A Dialogue
Concerning Heresies

by

Sir Thomas More

Page and line numbers correspond to
The Complete Works of St. Thomas More
(Yale University Press), volume 6.

A complete concordance to this work can be found at
www.thomasmorestudies.org/publications.html#Concordance.

Spelling standardized, punctuation modernized, and glosses added
by Mary Gottschalk

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Punctuation

The only punctuation marks found in the original printed version of A Dialogue Concerning Heresies are
the period, question mark, slash, or "virgule" ( / ), and parentheses. Commas, quotation marks,
semsicolons, dashes, exclamation points, italics, and suspension points have been added with the goal of
making the text more readily understood by present-day readers. Italics are added for titles and,
ocasionally, for emphasis. As for the suspension points ( … ), these are substitutes for many of More’s
slashes. He often used a slash where we would use a comma, a semicolon, a dash, or italics; but he also,
quite often, used one to indicate whether a certain phrase was meant to be connected more closely with
the one preceding it or with the one following it; to call attention to parallel elements in different phrases;
or simply to facilitate serious reflection. He also quite often used a slash for dramatic purposes—to
indicate, perhaps, a coming sly comment, or some possibly surprising conclusion. The evident
thoughtfulness with which More punctuated this book leads one to suspect that he anticipated its being
often read aloud, and wanted to make sure the reader got the cadence right. He writes as though he were
speaking.
A dialogue of Sir Thomas More, Knight, one of the Council of our sovereign lord the King, and Chancellor of his duchy of Lancaster. Wherein be treated divers matters: as of the veneration and worship of images and relics, praying to saints, and going on pilgrimage. With many other things touching the pestilent sect of Luther and Tyndale, by the one begun in Saxony, and by the other labored to be brought into England.

Newly overseen by the said Sir Thomas More, Chancellor of England.

1530.
Table of the First Book

The First Chapter

The letter of credence sent from his friend by a trusty secret messenger. With the letter of the author answering the same.

The declaration of the credence by the mouth of the messenger; whereupon the matter of all the whole work dependeth.

The Second Chapter

Here summarily is declared what order the author intendeth to treat of the matters purposed unto him. Whereof because the first was an opinion conceived in some men’s heads that a certain person lately abjured of heresy for preaching against pilgrimages and images and prayers made to saints was therein greatly wronged, the author briefly declareth his mind concerning the confutation of those perilous and pernicious opinions.

The Third Chapter

The objections of the messenger made against praying to saints, worshipping of images, and going on pilgrimages; with the answer of the author unto the same. And incidentally is it by the messenger moved that there should seem no necessity for Christian folk to resort to any churches, but that all were one to pray thence or there. And that opinion by the author answered and confuted.

The Fourth Chapter

The author declareth in the comprobation of pilgrimages that it is the pleasure of God to be specially sought and worshipped in some one place before another. And albeit that we cannot attain to the knowledge of the cause why God doth so, yet the author proveth by great authority that God by miracle testifieth it is so.

3, 5 (letter of) credence: letter of introduction  3 secret: personal
5 declaration: explanation  6 matter: content
9 purposed: put forward for consideration  11 lately: recently
11 abjured of heresy: made to renounce his heresies under oath
13 declareth his mind: explains his thinking  17 worshipping: venerating
18 incidentally: in passing  19 moved: submitted  // seem: i.e., seem to be
20 resort: betake themselves; go  // all were one: it would be all the same
21 thence: somewhere else  24 declareth: explains  // comprobation: defense
25 sought: gone to for help  28 testifieth: attests (that)
The Fifth Chapter

Because pilgrimages be, among other proofs, testified by miracles… the messenger doth make objection against those miracles; partly lest they be feigned and untrue, partly lest they be done by the devil if they be done at all.

The Sixth Chapter

Because the messenger thinketh that he may well mistrust and deny the miracles because reason and nature tell him that they cannot be done: therefore first the author showeth what unreasonableness would ensue… if folk would stand so stiff against all credence to be given to any such thing as reason and nature should seem to gainsay.

The Seventh Chapter

The author showeth that neither nature nor reason do deny the miracles to be true, nor do not gainsay but that they may be well and easily done.

The Eighth Chapter

The messenger allegeth that God may nothing do against the course of nature. Of which the author declareth the contrary— and, over that, showeth that our Lord in working of miracles doth nothing against nature.

The Ninth Chapter

The author showeth that albeit men may mistrust some of the particular miracles, yet can there no reasonable man neither deny nor doubt but that many miracles hath there been done and wrought.

The Tenth Chapter

The author proveth that many things daily done by nature or craft whereof we nothing marvel at all… be more marvelous and more wonderful in deed than be the miracles that we most marvel of and repute most incredible.

The Eleventh Chapter

The author showeth that a miracle is not to be mistrusted though it be done in a small matter and seemeth upon a slight occasion.
The Twelfth Chapter

The author somewhat noteth the froward minds of many folk that would be very hard to believe a man in a miracle upon his oath… and very light in a shrewd tale to believe a woman on her word.

The Thirteenth Chapter

The author showeth the untoward mind of many men… which in miracles so highly touching the honor of God and weal of their own souls… will neither believe other folk that tell them… nor themselves vouchsafe to go prove them.

The Fourteenth Chapter

The messenger maketh objection that miracles showed before a multitude… may be feigned; and by the author showed how the goodness of God bringeth shortly the truth of such falsehood to light (with examples thereof, one or two rehearsed), and further showed that many miracles there be which no good Christian man may deny to be true.

The Fifteenth Chapter

The author showeth that if of those miracles that are told and written to be done at divers pilgrimages, and commonly believed for very true, we certainly knew some falsely feigned, yet were that no cause to mistrust the remnant.

The Sixteenth Chapter

The author showeth that whoso would inquire should soon find that at pilgrimages be daily many great and undoubted miracles wrought and well known. And specially he speaketh of the great and open miracle showed at Our Lady of Ipswich of late upon the daughter of Sir Roger Wentworth, Knight.

The Seventeenth Chapter

The messenger layeth forth objections against miracles done at pilgrimages… of which he confesseth many to be true. But he layeth causes and reasons whereby he saith that many men be moved to believe and think that those miracles that be done there be done by

2 somewhat noteth: comments a little on // froward minds: perverse dispositions
3 hard to believe: resistant to believing; slow to believe 3, 4 in: about
4 light: ready; quick // shrewd tale: report of something bad
4 word: i.e., mere word, as opposed to an oath 6 untoward mind: badness of attitude
7 touching: pertaining to // weal: good 9 vouchsafe: bother // prove: investigate
11 showed: performed 12, 20 feigned: faked 12 showed: i.e., it is shown
14 rehearsed: related 18, 23 showeth: asserts 19, 24, 30 pilgrimages: pilgrimage sites
20 certainly knew some: knew for a fact that some were // falsely: deceitfully
21 remnant: rest 23 inquire: do any investigating 26 showed: performed
26 of late: recently 30 confesseth: acknowledges
the devil, to set our hearts upon idolatry by the worshipping of images instead of God.

The Eighteenth Chapter

The author deferreth the answer to the aforesaid objections... and first by Scripture he proveth that the church of Christ cannot err in any necessary article of Christ’s faith. And in this chapter be those words of Christ specially touched, “Super cathedram Mosi sederunt [etc.]: quae dicunt vobis, facite; quae autem faciunt, nolite facere,” concerning the authority of the Church.

The Nineteenth Chapter

The author proveth that if the worship of images were idolatry, then the Church, believing it to be lawful and pleasant to God, were in a misbelief and in a deadly error. And then were the faith failed in the Church; whereof Christ hath promised the contrary, as is proved in the chapter before.

The Twentieth Chapter

The messenger allegeth that the perpetual being and assistance of Christ with his church to keep it out of all damnable errors... is nothing else but his being with his church in Holy Scripture; whereof the author declarreth the contrary.

The Twenty-first Chapter

The author showeth that if it so were indeed as the messenger said—that is to wit, that Christ continued with his church none other wise but only by the leaving of his Holy Scripture to them... and that all the faith, also, were only therein—then should it yet follow that as far as the necessity of our salvation requireth, God giveth the Church the right understanding thereof. And thereupon followeth further that the Church cannot err in the right faith. Whereupon is inferred eftsoons all that the messenger would have fled from before. And thereon also specially followeth that all the texts of Holy Scripture which heretics allege against images... or any point of the common belief of Christ’s Catholic Church... can nothing serve their purpose.

5, 28 in: with regard to  6 necessary: essential
7 specially touched: discussed in particular
7–8: “On the chair of Moses sit... : what they say, do; what they do, don’t do” (Mt 23:2–3).
11 worship: veneration  12 lawful: licit  //  pleasant: pleasing  13 were: would be
13 misbelief: wrong belief  //  deadly: fatal  17 assistance: active presence
22 showeth: points out
26 the... requireth: i.e., the requirements for our salvation render necessary
28 in: with regard to  29 eftsoons: for a second time  //  would: wanted to
30 specially: in particular  31 allege: cite
32 common: universal  //  nothing: in no way
The Twenty-second Chapter

Because the messenger had in the beginning showed himself desirous and greedy upon the text of Scripture… with little force of the old fathers’ glosses, and with dispraise of philosophy and almost all the seven liberal sciences: the author therefore incidentally showeth what harm hath happed sometimes to fall to divers of those young men whom he hath known to give their study to the Scripture only, with contempt of logic and other secular sciences, and little regard of the old interpreters. Wherefore the author showeth that in the study of Scripture, the sure way is with virtue and prayer… first to use the judgment of natural reason, whereunto secular literature helpeth much. And secondly, the comments of holy doctors. And thirdly—above allthing—the articles of the Catholic faith, received and believed through the church of Christ.

The Twenty-third Chapter

The messenger objecteth against the counsel of the author… in that he would that the student of Scripture should lean to the commenters and unto natural reason—which he calleth enemy to faith. And thereupon the answer of the author to those objections, specially proving that reason is servant to faith, and not enemy… and must with faith and interpretation of Scripture needs be concurrent.

The Twenty-fourth Chapter

The messenger maketh objections against the author… in that he counseled the student of Scripture to bring the articles of our faith with him for a special rule to construe the Scripture by. And the author confirmeth his counsel given in that behalf, declaring that without that rule, men may soon fall into great errors in the study of Holy Scripture.

The Twenty-fifth Chapter

The author, taking occasion upon certain words of the messenger, declareth the preeminence, necessity, and profit of Holy Scripture… showing, nevertheless, that many things have been taught by God without writing, and many great things so
remain—yet unwritten—of truths necessary to be believed. And that the New Law of Christ is the law so written in the heart… that it shall never out of his church. And that the law there written by God is a right rule to interpret the words written in his Holy Scripture. Which rule with reason and the old interpreters… the author showeth to be the very sure way to wade with… in the great stream of Holy Scripture.

The Twenty-sixth Chapter

The messenger saying that him seemed he should not believe the Church if he saw the Church say one thing and the Holy Scripture another thing, because the Scripture is the word of God: the author showeth that the faith of the Church is the word of God as well as the Scripture… and therefore as well to be believed. And that the faith and the Scripture well understood be never contrary.

And further showeth that upon all doubts rising upon Holy Scripture concerning any necessary article of the faith, he that cannot upon all that he can hear in the matter on both the sides perceive the better and truer part… hath a sure and undoubtable refuge provided him by the goodness of God to bring him out of all perplexity, in that God hath commanded him in all such doubts to believe his Church.

The Twenty-seventh Chapter

The author proveth that God hath commanded us in all thing necessary to salvation to give firm credence and full obedience unto his church. And a cause why God will have us bound to believe.

The Twenty-eighth Chapter

The messenger eftsoons objected against this—that we should believe the Church in anything where we find the words of Scripture seeming plainly to say the contrary, or believe the old doctors’ interpretations in any necessary article… where they seem to us to say contrary to the text—showing that we may perceive the Scripture as well as they might. And the answer of the author, proving the authority of the old interpreters and the infallible authority of the Church in that God teacheth it every truth requisite
to the necessity of man’s salvation. Which he proveth by a
deduction partly depending upon natural reason.

*The Twenty-ninth Chapter*

The author proveth by Scripture that God instructeth the church
of Christ in every truth necessarily requisite for our salvation.

*The Thirtieth Chapter*

Whereas the messenger had thought before that it were hard to
believe anything certainly save Holy Scripture, though the Church
did agree therein and command it: the author showeth that
saving for the authority of the Church, men could not know
what scripture they should believe. And here is it showed that
God will not suffer the Church to be deceived in the choice of the very
scripture of God from any counterfeit.

*The Thirty-first Chapter*

In that the Church cannot err in the choice of the true scripture,
the author proveth—by the reason which the King’s Highness,
in his noble and most famous book, objecteth against Luther—that
the Church cannot err in the necessary understanding of
Scripture. And finally the author in this chapter doth briefly
recapitulate certain of the principal points that be before proved;
and therewith endeth the First Book.

