wise men both had the proof of both before the law made, and it well allowed through christendom long time since. Which ere I would assent to change, I would see a better author thereof than such a heretic as Luther, and Tyndale, and a better sample than the seditious and schismatic priests of Saxony.

Surely, quod he, ye have well declared the church touching that law. But whatsoever the cause be, by my truth, nought they be, and as far worse than we as they be bounden to be better; and yet be we the worse for them.

There be, quod I, many right good among them; and else were it wrong with us. And many be there bad also; and some the worse for us. But whether part is the better or the worse, will I not dispute. But this will I say that it were best that they thought themselves the worse, and we ourselves, and every man himself worst. I would that we were all in case with our own faults, as my father saith that we be with our wives. For when he heareth folk blame wives, and say that there be so many of them shrews: he saith that they diffame them falsely. For he saith

THERE IS BUT ONE SHREWD WIFE IN ALL THE WORLD

plainly that there is but one shrewd wife in the world: but he saith indeed that every man weeneth he hath her; and that that one is his own. So would I fayne that every man would wene there were but one man naught in all the whole world, and that that one were himself. And that he would thereupon go about to mend the one, and thus would all wax well: which thing we should shortly do, if we would once turn our wallet that I told you of, † and the bag with other folks faults cast at our back, and cast the bag that beareth our own faults, cast it once before us at our breast: it would be a goodly brooch ‡ for us to look on our own faults another while. And I dare boldly say, both they and we should much the better amend if we were so ready each to pray for other, as we be ready to seek each other's reproach and rebuke.

In faith, quod he, I trow that be true, and pray God we so may.

FOURTEENTH CHAPTER

The author answereth the doubt moved before in the eleventh chapter, concerning the

constitution provincial, and that the clergy is therein far from the fault that is imputed to them in that point, showing also that the clergy hath not forbidden the bible to be made and read in English.

But now to the matter we were in hand with. Ye said ye would make answer for the law whereby the clergy of this realm hath forbidden all the people to have any scripture translated into our tongue: which is, as I said, in my mind, an evil made law.

Mary, quod I, that is soon answered. Lay the charge to them that made it.

Mary, quod he, so I do. For who made the constitution but they?

Surely, quod I, nobody else, nor they neither.

No? quod he, What? Every man knoweth it!

Verily, quod I, many men talk of it; but no man knoweth it. For there is none such indeed. There is of truth a constitution that speaketh of such matter; but nothing of such fashion. For ye shall understand that the great arch heretic Wicklif, whereas the whole bible was long before his days by virtuous and well learned men translated into the

WICKLIF'S TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE

English tongue, and by good and godly people with devotion and sober-ness well and reverently read, took upon him of a malicious purpose to translate it of new. ⁴ In which translation, he purposely corrupted the holy text, maliciously planting therein such words as might in the readers ears serve to the proof of such heresies as he went about to sow; which he not only set forth with his own translation of the bible, but also with certain prologues and glosses which he made thereupon. And these things he so handled (which was no great mastery) with reasons probable and likely to lay people and unlearned, that he corrupted in his time many folk in this realm. And by other ill books which he made in latin, being after borne into Boheme, and there taught by John Huss and other, he was the occasion of the utter subversion of that whole realm, both in faith and good living, with the loss also of many a thousand lives. And as he began again the old heresies of those ancient heretics---whom and whose errors the church of Christ had condemned and subdued many divers ages before--so doeth Luther again begin to set up his. For all that he hath, in effect, he hath of him. Saving that lest he should seem to say nothing of his own, he added some things of himself of such manner sort as there was never heretic before his days, neither so wicked that he would for sin, nor so foolish that he durst for shame, write, say, or, I trow, think the like.

I long, quod he, to hear some of them; for the man is taken for wiser than to mean so madly as men bear him in hand.

