

Thomas More Reader: Memorabilia: Personal Remembrances (modernized selections)

94. “Richard Hunne: Murder or Suicide”

[From *The Supplication of Souls* (Scepter, 2002)]

And of those who have heard of it and know much about it, he will find plenty—and in particular, we think, the King’s Grace himself (with whose Highness this man assumes such familiarity as to ask the question of him and then dictate to him the answer)—who will affirm that of all five things which he has here in so few lines affirmed, not one of them is true; that they are lies, every one of them.

For first, to begin where he leaves off, when he says that after the death of Richard Hunne the clergy rewarded Father Horsey with benefice upon benefice, to the value of four times as much as six hundred pounds, the patent untruth of this claim can immediately be known by everyone who will immediately inquire. For Father Horsey is still living at Exeter, and living there only on what he had before, without that new stack of benefices supposedly given him by the captains of his kingdom for killing Richard Hunne, and without any reward, either, save only from God, for his long patience in his undeserved ordeal. But so that you can see how little this man cares how blatantly he lies, think about his statement that the clergy gave to Father Horsey, after he got out of prison, benefice upon benefice to the value of four times as much as six hundred pounds. If this is true, then Father Horsey has received in benefices, besides whatever he had before his ordeal, the equivalent of 2,400 pounds. We trust that the man, his financial worth, and his standard of living are well enough known that we need not tell you that the beggars’ spokesman has on this point told one blatant lie.

Another is that he says Hunne was sued in the ecclesiastical court over a matter determinable in the King’s court. The matter was a funerary offering, which by explicit statute is declared to pertain to ecclesiastical law. The third lie is that Hunne was honorable—unless heresy is honorable. The fourth is that Father Horsey and his accomplices murdered him in prison. For, to the contrary, it is well known that the man hanged himself out of despair and contempt, and for lack of grace.

Now we could say, and we would like to say, that the fifth lie is the payment he speaks of—the six hundred pounds he wants people to think Father Horsey bought his pardon with. He alleges this good, big amount so that folk will think, since they well know that Father Horsey was not likely to have so much money of his own, that the clergy got together and gave it to him, and then gave him benefices from which he could pay them back. He presents this as not coming from himself, but he gives no source, just saying, “as it is said.” And yet it would not be wrong to let it be accounted his own until he puts it better and shows from whom he heard it.

However, since there are plenty of others, we will leave this lie in question between him and we know not whom else, and for the fifth lie we will lay before you one that is definitely told by

him, and that is where he claims that Father Horsey, the bishop's chancellor, purchased the King's most gracious pardon for his murdering of Hunne. For the truth is that he never tried to get any such pardon. After the matter had over a long period of time and with great diligence been so thoroughly examined that the King's Highness eventually (since time always brings out the truth) well perceived his innocence and also that of those accused and indicted with him, his noble Grace, when they were arraigned on that indictment and they pleaded not guilty, commanded his attorney general to acknowledge their plea to be truthful—something that His Grace, as a most virtuous prince, usually does when not only has no crime been committed, but also the defendant is known to be a good person. Because just as where the matter appears doubtful, he does, as stands to reason, allow the trial to proceed and let the truth be ascertained, so too, where he clearly sees and realizes the right to be on the other side, His Highness will in no way have the wrong sanctioned or upheld in his name. Now, the reality being that neither the chancellor nor anyone else ever tried to get any pardon for the matter, this is, then, the fifth lie that this man has told in so few lines. Whoever well considers these things cannot but be amazed at the terribly pithy point with which he concludes this whole weighty allegation, saying to the King: "Who of their kingdom will not now be encouraged to commit similar offenses, seeing the rewards that came to those men for their so offending, so weak and blunt is your sword to strike at one of the offenders in this crooked and perverse generation."