*The Second Book*

*The First Chapter*

The messenger, recapitulating certain things before proved, and,
for his part, agreeing that “the church of Christ” cannot in any
necessary article of the faith fall in any damnable error, doth
put in doubt and question which is the very church of Christ…
alleging that they, peradventure, whom we call heretics will say that
themselves is “the Church,” and we not. Whereof the author showeth the

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1 *the necessity of*: what is needed for  
7 *were*: would be  
8 *certainly*: with certainty  
9 *agree*: concur  
9–10 *showeth that saving*: points out that were it not  
11 *showed*: pointed out  
12 *suffer*: allow  
12 *choice*: distinguishing; picking out  
12 *very*: actual; authentic  
15, 18 *in the*: regarding the  
16 *reason*: argument  
17 *noble and most famous book*: I.e., his *Defense of the Seven Sacraments*.  
17 *objecteth*: pits  
25 *in*: with regard to  
26 *necessary*: essential  
27 *very*: true  
28 *peradventure*: perhaps
contrary, declaring whereby we may know that they cannot be “the Church.”

The Second Chapter

The author showeth that no sect of such as the Church taketh for heretics can be “the Church,” forasmuch as the Church was before all them—as the tree from which all those withered branches be fallen.

The Third Chapter

The messenger moveth that the very church peradventure is not the people that we take for it, but a secret, unknown sort of such only... as be by God predestined to be saved. Whereunto the author answereth, and declareth that it cannot be so.

The Fourth Chapter

The messenger moveth that though “the Church” be not the number of folk, only, predestined to bliss, yet may it peradventure be the number of good and well-believing folk, here and there, unknown—which may be, peradventure, those whom we condemn for heretics for holding opinion against images. Whereof the author proveth the contrary.

The Fifth Chapter

The author showeth and concludeth that this common-known multitude of Christian nations not cut off nor fallen off by heresies... be the very church of Christ—good men and bad together.

The Sixth Chapter

The messenger moveth that since the church is this known multitude of good men and bad together... of whom no man knoweth which be the one sort and which be the other: that it may be, peradventure, that the good sort of the Church be they that believe the worship of images to be idolatry, and the bad sort they that believe the contrary. Which objection the author doth answer and confute.

The Seventh Chapter

The author somewhat doth corroborate the truth against the heresies holding against images; and recapitulating somewhat

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1 declaring whereby we may: showing how we can 5 was: existed
9, 14, 25 moveth: submits 9, 23 very: true 9, 15, etc. peradventure: perhaps
10, 27, etc. sort: set; group 12 declareth that: explains why
16 well-believing: right-believing 21 showeth: states // concludeth: proves
29 worship: veneration 30 objection: contention
33 somewhat doth corroborate: does some defending of
briefly what hath been proved, so finisheth and endeth the proof of his part.

The Eighth Chapter

The author entereth the answer to the objections that had been before laid by the messenger against the worship of images, and praying to saints, and going on pilgrimages. And first he answereth, in this chapter, the objections made against praying to saints.

The Ninth Chapter

The messenger yet again objecteth against relics; and putteth great doubt in canonizing. Whereunto the author maketh answer.

The Tenth Chapter

The messenger objecteth many things against pilgrimages and relics and worshipping of saints... because of much superstitious manner used therein, and unlawful petitions asked of them, and harm growing thereupon.

The Eleventh Chapter

The author answereth all the objections proposed by the messenger in the tenth chapter. And some of them touched by the messenger more at large in other parts before.

The Twelfth Chapter

The author confirmeth the truth of our faith and usage in the worship of images... by the consent of the old holy doctors of the Church approving the same (as appeareth well in their writings) whom God hath by many miracles testified to be saints. The messenger eftsoons doubteth whether we can be sure that the miracles told by them were true or not... or themselves saints or not. Whereupon the author proveth that of any miracles told by any saints, we may be most sure of theirs... and, consequently, by their miracles most sure of them that they be surely saints. And in this chapter also proveth that the miracles and consent of those holy doctors do prove... that this must needs be the very, true church... in which they have written and miracles have been done. Whereupon is finally concluded, eftsoons, the truth of the principal question; and therewith finisheth the Second Book.
The Third Book

The First Chapter

The messenger, having in the meanwhile been at the university, showeth unto the author an objection which he learned there against one point proved in the First Book—that is to wit, that in the necessary points of the faith, equal credence is to be given to the Church and to the Scripture. Which objection the author answereth and dissolveth.

The Second Chapter

Incidentally somewhat is there touched the superstitious fear and scrupulosity that the person abjured did, as it is said, begin with. The weariness whereof drove him to the delight of such liberty as brought him to the contempt of the good devout things used commonly in Christ’s church. And in this chapter is somewhat touched the good mean manner… between scrupulous superstition and reckless negligence… that would be used in the singing or saying of Divine Service.

The Third Chapter

The author showeth that men ought not to be light in mistrusting of any judgment given in the Court. And that much less ought any man to be bold in the reproving of a common law. And he showeth also the cause why that the law admitteth more slight witnesses in heinous criminal causes than in slighter matters of covenants or contracts.

The Fourth Chapter

The author showeth upon what ground and cause the man was convicted. And also divers other things not then brought in judgment… whereby it may well appear that he was greatly guilty. And so he showeth incidentally wherefore it were not reason in a detection of heresy… to suffer, after the witnesses published and the crime well proved, any new witnesses to be received for the party that is accused.

The Fifth Chapter

The author proveth that the spiritual judges did the man marvelous favor—and almost more than lawful—in that they

4 showeth: relates 5 necessary: essential 7 dissolveth: disposes of 9, 13 touched: discussed 10 abjured: made to renounce his heresies under oath 12 devout: devotional 14 mean: middle 15 would: should 15–16 Divine Service: the Divine Office 18 light: quick 20 reproving: criticizing 21 more slight: less reliable 21–22 heinous criminal causes: cases of high crime 22 covenants: pacts 27 may well appear: can be clearly shown 28 were not reason: would not make good sense 28–29 in a detection: with regard to an accusation 29 suffer: allow 29 published: (have been) slated 33 spiritual: ecclesiastical 34 marvelous: extraordinary
admitted him to such an abjuration as they did... and that they did not, rather, leave him to the secular hands.

The Sixth Chapter

The author showeth that the person abjured—for his own worldly honesty, and for the more fruit of his preaching if he be suffered to preach in time to come, it were much better for him openly and willingly 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.

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 the truth cannot be proved against him. Whereunto the author answereth that he is bound upon peril of perjury to say and confess 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 indeed. And with this finisheth he the matter of his abjuration.

The Eighth Chapter

The author showeth why the New Testament of Tyndale’s translation was burned. And showeth for an example certain words evil, and of evil purpose, changed.

The Ninth Chapter

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

The Tenth Chapter

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

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 incidentally the
teacher 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.

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.

The Thirteenth Chapter

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

The 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.

The Fifteenth Chapter

The messenger moveth against the clergy that though they have
made no law thereof, yet they will in deed suffer none English
Bible in no man’s hand, but use to burn them where they find
them—and sometimes to burn the man too. And for example he layeth
one Richard Hunne, showing that the chancellor of London
murdered him in prison and after hanged him (feigning that he hanged
himself), and after condemned him of heresy… because he had an
English Bible; and so burned the Bible and him together. Whereunto
the author answereth.

The Sixteenth Chapter

The messenger rehearseth some causes which he hath heard laid
by some of the clergy wherefore the Scripture should not be suffered
in English. And the author showeth his mind—that it were convenient
The Fourth Book

The First Chapter

The author showeth wherefore it were not well done to suffer Luther’s books—or any other heretic’s—to go abroad and be read among the people… though there were some good things in them among the bad.

The Second Chapter

The author showeth many of Luther’s heresies to be so abominable… and some part also so peevish… that the very bare rehearsal is enough, without any further dispicion thereupon, to cause any good man abhor them… and to be ashamed also to seem so foolish as to hold them. And for an example the author rehearseth divers… whereof some be newly set forth by Tyndale in his English books… worse yet, in some part, than his master Luther is himself.

The Third Chapter

The author showeth by what occasion that Luther first fell to the devising of these heresies. And that the occasion was such as well declareth that he was pricked thereto by malice… and ever proceeded from evil to worse, not witting where to hold him; and that he refuseth to stand to the judgment of any folk earthly concerning the truth or falsehood of his opinions… save only himself.

The Fourth Chapter

The author showeth how that Luther, in the book that himself made of his own acts at the city of Worms in Almaine, doth so madly oversee himself that he discloseth unawares certain follies of himself which a man will well laugh at, and marvel much to see it.

The Fifth Chapter

The author showeth the perpetual inconstancy of Luther, and his contrariety and repugnance against himself.

5 showeth . . . suffer: explains why it would not be good to allow 6 go abroad: get out there
7 though: even if 11 peevish: silly // the very bare rehearsal: just the mere mention
12 dispicion: discussion // cause: make 13 abhor: shudder at
14 rehearseth: relates // divers: several 18 showeth: tells
20 well declareth: makes it quite clear // pricked: spurred 21 evil: bad
21 witting: knowing // hold him: settle 23 opinions: theses 26 himself: he himself
27 made of: wrote about // Almaine: Germany 28 oversee: forget // follies: idiocies
28 of: about 29 marvel . . . it: be very surprised to see 32 repugnance: opposition
The Sixth Chapter

The author showeth how that Luther hath been fain for the defense of his indefensible errors… to go back and forsake all the manner of proof and trial… which he first promised to stand to. And now, like a man shameful and shameless, hath no proof in the world but his own word… and calleth that the word of God.

Table 4.6

The Seventh Chapter

The author showeth what things caused the people to fall into Luther’s fond and furious sect. And he showeth also what mischief the followers of that sect have done in Almaine, Lombardy, and Rome.

The Eighth Chapter

The messenger saith that the malice of the men is not to be imputed to the sect, since that of every sect, some be naught. And the author showeth that in the Lutherans, the sect itself is the cause of the malice that the men fall to.

The Ninth Chapter

The author showeth that it is a great token that the world is near at an end… while we see the people so far fallen from God that they can abide it to be content with this pestilent frantic sect… which no people, Christian or heathen, could have suffered before our days.

The Tenth Chapter

The author inveigheth against this detestable article of this ungracious sect whereby they take away the liberty of man’s free will and ascribe althing to destiny.

The Eleventh Chapter

The messenger saith that howsoever Luther and his followers in Almaine believe, yet he cannot think that such as be Lutherans in England—of whom some, he saith, have seemed good and honest—be so mad and unhappy to believe that all hangeth upon destiny. Whereupon the author showeth the contrary… and that they be naught in deed, seem they never so good. And for proof that howsoever they color their

words, they mean that all dependeth upon only destiny, he
rehearseth a certain dispicion had with a heretic detected to the
bishop and examined—the author being present—where the heretic,
being learned and a preacher, made many shifts to make it seem
that in his evil words he meant but well.

The Twelfth Chapter

The author inveigheth against the most pestilent sect of these
Lutherans, which ascribe our salvation and damnation, and
all our deeds, to destiny.

The Thirteenth Chapter

The author showeth his opinion concerning the burning of
heretics… and that it is lawful, necessary, and well done; and
showeth also that the clergy doth not procure it… but only the
good and politic provision of the temporalty.

The Fourteenth Chapter

The author somewhat showeth that the clergy doth no wrong in
leaving heretics to secular hand… though their death follow thereon.
And he showeth also that it is lawful to resist the Turk and such other
infidels—and that princes be bound thereto.

The Fifteenth Chapter

That princes be bound to punish heretics… and that fair
handling helpeth little with many of them.

The Sixteenth Chapter

Of simple, unlearned folk that are deceived by the great good opinion
that they have, percase, in the learning and living of some that teach
them errors.

The Seventeenth Chapter

The author showeth that some which be Lutherans and seem to
live holily, and therefore be believed and had in estimation,
intend a further purpose than they pretend… which they will well
show if they may once find their time.
The Eighteenth Chapter

The author showeth that in the condemnation of heretics, the clergy might lawfully do much more sharply than they do; and that in deed the clergy doth now no more against heretics… than the Apostle counseleth… and the old holy doctors did.

Finis tabulae
The First Book

1. Preface

One business begetteth another. It is an old-said saw that one
business begetteth and bringeth forth another.

Which proverb, as it happeth, I find very true by myself;
which have been fain by occasion first of one business…
after to take the second, and upon the second… now to take the
third. For, whereas a right worshipful friend of mine sent
once unto me a secret, sure friend of his, with certain credence to
be declared unto me… touching many such matters as, being in deed
very certain and out of doubt, be nevertheless of late by lewd
people put in question (the specialties whereof do so far forth in the
first chapter of this book appear that we shall here need no rehearsal
thereof), I thought it first enough to tell the messenger my mind by
mouth, accounting that after our communication ended, I
should never need further business therein. But after that the messenger
was departed, and I felt my stomach well eased, in that I reckoned all
my labor done—bethinking myself a little while thereon, my
business that I took for finished, I found very far from that
point… and little more than begun. For when I considered what
the matters were… and how many great things had been treated
between the messenger and me… and in what manner fashion—albeit
I mistrusted not his good will… and very well trusted his wit, his
learning well serving him to the perceiving and reporting of
our communication—yet, finding our treaty so diverse and so long,
and sometimes such wise intricate, that myself could not
without labor call it orderly to mind, methought I had not well
done… without writing, to trust his only memory; namely since
some parts of the matter be such of themselves as rather need to be
attentively read and advised than hoverly heard and passed over.