Well, quod I, that shall we see soon when we come thereto. But for our present purpose, after that it was perceived what harm the people took by the translation, prologues, and glosses of Wiclif; and also of some other that after him holpe to set forth his sect, then for that cause--
IT IS A DANGEROUS THING TO TRANSLATE SCRIPTURE

and for as much as it is dangerous to translate the text of scripture out of one tongue into another, as holy S. Jerome testifieth, for as much as in translation it is hard alway to keep the same sentence whole--it was, I say, for these causes at a Council holden at Oxenford, ⁴ provided upon great pain that *no man should from thenceforth translate into the English tongue, or any other language of his own authority, by way of book, lybel ⁵ or treatise: nor no man openly or secretly any such book, lybel or treatise read, newly made in the time of the said John Wiclif or since (or that should be made any time after) till the same translation were by the diocesan, or, if need should require, by a provincial council, approved.*

And this is a law that so many so long have spoken of, and so few have in all this while cared to seek whether they say truth or no. For I trow that in this law ye see nothing unreasonable. For it neither forbiddeth translations to be read that were already well done of old before Wicklif's days, nor damneth his because it was new; but because it was nought; nor prohibiteth new to be made; but provideth that they shall not be read if they be miss made, till they be by good examination amended, except they be such translations as Wiclif made, and Tyndale, that the malicious mind of the translator had in such wise handled it, as it were labour lost to go about to mend them.

I long, by my trouth, quod he, and even sit on thorns, till I see that constitution. For not myself only, but every man else, hath ever taken it far otherwise that ever I have heard spoken thereof till now. But surely I will see it myself ere I sleep.

Ye shall be sooner eased, quod I. For I cannot suffer to see you sit so long on thorns. And therefore ye shall see it by and by. And therewith I set him forth the constitutions provincial, with Linwood ⁶ thereupon, and turned him to the place in the title, *De magistris*: Which, when himself had read, he said he marvelled much how it happened that in so plain a matter men be so far abused to report it so far wrong.

This groweth, quod I, partly by malice, partly by sloth and negligence, in that folk be more glad to believe and tell forth a thing that may sown to the dispraise of the clergy than to search and be sure whether they say true or no.

¹ *Ecclesiasticus* 41.15.

² *Prov* .22. I.

³ A misquotation; cf. *Prov* . 19.21, *Qui... nelgigit viam suam, mortificabitur*.

⁴ deception, cunning trick.

⁵ *Joshua* 7. 19.

⁶ boasts.

⁷ *I Tim*. 4. 12.

⁸ inculcateth.

⁹ except.

¹⁰ Tyndale.

¹¹ a worthless fellow and his mate.

¹² *The Obedience of a Christian Man* , published 1528.

¹³ It was written by Jerome Barlow, an apostate Friar Observant.

- ¹⁴ 1528 (May 8).
- ¹⁵ 1528 (Oct 2).
- ¹⁶ William Roy; see *D.N.B.*
- ¹⁷ apostate
- ¹⁸ The Arundel constitution of 1408 was directed against unauthorised Wicliffite translations.
- ¹⁹ Cf. pp. 219, 228.
- ²⁰ peeps
- ²¹ Comp[r]ynable, printed also in 1531 edition.
- ²² *Matt* . 5. 16.
- ²³ jest.
- ²⁴ *Gen* . 9. 23.
- ²⁵ wax feeble.
- ²⁶ *Matt* . 5. 13, 15.
- ²⁷ impair
- ²⁸ impairing
- ²⁹ Cf. pp. 215, 228.
- ³⁰ at hazard
- ³¹ offices.
- ³² *The Obedience of a Christian Man*.
- ³³ I *Tim*. 3. 2.
- ³⁴ fashion
- ³⁵ *Matt*. 19. 11.
- ³⁶ Germany.
- ³⁷ against his own will.
- ³⁸ *Luke* I. 8.
- ³⁹ *Matt*. 19. 12.
- ⁴⁰ cf. also pp. 215, 219.
- ⁴¹ p. 215.
- ⁴² a sharp tooth, goad, point.
- ⁴³ anew.
- ⁴⁴ 1407, cf. Gairdner, *Lollardy and the Reformation* , vol. i, pp. 61 *ff* .
- ⁴⁵ tract.
- ⁴⁶ Lyndwood.