And over this, I considered that though I nothing suspect the
messenger—as in good faith I do not (and, to say the truth, am of
myself so little mistrusting… that he were likely very plainly to show

2 it is an old-said saw: there is an old saying 4 by: of; with regard to 5 which: who
5 fain: forced 7 whereas: given that // right: very
7 worshipful: distinguished / devout 8 secret: personal // sure: reliable
8 credence: credentials 9 touching: concerning // in deed: in fact; actually
10 out of: beyond // lewd: base; vile 11 specialties: particulars
12 rehearsal: relating 14 accounting: figuring 14, 24 communication: conversation
16 stomach: spirit 22 wit: intelligence 23 perceiving: understanding
24 treaty: discussion 27 his only memory: solely his memory // namely: especially
28 matter: content (of the conversation) 29 advised: reflected on
29 hoverly: superficially 30 over: in addition to // though: even if
30 nothing: in no way 31 in good faith: in all sincerity // say: tell
31–32 of myself: by nature 21/32—22/1 that . . . bad: i.e., that for me to take someone
for bad, he would probably have to very clearly prove himself wicked
himself naught… whom I should take for bad)—yet, since no man can 1. Preface

Deem the best.

look into another’s breast, as it is therefore

well done to deem the best… so were it not

much amiss in such wise to provide for the worst… as, if a man

hap to be worse than we take him for, our good opinion turn

us to no harm. For this cause methought that for the more

surety, my part were to send our communication to my said

friend in writing. Whereby, if it had happed that his messenger had,

for any sinister favor borne toward the wrong side, purposely

mangled the matter, his master should not only know the truth…

but also have occasion the better to beware of his messenger—which

else might hap to hurt, while he were mistaken for good. Now,

when I had, upon this deliberation taken with myself, written

all the matter and sent it to my friend… then had I, methought, all

done… and my mind full set at rest. But that rest rested not

long. For soon after, it was showed me… that of all my writings

were written divers copies… and one also carried over the sea.

Where when I remembered what a shrewd sort of our apostates are

assembled (part run out of religion… and all run out of the

right faith), methought great peril might arise if some of that

company, which are confederated and conspired together in the

sowing and setting forth of Luther’s pestilent heresies in this

realm, should maliciously change my words to the worse… and so

put in print my book… framed after their fantasies; which when

I would afterward reprove and show the difference, I might

peradventure seem for the color of my cause… to have amended

mine own upon the sight of theirs. For eschewing whereof I am

now driven, as I say, to this third business of publishing and

putting my book in print myself; whereby their enterprise (if

they should any such intend) shall (I trust) be prevented and

frustrated. And this have I done not all of mine own heed, but after

the counsel of others, more than one—whose advice and counsel, for

their wisdom and learning, I asked in that behalf… and which have,

at my request, vouchsafed to read over the book ere I did put it forth.
For albeit that I dare be somewhat bold to commune in familiar manner
with such as for their fantasies like to ask me of such matters any
question (according to the counsel of
Saint Peter bidding us be ready to give
a reckoning, and to show a reasonable cause, to every man, of the
faith and hope that we have), yet to make and put forth any book
wherein were treated any such things as touch our faith… would
I not presume… but if better learned than myself… should think it
either profitable or at the leastwise harmless. To whose examination
and judgment I did the more studiously submit this work…
for two things in special, among divers others. The one, for the
liberal allegations of the messenger for the wrong part, so laid
out at large… that of myself, I stood half in a doubt whether it were
convenient to rehearse the words of any man so homely… and in manner
sometimes irreverently spoken against God’s holy hallows and
their reverent memories. The other was certain tales and merry
words which he mingled with his matter—and some such on
mine own part, among—as occasion fell in communication. In
which albeit I saw no harm… yet somewhat doubted I lest they should
unto sad men seem over light and wanton for the weight and gravity
of such an earnest matter. Wherefore, in these two points though I
had already seen some examples of right holy men… which, in
their books answering to the objections of heretics in their
time, have not letted to rehearse the very, formal words of them
whose writings they made answer to… being sometimes of such
manner and sort as a good man would not well bear… and have not,
also, letted to write a merry word in a right earnest work—of
which two things I could out of godly men’s books and holy
saints’ works gather a good sort—yet in mine own work I
determined that I would nothing allow nor defend that the
judgment of other virtuous and cunning men would in any wise
mislike. And therefore, after that such had read it and severally
said their advice, I found, as it often happeth, that something
which one wise and well-learned man would have out, twain of
like wisdom and learning specially would have in—neither side
lacking good and probable reasons for their part. Wherefore, since
it became not me to be judge over the judgment of them… whom
I took and chose for my judges… being such, of themselves, as
hard were it for any man to say which of them before the others
he could in erudition, wit, or prudence anything prefer: I

Lean to the more part. could no further go… but lean to the more
part. Which I so far forth have followed…

that likewise as I divers things put out or changed by their
good advice and counsel, so let I nothing stand in this book… but
such as twain advised me specially to let stand… against any one
that any doubt moved me to the contrary. And thus much have I
thought necessary for my declaration and excuse to advertise you, all
that shall happen to read this rude, simple work—praying you of
patience and pardon; whom God, of his especial grace, grant as
much profit in the reading… as my poor heart hath meant you and
intended in the making.

The First Chapter

The letter of credence sent from his friend by a trusty
secret messenger. With the letter of the author answering the
same. The declaration of the credence by the mouth of the
messenger; whereupon the matter of all the whole work
dependeth.

The Letter of Credence

Master Chancellor, as heartily as I possibly can, I recommend
me to you. Not without a thousand thanks for your good company
when we were last together. In which forasmuch as it
liked you to spend some of your time with me in familiar communication—
whereof some part I trust so to remember as myself
shall be the better, and some others never the worse… which shall
have cause, and have already, to give you great thanks therefor—I am
bold at this time to send you my special secret friend, this bearer, to

2 probable: cogent // reasons: arguments // part: view
7 lean to: defer to; go along with  7–8 the more part: the majority
12 any doubt moved me: expressed to me any misgiving  13, 21 declaration: explanation
13 advertise you: make you aware of  14 rude: rough  17 making: writing
19, 21, 24 (letter of) credence: letter of introduction
20, 32 secret: personal  22 matter: content
25–26 recommend me to you: commend myself to your remembrance
28 liked: pleased // communication: conversation  31 therefore: for it
32 bold: taking the liberty
break with you somewhat further, partly of the same matters, partly
of some others such as are happed there since… whereof great speech
and rumor runneth here… whereby ye shall have occasion more at
length (if your leisure will serve) to touch certain doubts moved
since, of the matters treated between us before. Wherein, were
it not for your other business, I would be bold on your goodness to
desire you to take good time with him. And yet nevertheless do
require you heartily—as your leisure will serve you—to satisfy him
at the full. For he shall (how long soever he tarry therefor) give
attendance unto you… days and hours, as ye may spare him
time; which cannot in these things be but well bestowed,

In matters concerning God, set worldly businesses aside.

especially in such need. For I assure you, some folk here talk very
strangely of the things that he shall move you. Not only for such
words as they tell that come from thence, but also, most especially,
through the occasion of some letters lewdly written hither out of
London by a priest or two… whom they take here for honest. But whatsoever
any man tell or write, I shall, for the confidence and trust
that I have in you, surely take and tell forth for the very truth whatsoever
ye shall affirm unto my friend; whom I send unto you…
not so much because I may not come myself (howbeit, therefore
too) as for because I long to have him talk with you. To whom

whatsoever ye say, reckon it said to myself—not only for his
troth and secretness, but also for his memory; with whom to
commune, I trust shall not mislike you. For either mine affection
blindeth me… or ye shall find him wise and, as others say that
can better judge it than I, more than meanly learned; with one thing
added wherewith ye be wont well to be content: a very merry
wit! He is of nature nothing tongue-tied. And I have in these
matters bidden him be bold, without any straining of courtesy—
whereof the ceremonies in disputation marreth much of the matter,
while one studieth more how he may behave him… than what he
shall say. I have, I say, therefore bidden him more to mind his
matter than his courtesy, and freely to lay forth not only what he
The Letter of the Author Sent with the Book

Right worshipful sir [after most hearty recommendation], albeit that of late I sent you my poor mind by the mouth of your trusty friend... to whom ye desired me, by your letters, to give no less credence than to yourself, concerning all such things as he broke of and communed with me in your behalf; and that (for the confidence that ye have in him, the wit and learning that I found in him, and honesty that I so much the more think him to be of... in that I perceive you, being of such wisdom and virtue, to have him in so special trust) I neither do nor can believe the contrary but that he hath of all our communication made you faithfully plain and full report: yet, since I suppose in myself that if we had might conveniently come together, ye would rather have chosen to have heard my mind of mine own mouth than by the means of another, I have since, in these few days in which I have been at home, put the matter in writing, to the end ye may not only hear it by the mouth of your friend, but also (which better is than suddenly once to hear it of mine own mouth) read it (if ye list) more often, at your best leisure, advisedly, from mine own pen. Which thing I verily thought myself so much the more bound to do... for that it liked you, of your special favor and affection toward me, so greatly to regard and esteem my mind and answer in those matters... that no rumor there running, or tales in your country told, or letters thither written, nor reasons or arguments there made to the contrary, should let or withstand but that ye would (as ye wrote) take that thing for undoubted truth that I should (by your friend) ascertain you.

1 what him list: whatever he wants to  2 but if: unless  3 am bold: presume
4 one: someone  // face: confront  9 recommendation: greetings
10 desired: asked  13 broke . . in: disclosed to me, and talked with me about, on
14 wit: intelligence  15 honesty: honorableness  18 communication: conversation
20 we . . . together: you and I could have conveniently gotten together
25 suddenly: extemporaneously  26 list: want to  27 advisedly: reflectively
28 liked: pleased  31 thither: to there  32 reasons: reasonings  // let: hinder
34 ascertain you: assure you of
And surely, sir, in this point ye may make yourself sure: that I shall never willingly deceive your trust. And lest I might hap to do it of oversight, unawares; albeit I nothing said unto your friend by mouth but that I was right well informed of the truth: yet, forasmuch as I perceived by him that some folk doubted lest many things were laid to the charge... not only of that man ye wrote of, but also of Luther himself... otherwise than could be proved, I did so much therein that I was suffered to see and show him as well the books of the one... as the very acts of the court concerning the other—that we might both, by so much, the more surely warrant you the truth. Wherein if ye find any man that yet doubteth whether he told you, and I write you, the truth or not: I shall, if he understand the Latin tongue, find the means at your pleasure... that he shall so see the books himself... that were he never so full of mistrusting, he shall not fail to be fully content and satisfied. And this warranty will I make you as far forth as concerneth any act done here. But as for things reasoned and disputed between us—the conclusions self be so sure truths that they be not disputable. But whether the reasons by me made in them be effectual or insufficient—albeit your friend, either for that of truth he thought so or for that of courtesy he said so, accepted them for good—yet without prejudice of the principal matters, ye may yourself be judge. And thus I pray you take in good worth the little labor and great good will of him... whom in anything that may do you pleasure... ye may to the uttermost of his little power well and boldly command. And thus our Lord send you, with my good lady your bedfellow and all yours, as heartily well to fare as you would all wish.

Your friend first after your letter read, when I demanded him his credence, showed me that ye had sent him to me not for any doubt that yourself had in many of those things that he should move unto me, but for the doubt that ye perceived in many others—and in some folk plain persuasion to the contrary... whom ye would be glad to answer with the truth—albeit some things, he said, were also there so talked... that ye wist not well yourself

1 in: of  // may make yourself sure: can rest assured  2 willingly: deliberately
2 deceive: betray  5 doubted lest: suspected that  8 suffered: allowed
18 self: themselves  // sure: certain  19 reasons: reasonings
21 good: valid  23 in good worth: for what it is worth
28 demanded: asked of  29 credence: letter of introduction  // showed: told
30 in: with regard to  31 move unto me: bring up to me for discussion
34 wist not well: did not really know
which part ye might believe. For it was there not only
spoken, but also thither written by divers honest priests out of
London, that the man ye write of was of many things borne
wrong in hand, and therein so sore handled that he was forced to
forswear and abjure certain heresies—and openly put to penance
therefor—where he never held any such. And all this done for
malice and envy… partly of some friars (against whose abusions
he preached), partly for that he preached boldly against the pomp
and pride and other inordinate living (that more men speak of than
preach of) used in the clergy. And they take for a great token
that he should not mean evil… the proof and experience which
men have had of him… that he lived well, and was a good, honest,
virtuous man—far from ambition and desire of worldly
worship, chaste, humble, and charitable, free and liberal in
almsdeed—and a very good preacher… in whose devout
sermons the people were greatly edified. And therefore the people
say that all this gear is done but only to stop men’s mouths
and to put every man to silence that would anything speak of the
faults of the clergy. And they think that for none other cause
was also burned, at Paul’s Cross, the New Testament lately translated
in English by Master William Hutchins, otherwise called
Master Tyndale, who was (as men say) well known ere he went
over the sea… for a man of right good living… studious and well
learned in Scripture… and in divers places in England was very well
liked and did great good with preaching. And men mutter among
themselves that the Book was not only faultless, but also very well translated…
and was devised to be burned because men should not be
able to prove that such faults as were at Paul’s Cross declared to
have been found in it were never found there in deed, but untruly
surmised. And yet such as they were (some men say) were no
faults at all if they had been so translated indeed, but blame
laid and fault found with things nothing blameworthy… only
to deface and infame that holy work, to the end that they might
seem to have some meet cause to burn it.

1 part: side // might: should  2 thither: to there  2, 12 honest: honorable; upstanding
3–4 borne wrong in hand: falsely accused // 4 sore handled: badly treated
5 openly: publicly 6 therefor: for them 7 abusions: corrupt practices
9 inordinate living: out-of-line behavior  9, 10 of: about 10 used in: engaged in by
10 token: indication 11 evil: ill // proof: personal knowledge
12 well: in a good manner 14 worship: prestige // liberal: generous
15 almsdeed: almsgiving 17 gear: stuff // stop men’s mouths: shut people up
19 faults: misdeeds
20, 28 Paul’s Cross: the outdoor pulpit at Old St. Paul’s Cathedral, in London
20 lately: recently 21 in: into 22 as men say: according to what people say
23 over the sea: overseas // living: personal conduct 26 faultless: free of error
26 well: rightly 27 because: so that 28, 31 faults: errors
29 in deed: in reality 29–30 untruly surmised: falsely alleged
30 were no: would have been no 32 nothing: in no way 33 deface: discredit
33 infame: bring into infamy 34 meet: just
And that for none other intent but for to keep out of the
people’s hands all knowledge of Christ’s Gospel, and of God’s
care, except so much only as the clergy themselves list now
and then to tell us. And that—little as it is, and seldom showed—yet, as
it is feared, not well and truly told, but watered with false glosses,
and altered from the truth of the very words and sentence of Scripture,
only for the maintenance of their authority.

And the fear lest this thing should evidently appear to the
people if they were suffered to read the Scripture themselves in
their own tongue… was (as it is thought) the very cause not only for
which the New Testament translated by Tyndale was burned… but
also that the clergy of this realm hath before this time, by a constitution
provincial, prohibited any book of Scripture to be
translated into the English tongue, fearing men with fire as heretics,
whoso should presume to keep them—as though it were
heresy for a Christian man to read Christ’s Gospel.

“And surely, sir,” quoth he, “some folk that think this dealing of the
clergy to be thus (and good men to be mishandled for declaring
the truth, and the Scripture itself to be pulled out of the people’s
hands… lest they should perceive the truth) be led in their
minds to doubt whether Luther himself—of whose opinions
(or, at the least, of whose works) all these businesses began—wrote indeed
so evil as he is borne in hand. And many men there be that
think he never meant such things; but that because he wrote
against the abuses of pardons… and spoke somewhat liberally
against the court of Rome… and generally against the vices of the
clergy—therefore he was brought in hatred… and first cited to
Rome. And when that, for fear of bodily harm with wrong
(whereof it would have been too late to look for remedy after… if he had
once been burned up before), he durst not come thither—then was he
accursed, and his books damned… and, under great pains, forbidden
to be read. And that thing done because it should not be
known what wrong he had… and that he neither meaneth nor saith
such odious and abominable heresies as the people be borne
in hand to induce them to hatred of him—as it would peradventure appear if his books were suffered to be read.

“And they say that it were no mastery to make it seem that a man should be a heretic… if he may be borne in hand that he saith the thing . . . —which he never said; or peradventure one line taken out among many, and misconstrued, not suffering the remnant to be seen, whereby it might more clearly appear what he meaneth. By which manner of dealing, a man, they say, might lay heresy to Saint Paul, and find a fault in Saint John’s Gospel.

“And yet, they say, the worst of all is this: that the clergy cease not hereby, nor hold themselves content with the condemning of Luther, and forbidding of his books, but further abuse the hatred of his name against every man that is, in preaching of the word of God, anything such as should be; that is to wit, plain and bold, without gloss or flattering. Where if they find a man faulty—let them lay his fault to his charge. What needeth to call him a ‘Lutheran’? Though Luther were a devil, yet might a man percase say as he saith in something… and say true enough. For never was there heretic that said all false. Nor the devil himself lied not… when he called Christ God’s Son. And therefore men think that this name of ‘a Lutheran’ serveth the clergy for a common cloak of a false crime; that where they lack special matter to charge one with by judgment, they labor to bring him first in the infamy of that name, that compriseth (as they make it seem) a confused heap of heresies, no man can tell what.

“And yet in such dealing they wound their own matter another way. For while they defame for ‘Lutherans’ men that be of known virtue and cunning, what do they thereby but one of the twain—either cause the people (that have, for good living and learning, those men in great reputation) to think that the clergy for malice and envy doth unruly defame them… or else that Luther’s doctrine is good, while so cunning men, and good men, lean thereto.

“And therefore it were wisdom… not to call them ‘Lutherans,’ but rather, when they teach and hold any such opinions as the people know for Luther’s, let it either be dissembled… or they secretly, by fair ways, induced to the contrary, if the points that they teach of
his be naught. Lest by calling good and cunning men ‘Lutherans,’
they may peradventure bring themselves in suspicion of malice and
envy… and Luther among the people into good opinion;
thinking, as they begin to do already, that either Luther said not
as evil as is surmised upon him… or else that those things that he
saith, as odious as they seem, be good enough in deed.”

He said also that it seemed unto many men a sore thing, and far unreasonable,
that “poor simple and unlearned men—although they fell
into errors, and were led out of the right way, by that they leaned to
the authority of such men as they believed to be virtuous and cunning—
should instead of teaching… be beaten cruelly, with abjurations and open
shame… with peril of burning, also, if a few false witnesses shall
after such abjuration depose that they have heard him fall in
relapse.”

Finally he said that many “good and well-learned” men thought
plainly “that the clergy seemeth far out of all good order of
charity, and that they do contrary to the mildness and merciful
mind of their Master, and against the example of all the old
holy fathers, in that they cause for any error or wrong opinion in
the faith… any one man or other to be put to death.

“For they say that the old holy fathers used only to dispute
with heretics, teaching them, and convicting them, by
Scripture… and not by fagots. And that by that way… the
faith went well toward, and one heretic so turned did turn
many others; whereas now, men abhor this cruelty in the
Church… and they that seem turned think still the things

Of the ashes of one heretic that they dare not say… and of the ashes of
one heretic springeth up many. And
that now we make the fashion of Christendom
to seem all turned quite upside down. For whereas Christ made
infidels the persecutors… and his Christian people the sufferers, we make
the Christian men the persecutors… and the infidels the sufferers—
whereby men think that secretly Christ’s order yet standeth still,
though it be not so taken and so perceived. For the people take it
that still those that persecute be the miscreants… and those poor
people that suffer it be (under the false name of ‘heretics”) the true-believing men—and very Christian martyrs.

“Christ also, they say, would never have any man compelled by force and violence to believe upon his faith; nor would that men should fight for him or his matters. In so far forth that he would not suffer Saint Peter to fight for his own self… but reproved him for

Mt 26:51–54; Jn 18:10 striking Malchus. Nor would not defend himself; but, healing the ear again of Malchus his persecutor… which Peter had smitten off, and giving all his holy body to the patient sufferance of all the painful torments that his cruel enemies would put to it, showed us, as well by his effectual example of his death as by his godly counsel in his life—and after that, confirmed by the continual passion and martyrdoms of his holy martyrs—that his will and pleasure is that we should not so much as defend ourselves against heretics and infidels, were they pagans, Turks, or Saracens. And much less, then, should we fight against them and kill them; but that we should persevere in setting forth his faith against miscreants and infidels… by such ways as himself began it; keep it, and increase it, as it

By patience and sufferance was gotten. And that was by patience and the faith was divulged. sufferance—by which the faith was divulged and spread almost through the world in little while. Not by war and fighting—which way hath (as they say) well near already lost all… that the other way won.”

When your friend had thus declared his credence, he desired me, both on your behalf and on his own, in such things as were percase not well said… to take them as they were indeed: the mind of others, whom ye would fain answer, and satisfy, with reason—which ye trusted to be the better able to do by mine answer—and neither the mind and opinion of you nor him, which did and would in allthing “stand and abide” by the faith and belief of Christ’s Catholic Church. But as for such parts of this matter as concerned “not any part of our belief,” but the “dealing of this world”—as the justice or injustice of “some spiritual persons” in the “pursuing and condemning men for heretics, or their works for heresies”—he thought, he said, as of himself, that men might “without any peril of heresy,” for “their own part,” notwithstanding
“any man’s judgment given,” yet well and reasonably
doubt therein. For though he “thought it heresy” to think the
opinions of any man to be good and Catholic which be
“heresies indeed,” yet might a man, he thought, “without any peril of
‘heresy’ doubt whether he were a heretic or no… that were “by
man’s judgment” condemned for one, since it might well happen
that he never held those opinions that were “put upon him,” but
that he was either by “false depositions of wrongful witnesses” or
by “the error or malice of unjust judges” condemned. And that
sometimes, percase, the “ignorance” of some judges would condemn
for heresy such articles as “wiser and better-learned” would in point
of judgment allow for good and Catholic… and of the other
judgment discern and judge the contrary.

Howbeit, he said that ye had in me and my “learning” so
special “trust and confidence”… that in any of all these things, whatsoever
ye had heard, or should hear, elsewhere, ye were fully
determined to give “full credence” to me… and take for the truth
“such answer” as he should bring you from me; wherein ye “right
heartily desired” me to “take some pain,” that ye might in “these
matters” by his mouth know my mind “at large.”

After this, ere I made any answer to his words, I demanded him
what manner acquaintance was between him and you. And thereupon
perceiving him to have your sons at school… inquiring
further of him to what faculty he had most given his study, I
understood him to have given diligence to the Latin tongue. As
for other faculties, he rought not of. For he told me merrily that
logic he reckoned but “babbling”; music, to “serve for singers”;
“arithmetic meet for merchants, geometry for masons…
astronomy good for no man.” And as for philosophy: “the most
vanity of all.” And that it and logic had lost “all good divinity”
with the “subtleties of their questions” and “babbling of their dispicions”—
building all upon reason, which “rather giveth
blindness than any light.” For man, he said, “hath no light but
of Holy Scripture.” And therefore he said that besides the Latin tongue,
he had been (which I much commend) studious in Holy Scripture;
which was, he said, “learning enough for a Christian man; with

1 well and: quite  3, 7 opinions: contentions; views  21 demanded: asked
24 faculty: discipline; branch of knowledge
26 rought not of: had no interest in (them)  28 meet: suitable
30 lost: destroyed  // divinity: theology  31 dispicions: disputations
which the apostles held themselves content.” And therein, he said, he labored not only to can many texts thereof by heart, but also to ensearch the sentence and understanding thereof… as far as he might perceive by himself. For as for interpreters, he told me that neither his time would well serve him to read… and also he found “so great sweetness in the text itself” that he could not find in his heart to “lose any time” in the glosses. And as touching any difficulty, he said that he found by experience that the best

The surest interpretation and surest interpretation was to lay and confer one text with another, “which fail not among them well and sufficiently to declare themselves.” And this way he said that he used, which he found sufficient and surest… “for so should it most surely tarry, when it were found out and learned by a man’s own labor.”

And that he said every man was able enough to do “with help of God, which never faileth them that faithfully trust in his promise;

Mt 7:7–8 and he hath promised that if we seek, we shall find, and if we knock, we shall have it opened to us. And what shall be opened but that book which,

Rv 3:7; 5:1–7 as Saint John saith in the Apocalypse, is so shut, with ‘seven clasps,’ that it cannot be opened but by the Lamb—that when he shutteth, then can no man open it, and when he openeth it, then can no man shut it!”

Upon these words and other like… when I considered that your friend was studious of Scripture—and although I now have a very good opinion of him, nor at that time had not all the contrary—yet, to be plain with you and him both, by reason that he set the matter so well and lustily forward… he put me somewhat in doubt whether he were (as young scholars be sometimes prone to new fantasies) fallen into Luther’s sect; and that ye, peradventure, somewhat fearing the same, did of good mind the rather send him to me… with such a message… for that ye trusted he should be somewhat answered and satisfied by me. I therefore thought it not meet, in so many matters and weighty, to make him an unadvised answer; but, with good words welcoming him for the time, pretending lack of leisure for other present business, required him to return on the

2 can: learn  3 sentence: meaning // understanding: i.e., right understanding  4 might: could  7 as touching: as regards  9 lay: put  10 confer: compare 11 well and: quite  12 declare themselves: make themselves clear 14 tarry: stick with one  15 of: from  16 which: who 28 well and: good and; very // lustily: energetically  30 fantasies: wild notions 33 meet: advisable; a good idea  34 unadvised: unpremeditated; extemporaneous 35 pretending: claiming (a)  36 leisure: free time // for: on account of 36 required: asked
morrow—against which time I would so order mine affairs that we would have conference together… of all his errand at length. And he in this wise being departed… I began to gather in mind the whole effect, as my remembrance would serve me, of all that he had purposed. And because I would have it the more ready at mine eye, so that I might the more fully and effectually answer it, leaving no part untouched: in such order as he had purposed it (that is to wit, after the manner that I have above rehearsed), I briefly committed it to writing.

The Second Chapter

Here summarily is declared what order the author intendeth to treat of the matters purposed unto him. Whereof because the first was an opinion conceived in some men’s heads that a certain person lately abjured of heresy for preaching against pilgrimages and images and prayers made to saints was therein greatly wronged, the author briefly declareth his mind concerning the confutation of those perilous and pernicious opinions.

On the morrow, when he was come again (somewhat before seven of the clock; for so I appointed him), taking him with me into my study—and my servants warned that if any others should happen to desire to speak with me (certain except, of whom I gave them knowledge), they should defer them till another leisure—I set him down with me, at a little table. And then I showed unto him that whereas he had purposed, on your behalf, in short words… many long things… whereof the rehearsal were loss of time, to him that so well knew them already: I would, all superfluous recapitulation set apart, as briefly as I conveniently could… show him my mind in them all. And first begin where he began: at the abjuration of the man he spoke of. Secondly would I touch the condemnation and burning of the New Testament… translated by Tyndale. Thirdly, somewhat would I speak of Luther and his sect
in general. Fourthly and finally, the thing that he touched last: that is to wit, the war and fighting against infidels, with the condemnation of heretics unto death; which two points himself had combined and knit together.

And first, as touching the matter of the man’s abjuration, “Whereas it is reported that the spiritualty did him wrong; and for to make that seem likely, there is laid in them displeasure, malice, and envy toward him… for preaching (as ye say),” quoth I, “against their vicious living; and in him is, on the other side, alleged much cunning, virtue, and goodness: I will neither enter into the praise of them nor into the dispraise of him; wherein standeth nothing the effect of this matter. For if there did, I would not pass over some part thereof so shortly.

“But, now, for this matter—although the whole spiritualty (wherein no man doubteth to be many a right virtuous and godly man) were in their living far worse than devils, yet if they did that man no wrong, there hath for this matter no man against them any cause to complain. And, over this, if that man were in all his other living as innocent as a saint—yet if he were infected and faulty in these heresies, he had, then, in this matter no wrong. And yet besides all this, if he not only were in all other things very virtuous, but also were in all these heresies whereof he was detected… utterly clean and faultless: yet if it were by sufficient witness (were they never so false in deed… seeming honest and likely to say true) proved in open court that he was faulty therein—albeit in such case his witnesses had wronged him, yet had his judges done him but right. And therefore letting pass, as I say, the praise or dispraise of either his judges or him… as things impertinent to the point: I will show you that they not only did him no wrong, but also showed him, in my mind, the greatest favor, and used toward him the most charitable mercy, that ever I wist used to any man in such case.

“And first, as for any wrong that his judges did him… I marvel me much wherein they that report it could assign it. For if any were done him, it must needs have been in one of the two things: either in that he was untruly judged… to have preached such articles as he
was detected of, whereas he preached none such in deed; or else in
that some such articles as he preached… were judged and condemned
for heresies, whereas they were none in deed. Except that any man
would say that though he were proved and convicted of heresy, yet
he should have been put to no penance at all… or else to no such as
he was. And of that point if any man so think… I shall speak in
the Fourth Part, where we shall touch in general the order that
the Church taketh in the condemnation of heretics. But as for
the other points: first, if any priest wrote out of London into your
country… that any such article of his preaching was by his judges
declared for heresy… as were in deed good and not against the faith
of Christ’s church, let him name what article. And either ye shall
find that he shall name you such as the man was not charged
with… or else shall ye find that such as he shall name you were
such indeed as yourself shall perceive for heresies at your ear.

Three manifest heresies

For the articles wherewith he was
charged… were that we should do no
worship to any images… nor pray to any saints… or go on
pilgrimages; which things I suppose every good Christian man
will agree for heresies. And therefore we shall let that point pass, and
so resort to the second… to see whether it were well proved that he
preached them or no.”

“Sir,” quoth your friend, “I would for my part well agree them for
heresies, but yet have I heard some ere this that would not do so. And
therefore, when we call them heresies, it were well done to tell why,
since some men would, I ween, if they might be heard, stiffly say nay…
which now hold their peace, and bear themselves full coldly, that
would take the matter more hot… save for burning of their
lips.”

“Now, forsooth,” quoth I, “whosoever will say that these be no
heresies—he shall not have me to dispute it, which have no

What becometh a layman
cunning in such matters, but (as it best
becometh a layman to do in all things)
lean and cleave to the common faith and belief of Christ’s church.

And thereby do I plainly know it for a heresy… if a heresy be a
sect and a side way taken, by any party of such as be baptized
and bear the name of Christian men, from the common faith and
belief of the whole Church beside. For this am I very sure and
perceive it well—not only by experience of mine own time... and the
places where myself hath been, with common report of other honest
men... from all other places of Christendom, but by books also, and
remembrances, left of long time, with writing of the old holy
fathers... and now saints in heaven—that from the apostles’ time
hitherto, this manner hath been used, taught, and allowed... and the
contrary commonly condemned... through the whole flock of all good
Christian people.

“And as touching such texts as these heretics allege against
the worshipping of images, praying to saints, and going on
Ex 20:4 pilgramages—as they lay the law given
to the Jews, ‘Non facies tibi sculptile’
Ps 114:1; 115:4–8 de Aegypto,’ and ‘Soli Deo honor et gloria’
1 Tm 1:17 (‘Only to God be honor and glory’), and
Jer 17:5 ‘Maledictus qui confidit in homine’ (‘Accursed
is he that putteth his trust in man’),

15 with many such other like... which heretics have of old ever
barked against Christ’s Catholic Church—very sure am I that
Saint Augustine, Saint Jerome, Saint Basil, Saint Gregory, with
so many a godly cunning man as hath been in Christ’s church from
the beginning hitherto, understood those texts as well as did
those heretics. Namely having as good wits; being far better
learned; using in study more diligence; being a heap to a handful;
and (which most is of all) having (as God by many miracles
beareth witness) besides their learning... the light and clearness of his
especial grace... by which they were inwardly taught of his only
Spirit... to perceive that the words spoken in the Old Law to the
Jewish people, prone to idolatry—and yet not to all them, neither,
for the priests then... had the images of the angel cherubim in the
secret place of the Temple—should have no place to forbid images
among his Christian flock, where his pleasure would be to have the
image of his blessed body hanging on his holy cross... had in
honor and reverent remembrance; where he would vouchsafe to

King Abgar send unto the king Abgar the image of his own face; where he liked to leave the holy vernicle, the express image also of his blessed visage, as a token to remain in honor among such as loved him… from the time of his bitter Passion hitherto.

Which as it was by the miracle of his blessed, holy hand expressed and left in the sudarium: so hath it been, by like miracle, in that thin, corruptible cloth… kept and preserved uncorrupted this fifteen hundred years, fresh and well perceived, to the inward comfort, spiritual rejoicing, and great increase of fervor and devotion in the hearts of good Christian people. Christ also taught his holy evangelist Saint Luke… to have another manner mind toward images… than have these heretics, when he put in his mind to counterfeit and express in a table… the lovely visage of our blessed Lady, his Mother.

St. Amphibalus He taught also Saint Amphibalus, the master and teacher of the holy first martyr of England, Saint Alban, to bear about and worship the crucifix.

St. Alban Who showed also Saint Alban, himself, in a vision, the image of the Crucifix,

but God?—which thing wrought in that holy man so strongly… that he, with few words of Saint Amphibalus, at the sight of that blessed image (which our Lord had before showed him in his sleep) was clean turned to Christendom. And in the worshipping of the same image… was taken and brought forth to judgment, and afterward to martyrdom.

“I would also fain wit… whether these heretics will be content that the blessed name of Jesus be had in honor and reverence, or not. If not—then need we no more to show what wretches they be, which dare despise that holy name that the devil trembleth to hear of. And on the other side, if they agree that the name of Jesus is to be reverenced and had in honor; then, since that name of ‘Jesus’ is nothing else but a word… which, by writing or by voice, representeth unto the hearer the person of our Savior Christ, fain would I wit of those heretics—if they

2 liked: was pleased
3 vernicle: the handkerchief with which Saint Veronica wiped Jesus’ face
6 expressed: imprinted
7 sudarium: vernicle (See above.)
9 comfort: encouragement
13 counterfeit: portray
14 table: painting
17 bear: carry // worship: venerate
19 the Crucifix: Christ on the cross
20 wrought: worked
21 words of: words from
23 turned: converted // Christendom: Christianity // worshipping: venerating
24 judgment: trial
26 fain wit: like to know
27, 32 had: held
29 despise: slight; make little of
35 fain would I wit of: I would like to know from
give honor to the name of our Lord… which name is but an image representing his person to man’s mind and imagination—why and with what reason can they despise a figure of him, carved or painted, which representeth him and his acts… far more plainly and more expressly?"

“Sir,” quoth he, “as touching the cost done upon the ark and the Temple and the priests’ apparel by the commandment of God, there is a proper book, and a very contemplative—written in English, and entitled The Image of Love—which was made, as it seemeth, by some very virtuous man, contemplative and well learned. In which book that reason of yours is not only well answered… but also turned again against you. For therein that good, holy man layeth sore against these carved and painted images, giving them little praise, and specially least commending such as be most costly, curiously, and most workmanly wrought. And he showeth full well that

*Images laymen’s books* images be but laymen’s books; and therefore that religious men and folk of more perfect life, and more instructed in spiritual wisdom, should let all such dead images pass, and labor only for the lively, quick image of love and charity. And very sore he speaketh there against all these costly ornaments of the church—whereof the money were (as he saith) better bestowed upon poor folk. And he showeth that the saints and holy doctors of old time would suffer no such superfluity in the paraments of the church, but only see that they were clean and pure… and not costly. And therefore he saith that in their time they had treen chalices and golden priests… and now have we golden chalices and treen priests!”

“Surely,” quoth I, “that book have I seen; whereof who was the maker, I know not. But the man might peradventure mean well and run up so high in his contemplation spiritual… that while he thought he sat in God Almighty’s bosom up on high in heaven… he contemned and set at naught all earthly things, and all temporal service done to God here beneath among poor seely men in earth. And verily, of his intent and purpose I will not much meddle. For a right good man may hap at a time, in a fervent indiscreet, to say something, and write it, too, which when he considereth after more advisedly, he would be very fain to change. But this dare I be bold to say: that his words go somewhat further than he is able to defend. For I doubt it not but that in the days of those holy saints…
ornaments in churches of Christ were not only pure and clean, but also very costly. And it might well be—and so have I read that it hath been in some great dearth of corn and famine of people—that some good, holy bishops have relieved poor people with the sale of some of

Note

the vessels and plate of the church. But I suppose he shall never find (except in some such great, urgent cause chancing upon some occasion) that ever those holy men refused to have God served in his churches with the best and most precious of such metals as his goodness giveth unto man; of which it is very right and good reason that man serve him with the best... and not do as Cain did—keep all that aught is for himself... and serve his Master and his Maker with the worst. And, because he nameth Saint Ambrose... I ween there will no man doubt of the emperor Theodosius, a man so devout unto God as he was, that he would be served himself in cups of gold... and suffer his and our Savior Christ in the church of Milan, where himself resorted and Saint Ambrose was bishop, to be served in chalices of tree. Nor, verily, I can scant believe that any Christian people... all were they very poor... would at this day suffer the Precious Blood of our Lord to be consecrated and received in tree—where it should cleave to the chalice and sink in, and not be clean received out by the priest. But that word I ween he set in for the pleasure that he had in that proper comparison between treen chalices and golden priests of old... and now golden chalices and treen priests. But of truth, I think he saith truth—that the chalices were made of treen when the priests were made of gold— and shall find that then were, of old time, many more chalices made of gold... than he findeth now priests made of tree. If he look well in Platina’s De vitis pontificum, I ween he shall well perceive that Christ was served with silver and gold in the vessels, utensils, and ornaments of his church... long time ere Saint Ambrose was born, or the eldest of those ‘old’ doctors that he speaketh of. And I dare make me bold to warrant that they themselves used not to say Mass in chalices of tree. And methinketh that the pleasure of God cannot in this point better appear... than by his own words written in Holy Scripture; as in theark of the testament and the ornaments of

1, 31 ornaments: furnishings  3 dearth: scarcity  5 plate: utensils
12 aught is: is worth anything  13 worst: least valuable  14 nameth: mentions
14, 23 ween: suppose  15 doubt: suspect  18 resorted: went to
19, 21, 29, 35 tree: wood  19 scant: scarcely  20 all were they: even if they were
22 clean: completely  23 word: statement // set: put  24 had: took
24 proper: splendid  24, 26 treen: wooden  26 of truth: actually
26 he saith truth: what he says is true  27 treen: wood
27 when... gold: I.e., there never having been a time when the priests were made of gold.
30 ween: think  31 ornaments: furnishings  33 doctors: theologians
33–34 make... warrant: venture to guarantee  34 used not: did not make it their practice
37 testament: covenant // ornaments: vestments
the priest, and the cost and riches bestowed about the temple of Solomon.”

“Marry,” quoth he, “that is the thing that is in the book of the ‘images of love,’ as I was about to tell you, very well and clearly answered!”

“In what wise?” quoth I.

“Marry,” quoth he, “for first, when the ark was made, there were no poor men to bestow that riches upon; for while the children of Israel were in desert, they were fed with manna… and their clothes never wasted, nor were the worse, in all that forty years. And as for the riches of the temple made by Solomon, could make no matter to the people… for there was then no poor folk neither. For as the very words of the Scripture showeth, there was in his days so great plenty of gold that ‘silver was not set by.’”

“Forsooth,” quoth I, “the man maketh a proper answer for the ark. But I would fain wit of him… though there were no poor folk among them at the time of the making… was there never none among them after the time of the keeping? I ween he will not say nay. And then if there were: since God would, by his reason, rather have commanded to give that gold to poor men if there had been such… than to make it in the ark, he would by the same reason after, when there were such, have commanded then to break it again and give it them… rather than to keep it in the ark. And as for the riches bestowed upon the temple of Solomon—whereas he said that there were then no poor men, because there were so great plenty of gold that ‘silver was not set by’—every man may well wit… that if every man had in his time been rich… he had not had so many workmen! But weeneth he that because he was so rich, his people were the poorer! For albeit he had great gifts sent him… and also used not his own people, of the children of Israel, for bondsmen and slaves, yet it is likely that he set great and sore impositions upon them… whereby he gathered great riches… and they grew in great poverty. And if any man think the contrary, let him then look after Solomon’s death, in the beginning of his son’s reign, whether all the people did not so

1, 7, etc. riches: wealth  3, 6 marry: indeed  3 of: about  5 wise: way  
10 wasted: wore out  13 showeth: say  16 proper: good  
17 fain wit: like to know  // thought: even if  19 ween: think  
20 his: i.e., this man’s  20, 22 reason: reasoning  
22 make it in: put it into the making of  // after: afterward  
23 break it again: tear it back down  27 may well wit: can be quite certain  
28 had not: would not have  29 weeneth he: does he suppose  
34 great and sore impositions: high and oppressive taxes  35 grew in: came into
sore complain thereof that (because they could not get a promise
of amendment, as sad men advised the
king, but, by the lewd counsel of young
lads that then led the young king to folly, were with a proud,
rigorous answer put in fear of worse) of the twelve tribes of Israel, ten
fell clearly from him… and left him no more but twain. And,
therefore, by the richesse and royalty of the prince to prove that
there was no poor people in his realm… is a very poor proof. For so
may it hap that the prince may be most rich when his people be
most poor, and the richesse of the one causing the poverty of the
other, if the people’s substance be gathered into the prince’s purse.
And for conclusion, it is little doubt but Solomon might have
found poor folk enough to have given his gold unto that he
bestowed upon the temple of God. And therefore that answer
answereth not well the matter.”

“Well,” quoth your friend, “yet hath that book one answer that
assoileth all the whole matter. For as it is said there, all those things
that were used in the Old Law… were but gross and carnal… and were
all as a shadow of the law of Christ; and therefore the worshipping
of God with gold and silver and such other corporeal things ought
not to be used among Christian people, but, leaving all that shadow,
we should draw us to the spiritual things… and serve our Lord
Jn 4:24
only in spirit and spiritual things.
For so he saith himself: that God, as himself
is spiritual, so seeketh he such worshippers as shall worship
him ‘in spirit and in truth’—that is, in faith, hope, and charity of
heart; not in the hypocrisy and ostentation of outward observance,
bodily service, gay and costly ornaments, fair images, goodly
song, fleshly fasting, and all the rabble of such unsavory ceremonies,
all which are now gone as a shadow. And our Savior
himself, whose faith is our justification, calleth upon our soul…
and our good-faithful mind… and setteth all those carnal things
at naught.”

“The book,” quoth I, “saith not fully so far as ye rehearse; howbeit, indeed,
many other men do. But these men that make themselves so
‘spiritual,’ God send grace that some evil spirit inspire not to
their hearts a devilish device—which, under a cloak of special
zeal to ‘spiritual’ service, go first about to destroy all such devotion as ever hath hitherto showed itself, and uttered the good affection of the soul, by good and holy works unto God’s honor wrought with the body. These men be come into so high point of perfection… that they pass all the good men that served God in old time. For as for that good, godly man Moses, he thought that to pray not only in mind but with mouth also… was a good way. The good king David thought it pleasant to God… not only to pray with his mouth… but also to sing, and dance too, to God’s honor; and blamed his foolish wife… which did at that time as these foolish heretics do now, mocking that bodily service. Holy Saint John the Baptist not only baptized and preached, but also fasted, watched, prayed, and wore hair. Christ our Savior himself… not only prayed in mind, but also with mouth—which kind of prayer these holy, ‘spiritual’ heretics now call ‘lip labor,’ in mockage. And the fasting which they set at naught… our Savior himself set so much by… that he continued it forty days together. Now, as for the images, which ye call one of the shadows—"

“Nay, by Saint Mary,” quoth he, “I called gay ornaments of the church, and such other outward observances and ‘bodily ceremonies,’ as The Image of Love calleth them—such things I called, as the book doth, ‘shadows of the Old Law.’ But as for images, the book adviseth men either clean let pass and leave off… or, if we will needs have any, care not how simple it be made; for as well may the most rude image and most simply wrought… put us in mind of Christ… and our Lady… and any other saint… as may the most costly and most curious that any painter or carver can devise.

“And verily, to say the truth, as for images, they be no shadows of the Old Law, but things therein plainly and clearly forbidden—

Ex 20:4 as well in divers other places of Scripture…
Psalms 114 and 115 as in the texts lately remembered by yourself. ‘Non facies tibi sculptile’—‘Thou shalt carve thee, nor engrave thee, none image.’ And by all the whole psalm ‘In exitu Israel de Aegypto’ is it with great execration and malediction prohibited.”
“First,” quoth I, “ye may not take those words for such a precise
prohibition as should forbid utterly any images to be made; for
as I showed you before, they had in the Temple the images of cherubim;

What images were prohibited but it was prohibited to make such
images as the Egyptians and other
paynims did—that is to wit, the idols of false gods. For that
appeareth in the psalm itself, where he layeth for the cause of the
prohibition, ‘Quoniam omnes dii gentium daemonia; Dominus,
autem, caelos fecit’—‘For all the gods of the paynims be devils; but
our Lord hath made the heavens.’ Doth it not by these words well
appear what images were in that psalm forbidden?—that is to wit,
the images and idols only of those paynim gods! For else—I pray you
tell me what reason were this: if one would say, ‘Make none image
of Christ… nor of our Lady… nor of any Christian saint, in no wise; for
all the gods of the paynims be but devils’? Were not this a wise
reason well concluded?

“There is also in these prohibitions intended… that no man shall
worship any image as God. For if he should—then should he fall in
the contempt of the precept of God by which we be commanded

Ex 20:3–5 to worship only one God, and forbidden to
worship any false gods. And therefore
where it is written ‘Non facies tibi sculptile’ (‘Thou shalt engrave thee
none image’), it goeth next before, ‘Non habeis deos alienos’—‘Thou
shalt have no false gods.’ And it is also

Lv 19:4 written, ‘Nolite converti ad idola, neque
deos conflatiles faciatis vobis’ (‘Turn not to idols, nor make not for
yourself any gods of metal cast in a mold’). And where it is
forbidden to worship any image—there is the word that signifieth
the honor and service only pertaining to God. And therefore
neither may we do any worship to any image and idol of any false
paynim… nor with honor and service done as to God may we neither
worship image of any saint… nor yet the saint himself. But I suppose
neither Scripture nor natural reason doth forbid that a man may

How images may be reverenced do some reverence to an image… not
fixing his final intent in the image,
but referring it further, to the honor of the person that the image
representeth… since that in such reverence done unto the image, there
is none honor withdrawn neither from God nor good man... but both the saint honored in his image and God in his saint.
When a mean man, an ambassador to a great king, hath much honor done him, to whom doth that honor redound—to the ambassador, or to the king?

“When a man at the receipt of his prince’s letter putteth off his cap and kisseth it, doth he this reverence to the paper, or to his prince?

“In good faith, to say the truth, these heretics rather trifle than reason in this matter. For whereas they say that images be but laymen’s books—they cannot yet say nay but that they be necessary if they were but so. Howbeit, methinketh that they be good books both for laymen and for the learned too. For as I somewhat said unto you before, all the words that be either written or spoken... be but images representing the things that the writer or speaker conceiveth in his mind; likewise as the figure of the thing framed with imagination and so conceived in the mind... is but an image representing the very thing itself that a man thinketh on. As, for example, if I tell you a tale of my good friend your master, the imagination that I have of him in my mind... is not your master himself, but an image that representeth him. And when I name you him... his name is neither himself nor yet the figure of him which figure is in mine imagination, but only an image representing to you the imagination of my mind. Now, if I be too far from you to tell it you—then is the writing not the name itself... but an image representing the name. And yet all these names spoken, and all these words written, be no natural signs or images, but only made by consent and agreement of men... to betoken and signify such thing; whereas images painted, engraved, or carved may be so well wrought, and so near to the quick and to the truth, that they shall naturally and much more effectually represent the thing than shall the name either spoken or written. For he that never heard the name of your master... shall if ever he saw him be brought in a right full remembrance of him by his image well wrought and touched to the quick. And surely, saving that men cannot do it—else, if it might commodiously be done, there

3 mean: intermediary  6 at the receipt: upon the receiving  // prince’s: sovereign’s
6 putteth: takes  11 say nay but: deny  12 howbeit: however
13–14 for... before: See 39/32—40/2. 18 very: actual
19 a tale of: something about  19, 20, 33 master: employer  22 yet: even
30, 35 wrought: executed  30–31 near to the quick and to the truth: true-to-life
31 effectually: effectively  35 touched to the quick: capturing a living likeness
36 commodiously: conveniently
Effectual writing were not in this world so effectual as were to express allthing in imagery. And now, likewise as a book well made, and well written, better expresseth the matter than doth a book made by a rude man that cannot well tell his tale, and written with an evil hand: so doth an image well workmanly wrought better express the thing than doth a thing rudely made… but if it move a man for some other special cause—as, peradventure, for some great antiquity, or the great virtue of the workman… or for that God showeth at the place some special assistance of his favor and grace. But, now, as I began to say: since all names spoken or written be but images, if ye set aught by the name of Jesus spoken or written… why should ye set naught by his image painted or carved, that representeth his holy person to your remembrance as much, and more, too, as doth his name written? Nor these two words ‘Christus crucifixus’ do not so lively represent us the remembrance of his bitter Passion as doth a blessed image of the Crucifix—neither to lay man nor unto a learned. And this perceive these heretics themselves well enough.

Why heretics speak against images

Nor they speak not against images for any furtherance of devotion, but plainly for a malicious mind… to diminish and quench men’s devotions. For they see well enough that there is no man but if he love another, he delighteth in his image or anything of his. And these heretics that be so sore angry with him that would dishonestly handle an image made in remembrance of one of themselves… whereas the wretches forbear not villainously to handle, and cast dirt in despite upon, the holy crucifix: an image made in remembrance of our Savior himself—and not only of his most blessed Person… but also of his most bitter Passion.

“Now, as touching prayer made unto the saints, and worship done unto them… much marvel is it what cause of malice these
heretics have to them. We see it common in the wretched condition of this world… that one man of a pride in himself hath envy at another, or for displeasure done… beareth to some other

*A devilish hatred* malice and evil will. But this must needs be a devilish hatred: to hate him whom thou never knewest; which never did thee harm; which, if he could now do thee no good where he is, yet either with his good example gone before thee… or his good doctrine left behind him… doth thee (but if thou be very naught of thyself) great good in this world for thy journey toward heaven. And this must needs be an envy coming of a high, devilish pride… and far passing the envy of the devil himself. For he never envied but such as he saw and was conversant with—as when he saw man and the glory of God. But these heretics envy them whom they never saw nor never shall see… but when they shall be sorry and ashamed in themselves of that glorious sight.

“For whereas they pretend the zeal of God’s honor himself—as though God, ‘to whom only all honor and glory is to be given,’ were dishonored in that some honor is done to his holy saints— they be not so mad nor so childish as they make themselves. For if all honor were so to be given ‘only’ to God… that we should give none to no creature—where were, then, God’s *precept*… of honor to be given to our father and mother; to princes, governors, and rulers here

*Mk 7:10* in earth; and, as Saint Paul saith, every man to other?

*1 Pt 2:13–17; Rom 12:10* “And well they wot that the Church worshippeth not saints as God, but as God’s good *servants*—and therefore the honor that is done to them redoundeth principally to the honor of their Master; like as in common custom of people, we do reverence sometimes, and make great cheer, to some men for their master’s sake… whom else we would not haply bid once ‘Good morrow.’

“And surely if any benefit or alms done to one of Christ’s poor folk for his sake… be by his high goodness reputed and accepted… as
done unto himself; and that whoso receiveth one of his apostles or disciples receiveth himself: every wise man may well consider that in like wise, whoso doth honor his holy saints for his sake doth honor himself. Except these heretics ween that God
were as envious as they be themselves… and that he would be wroth
to have any honor done to any other… though it thereby redounded unto himself. Whereof our Savior Christ well declareth the contrary; for he showeth himself so well content that his holy saints shall be partners of his honor… that he promiseth his apostles that at the
dreadful Doom—when he shall come in his high majesty—they shall have their honorable seats… and sit with himself upon the judgment of the world.

“Christ also promised that Saint Mary Magdalene should be worshipped ‘through the world,’ and have here an honorable remembrance,
for that she bestowed that precious ointment upon his holy head. Which thing, when I consider it, maketh me marvel of the madness of these heretics that bark against the old, ancient customs of Christ’s church, mocking the setting up of candles… and with foolish facetiae and blasphemous mockery demand whether God and his saints lack light, or whether it be night with them, that they cannot see without candle. They might as well ask what good did that ointment to Christ’s head. But the heretics grudge at the cost now… as their brother Judas did then… and say it were better spent in alms upon poor folk. And this say many of them… which can neither find in their heart to spend upon the one nor the other. And some spend, sometimes, upon the one for none other intent but to the end that they may the more boldly rebuke and rail against the other. But let them all by that example of that holy woman, and by these words of our Savior, learn that God delighteth to see the fervent heat of the heart’s devotion boil out by the body… and to do him service with all such goods of fortune as God hath given a man.

“What riches devised our Lord God himself… in the making and garnishing of the Temple, and in the ornaments of the altar,
and the priests’ apparel—what was himself the better for all this? What for the beasts that himself commanded to be offered him in sacrifice? What for the sweet odors and frankincense? Why do these heretics more mock at the manner of Christ’s church… than they do at the manner of the Jews’ synagogue… but if they be better Jews than Christian men?

“If men will say that the money were better spent among poor folk, ‘by whom he more setteth, being the quick temples of the Holy Ghost, made by his own hand, than by the temples of stone, made by the hand of man’—this would be, percase, very true… if there were so little to do it with… that we should be driven of necessity… to leave the one undone. But God giveth enough for both, and giveth diverse men diverse kinds of devotion—and all to his pleasure. In which, as the apostle Paul saith, let every man for his part abound and be plenteous in that kind of virtue that the Spirit of God guideth him to. And not to be of the foolish mind that Luther is… which wisheth, in a sermon of his, that he had in his hand all the pieces of the Holy Cross… and saith that if he so had, he would throw them thereas never sun should shine on them. And for what worshipful reason would the wretch do such villainy to the Cross of Christ? Because (as he saith) that there is so much gold now bestowed about the garnishing of the pieces of the Cross… that there is none left for poor folk! Is not this a high reason? As though all the gold that is now bestowed about the pieces of the Holy Cross would not have failed to have been given to poor men if they had not been bestowed about the garnishing of the Cross! And as though there were nothing lost… but that is bestowed about Christ’s cross!

“Take all the gold that is spent about all the pieces of Christ’s cross through Christendom. Albeit many a good Christian prince, and other godly people, hath honorably garnished many pieces thereof, yet if all that gold were gathered together, it would appear a poor portion in comparison of the gold that is bestowed upon cups—what

1, 2, 3 what: how 1, 2 himself: he himself 1 better: better off 5 but if: unless 5–6 be better Jews than Christian men: are more Jewish than they are Christian 7 were: would be 8 by whom he more setteth, being: whom he cares more about, they being // quick: living 10 percase: perchance 12 the one: i.e., either the one thing or the other 20 thereas: where 22 worshipful: pious 23 villainy: insult 23 as he saith: according to him 24, 28–29 bestowed about the garnishing: put into the adorning 26 high: weighty 31 spent about: expended on 33 honorably: out of respect 35 of: with // what: why
speak we of cups? In which the gold, albeit that it be not
given to poor men, yet is it saved… and may be given in alms
when men will—which they never will. How small a portion,
ween we, were the gold about all the pieces of Christ’s cross… if it
were compared with the gold that is quite cast away, about the
gilding of knives, swords, spurs, arras, and painted cloths—
and (as though these things could not consume gold fast enough)
the gilding of posts and whole roofs… not only in the palaces of
princes and great prelates, but also many right mean men’s
houses! And yet among all these things could Luther spy no
gold that grievously glittered in his bleared eyes… but only about
the cross of Christ. For that gold… if it were thence, the wise man weeneth
it would be straight given to poor men. And that where he daily
seeth that such as have their purse full of gold… give to the poor not
one piece thereof, but if they give aught, they ransack the bottom,
among all the gold… to seek out here a halfpenny, or in his
country a brass penny—whereof four make a farthing. Such goodly
causes find they that pretend holiness for the color of their
cloaked heresies!"

The Third Chapter

The objections of the messenger made against praying to
saints, worshipping of images, and going on pilgrimages;
with the answer of the author unto the same. And
incidentally is it by the messenger moved that there should
seem no necessity for Christian folk to resort to any churches,
but that all were one to pray thence or there. And that opinion
by the author answered and confuted.

At this point your friend, desiring me that whatsoever he
should say, I should not reckon it as spoken of his own opinion,
but that he would partly show me what he had heard some others say
therein, to the end that he might the better answer them with that
he should hear of me—this protestation and preface made, he
said that albeit no good man would agree that it were well done to
do unto saints or their images despite or dishonor, yet to go
in pilgrimages to them, or to pray to them, not only seemed “in
vain (considering that all they—if they can anything do—can yet
do no more for us among them all… than Christ can himself alone,
that can do all; nor be not so ready at our hand to hear us… if they
hear us at all… as Christ, that is everywhere; nor bear us half the
love and longing to help us… that doth our Savior, that died for
us; whom, as Saint Paul saith, we have for advocate before the

\begin{center}
\textit{Rom 8:34; 1 Jn 2:1}
\end{center}

Father), but, over this, it seemeth to smell of
\textit{idolatry} when we go on pilgrimage to
this place and that place… as though God were not like strong,
or not like present, in every place; but as the devils were of old,
under the false name of ‘gods,’ present and assistant in the idols
and maumets of the pagans, so would we make it seem that God
and his saints stood in this place and that place, bound to this
post and that post cut out and carved in images. For when we reckon ourselves
to be better heard with our Lord in Kent than at Cambridge,
at the north door of Paul’s than at the south door, at one image of
our Lady than at another… is it not an evident token—and, in manner,
a plain \textit{proof}—that we put our trust and confidence in the image
itself, and not in God or our Lady? Which is as good in the one place
as in the other… and the one image no more like her than the other, nor
cause why she should favor the one before the other. But we blind
people instead of God and his holy saints themselves… cast our
affections to the \textit{images} themselves, and thereto make our prayers, thereto
make our offerings… and ween these images were the very saints
themselves, of whom our help and health should grow; putting our full
\textit{Necromancers} trust in this place and that place as
30
necromancers put their trust in their
circles… within which they think themselves sure against all the
devils in hell. And ween if they were one inch without, that then
the devil would pull them in pieces, but as for the circle, he dare
not, for his ears, once put over his nose.
“And men reckon that the clergy is glad to favor these ways... and to nourish this superstition under the name and color of ‘devotion,’ to the peril of the people’s souls... for the lucre and temporal advantage that themselves receive of the offerings.”

When I had heard him say what him liked, I demanded if he minded ever to be priest. Whereunto he answered, “Nay, verily. For methinketh,” quoth he, “that there be priests too many already but if they were better. And therefore when God shall send time, I purpose,” he said, “to marry.”

Twice-married cannot be a priest.

“Well,” said I, “then since I am already married twice, and therefore never can be priest... and ye be so set in mind of marriage that ye never will be priest... we two be not the most meet to ponder what might be said in this matter for the priests’ part.

“Howbeit, when I consider it, methinketh surely that if the thing were such as ye say—so far from all frame of right religion, and so perilous to men’s souls—I cannot perceive why that the clergy would for the gain they get thereby... suffer such abuson to continue. For first, if it were true that no pilgrimage ought to be used... none image offered unto... nor worship done, nor prayer made, unto any saint: then if none of all these things had ever been in ure, or now were all undone—if that were the right way, as I wot well it were wrong—then were it to me little question but Christian people being in the true faith, and in the right way to-God-ward, would thereby nothing slake their good minds toward the ministers of his church... but their devotion should toward them more and more increase. So that if they now get by this way one penny, they should (if this be wrong and the other right) not fail instead of a penny now, then to receive a groat. And so should no lucre give them cause to favor this way and it be wrong... while they could not fail to win more by the right.

“Moreover, look me through Christendom... and I suppose ye shall find the fruit of those offerings a right small part of the living
of the clergy. And such as though some few places would be glad to retain, yet the whole body might without any notable loss easily forbear.

“Let us consider our own country here… and we shall find of these pilgrimages far the most part in the hands of such religious persons, or such poor parishes, as bear no great rule in the convocations. And besides this, ye shall not find, I suppose, that any bishop in England hath the profit of one groat of any such offering within his diocese. Now standeth, then, the continuance or the breaking of this manner and custom… specially in them… which take no profit thereby. Which if they believed it to be such as ye call it—superstitious and wicked—would never suffer it continue to the perishing of men’s souls; whereby themselves should destroy their own souls… and neither in body nor goods take any commodity. And over this, we see that the bishops and prelates themselves visit those holy places and pilgrimages… with as large offerings, and as great cost in coming and going, as other people do; so that they not only take no temporal advantage thereof… but also bestow of their own therein!

“And surely I believe this devotion so planted by God’s own hand in the hearts of the whole Church— that is to wit, not the clergy only, but the whole congregation of all Christian people—that if the spiritualty were of the mind to leave it, yet would not the temporalty suffer it.

“Nor if it so were that pilgrimages hung only upon the covetousness of evil priests (for evil must they be that would for covetousness help the people forward to idolatry), then would not good priests and good bishops have used them themselves. But I am very sure that many a holy bishop—and therewith excellently well learned in Scripture, and the law of God—have had high devotion thereto.

“For whereas ye say men reckon that it smelleth of idolatry to visit this place and that place, as though that God were more

mighty, or more present, in one place than in another… or that God
or his saints had bound themselves to stand at this image or
that image; and that by men’s demeanor, thereby should appear
that the pilgrims put their trust in the place or the image itself,
taking that for very God, or for the very saint… of whom they seek
for help, and so fare like necromancers that put their trust in

Note their circle: surely, sir, holy Saint Augustine,
in an epistle of his (which he wrote to the
clergy and the people), taketh pilgrimages for a more earnest and a
far more godly thing. And saith that though the cause be to us
unknown why God doth in some place miracles, and in some
place none—yet is it no doubt but he so doth. And therein had that
good holy doctor so great confidence… that, as he saith himself,
he sent two of his priests in pilgrimage, for the trial of the truth
of a great matter in contention and debate between them, out of
Hippo (in Africa) unto St. Stephen’s Church in Milan—
where many miracles were wont to be showed—to the end that God
might there, by some means, cause the truth to be declared and
made open by his power… which by no means known to man he
could well find out.

“Nor they that go on pilgrimage do nothing like to those
necromancers to whom ye resemble them, that put their confidence
in the roundel and circle on the ground… for a special
belief that they have in the compass of that ground… by reason of
foolish charaxes and figures about it; with invocations of evil
spirits, and familiarity with devils, being enemies to God. And the

Necromancy by God forbidden craft and ways of all that work… by
Ex 22:18; Jer 27:9 God himself prohibited and forbidden
(and that upon pain of death!), what

likeness hath that unto the going of good men unto holy places… not
by enchantment dedicated to the devil… but, by God’s holy ordinance,
with his holy words consecrated unto himself? Which two
things if ye would resemble together, so might ye blaspheme

3 demeanor: behavior 5 very God: God himself  // the very saint: the actual saint
9 earnest: respectable 13 holy doctor: theologian
14 in: on (a) 15 of: concerning a 18 declared: made known
19 open: manifest 22, 33 resemble: liken
23 roundel and circle: circle and circumference 25 caraxes: charms
and have in derision all the devout rites and ceremonies of the Church—both in the Divine Service, as incensing, hallowing of the fire, of the font, of the paschal lamb... and, over that, the exorcisms, benedictions, and holy, strange gestures used in consecration or administration of the blessed sacraments. All which holy things—great part whereof was from hand to hand left in the Church... from the time of Christ’s apostles, and by them left unto us... as it was by God taught unto them—men might now, by that means, follily misliken unto the superstitious demeanor and fond fashion of jugglery. Nor the flock of Christ is not so foolish as those heretics bear them in hand—that, whereas there is no dog so mad but he knoweth a very cony from a cony carved and painted, Christian people... that have reason in their heads, and thereto the light of faith in their souls... should ween that the images of our Lady were our Lady herself. Nay, they be not, I trust, so mad; but they do reverence Reverence to the image to the image for the honor of the person whom it representeth—as every man delighteth in the image and remembrance of his friend. And albeit that every good Christian man hath a remembrance of Christ’s Passion in his mind... and conceiveth by devout meditation a form and fashion thereof in his heart—yet is there no man, I ween, so good, nor so well learned, nor in meditation so well accustomed, but that he findeth himself more moved to pity and compassion upon the beholding of the holy crucifix... than when he lacketh it. And if there be any that for the maintenance of his opinion will, peradventure, say that he findeth it otherwise in himself—he should give me cause to fear that he hath of Christ’s Passion neither the one way nor the other... but a very faint feeling, since that the holy fathers before us did, and all devout people about us do, find and feel in themselves the contrary.

“Now for the reason that you allege,” quoth I, “where ye say that in resorting to this place and that place, this image and that image, we seem to reckon as though God were not in every place...
like mighty, or not like present—this reason proceedeth no more
against pilgrimages… than against all the churches in Christendom.
For God is as mighty in the stable as in the temple. And as he is not

God is everywhere present. comprehensible nor circumscribed nowhere…

this letteth not heaven, be it a corporeal thing or not, to be the place
of a special manner and kind of his presence… in which it
liketh him to show his glorious majesty… to his blessed, heavenly
company… which he showeth not unto damned wretches in hell;

and yet is he never thence. So liked it his
goodness to go with his Chosen People
through the desert in the cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by
night; yet was he not ‘bound,’ as ye resemble it, like the damned
spirits to the old idols of the paynims.

“It liked him also to choose the ark that was carried with his
people; at which ark specially, by miracle, he divers times
declared his special assistance… the ark being translated
from place to place.

“Was it not also his pleasure to be specially present in his temple
of Jerusalem… till he suffered it to be destroyed for their sins?
And instead of that one place of prayer (to which he would before
that all his people should come!), he hath vouchsafed to spread himself
abroad into many temples, and in more acceptable wise to be
worshipped in many temples, throughout his Christian flock.”

Here said your friend that the temple of Christ “is, as Saint Paul

2 Cor 6:16; Jn 4:21, 23 saints, man’s heart,” and that God “is not
Christ’s very temple included nor shut” in any place. “And so himself
said to the woman of Samaria… that
very worshippers should worship in ‘spirit’ and in ‘truth,’ not in
‘the hill’ or in ‘Jerusalem,’ or any other temple of stone.”

Whereunto I showed him that I would well agree that no temple
of stone was unto God so pleasant as the temple of man’s heart,
“but yet that nothing letteth or withstandeth but that God will
that his Christian people have in sundry places sundry temples and
churches… to which they should, besides their private prayers,
assemble solemnly, and resort in company, to worship him

1 like: equally // reason: argument // proceedeth: militates
2 pilgrimages: pilgrimage sites; shrines // comprehensible: containable
6 letteth not . . . to be: does not keep . . . from being // liked: pleases
10 thence: not there // 10–11 so . . . goodness: it so pleased him, in his goodness,
13 resemble: liken // paynims: pagans // liked: pleased
15 declared: made manifest // assistance: active presence // translated: transported
20 suffered: allowed // for: on account of // included: enclosed
21 shut: confined // himself: he himself // very: true
23–30 in “the hill”: on “the mountain” // 31 showed: told // pleasant: pleasing
33 nothing . . . but: in no way hinders or prevents it from being the case
36 resort: betake themselves
together—such as dwell so near together that they may conveniently resort to one place.

“For albeit our Savior said,” quoth I, “unto the woman of whom ye spoke, that the time should come in which they should neither worship God in that hill of Gerizim nor in Jerusalem neither—which places were after destroyed and desolate… and the pagan manner of worshipping of the one, and the Jewish manner of worshipping in the other, turned both into the manner of worshipping of Christian faith and religion—yet said he not to her that they should never after worship God in none other temple. But he said that the time should come, and then was come already, when the very, true worshippers should worship God in spirit and truth. And that as God is a spiritual substance, so looked he for worshippers… that should in such wise worship him. In which words our Savior reproved all false worship… as was used after paganism in that hill in Samaria… and all such worship as was done in any place with opinion that God might not be worshipped elsewhere. Those that so believe, they be such as ‘bind’ God to a place; which our Lord.

\[\text{God in heart may everywhere be worshipped; } \text{Mt 6:5–6}\]

reproveth… showing that God may in heart truly and spiritually be worshipped everywhere. But this excludeth not… that besides that, he will be worshipped in his holy temple; no more than when he gave counsel that for avoiding of vainglory, a man shall not stand and pray ‘in the street,’ to gather worldly praise, but rather, secretly pray in his ‘chamber,’ this counsel forbade not the Jews to whom he gave it… that they should never after come into the Temple and pray.

“And surely, albeit that some good man here and there, one among ten thousand, as Saint Paul and Saint Anthony and a few such other like, do live all heavenly, far out of all fleshly company; as far from all occasion of worldly wretchedness… as from the common temple or parish church: yet if churches and congregations of Christian people resorting together to God’s Service were once abolished and put away, we were likely to have few good temples of

2 resort: betake themselves \ // one: the same  
5, 16–17 in that hill: on that mountain  
6 after: later \ // desolate: deserted  
16 used after: practiced in the manner of  
20 showing: stating  
26 chamber: private room  
30 as: such as  
30 Saint Paul: i.e., Saint Paul the Hermit (229–342)  
35 were: would be
God in men’s souls… but all would within a while wear away clean and clearly fall to naught. And this prove we by experience: that those which be the best temples of God in their souls, they most

What they are that come not to the church use to come to the temple of stone; and those that least come there… be well known for very ribalds and unthrifts—and openly perceived for temples of the devil! And this not in our days only, but so hath been from Christ’s days hither. I trow no man doubteth but that Christ’s apostles were holy temples of God in their souls… and as well understood the words of their Master spoken to the woman of Samaria… as the thing which their Master after told them himself; or else how could some of them have written that communication… which none of them heard, as appeareth by the Gospel? But they, not in their Master’s days only, but also after his resurrection—and after that they had received the Holy Ghost… and were by him instructed of every truth belonging to the necessity of their salvation—were not content only to pray secretly by themselves in their chambers… but also resorted to the Temple to make their prayers. And in that place as a place pleasant to God did they pray in spirit and in truth—as well appeareth in the book of Saint Luke written of the acts of Christ’s holy apostles. So that no doubt is there but that yet unto this day and so forth to the world’s end, it is and shall be pleasant unto God… that his chosen people pray to him and call upon him in temple and church. Whereof himself witnesseth with the prophet, ‘Domus mea domus orationis vocabitur’ (‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’).

“Now maketh your reason, as I said, no more against pilgrimages… than against every church. For as God is not bound to the place; nor our confidence bound to the place, but unto God, though we reckon our prayer more pleasant to God in the church than without… because his high goodness accepteth it so: in like wise do not we reckon our Lord bound to the place or image where the pilgrimage is, though we worship God there… because himself liketh so to have it.”
The Fourth Chapter

The author declareth in the comprobation of pilgrimages that it is the pleasure of God to be specially sought and worshipped in some one place before another. And albeit that we cannot attain to the knowledge of the cause why God doth so, yet the author proveth by great authority that God by miracle testifieth it is so.

With this your friend asked me what reason were there that God would set more by one place than by another; or how know we that he so doth—namely if the one be a church as well as the other.

Whereunto I answered that why God would do it, I could make him no answer; no more than Saint Augustine saith that he could. I was never so near of his counsel… nor dare not be so bold to ask him. But that he so doth indeed, that I am sure enough; yet not for that he setteth more by that place… for the soil and pavement of that place, but that his pleasure in some place is… to show more his assistance, and to be more specially sought unto, than in some other.

Then he asked me whereby was I so sure of that. Whereupon I demanded him that if it so were that, the thing standing in debate and question, it would like our Lord to show a miracle for the proof of the one part, “would ye not,” quoth I, “reckon then the question were decided, and the doubt assoiled, and that part sufficiently proved?”

“Yes, marry,” quoth he, “that would I.”

“Well,” quoth I, “then is this matter out of doubt long ago. For God hath proved my part in divers pilgrimages by the working of many more than a thousand miracles, one time and other. In the

Jn 5:4

Gospel of John, the fifth chapter, where we read that the angel moved the water… and whoso next went in was cured of his disease—was it not a sufficient
proof that God would they should come thither for their health... albeit no man can tell why he sent the angel rather thither, and there did his miracles, than in another water? But whencesoever our Lord hath in any place wrought a miracle... although he nothing do it for the place, but for the honor of that saint whom he will have honored in that place; or for the faith that he findeth with some that prayeth in that place; or for the increase of faith... which he findeth falling and decayed in that place, needing the show of some miracles for the reviving---whatever the cause be, yet I think the affection is to be commended of men and women that with good devotion run thither where they see or hear that our Lord showeth a demonstration of his special assistance. And when he showeth many in one place, it is a good token that he would be sought upon and worshipped there. Many Jews were there... that came to Jerusalem to see the miracle that Christ had wrought upon Lazarus, as the Gospel rehearseth. And surely we were worse than Jews... if we would be so negligent... that where God worketh miracles, we list not once go move our foot thitherward. We marvel much that God showeth no more miracles nowadays, when it is much more marvel that he doth vouchsafe to show any at all among such unkind, slothful, deadly people as list not once lift up their heads to look thereon; or that our incredulity can suffer him nowadays to work any."

The Fifth Chapter

Because pilgrimages be, among other proofs, testified by miracles... the messenger doth make objection against those miracles; partly lest they be feigned and untrue, partly lest they be done by the devil if they be done at all.

Then said your friend, “Well I perceive, then, the force and effect of all the proof standeth all in miracles! Which I will agree
to be a strong proof... if I saw them done... and were sure that God or
good saints did them. But first, since that men may, and haply do,
of miracles make many a lie, we must not prove this matter by the
miracles but if we first prove that the miracles were true. And
over this, if they were done indeed: yet, since the angel of darkness
may transform and transfigure himself into an angel of light, how
shall we know whether the miracle were done by God, to the
increase of Christian devotion, or done by the craft of the devil, to
the advancement of disbelief and idolatry... in setting men’s
hearts upon stocks and stones instead of saints—or upon
saints themselves, that are but creatures, instead of God
himself?"

I answered him that the force of my tale was not the miracles,
but the thing that I hold stronger than any miracles; which, as

I said in the beginning, I reckon so sure and fast, and therewith so
plain and evident unto every Christian man, that it needeth
none other proof. And that thing is, as I said before, the faith of
Christ’s church, by the common consent whereof these matters be

To worship saints and
images is meritorious.

decided and well known—that the worship
of saints and images be allowed,
approbated, and accustomed for good
Christian and meritorious virtues, and the contrary opinion not
only reproved by many holy doctors, but also condemned for
heresies by sundry general councils.

“And this in the beginning I told you,” quoth I, “was and should be
the force and strength of my tale; albeit, of truth, I said unto you
besides... that methought that the miracles wrought by God were
sufficient proof and authority therefor... although there were
none other. Which thing since ye seem to impugn, I shall, as I
can, make you answer thereunto.”

“Nay, sir,” said he, “I pray you take me not so, as though that I
did
impugn it; but, as I showed you before, I rehearsed you what I have
heard some others say.”

“In good time,” quoth I. “Then, because they be not here, I pray you
defend and bear out their part... with all that ye have heard them

2, 6 may: can  2, 21 good: bona fide
10 stocks and stones: chunks of wood and stone; i.e., statues
13 my tale: what I was saying  14 hold: consider
15 sure and fast: certain and reliable  16 plain and evident: clear and obvious
18 common consent: universal agreement  19 worship: veneration
20 allowed: commended  21 approbated: officially approved
21 accustomed for: adopted into custom as  23 reproved: censured
23 holy doctors: theologians  26 my tale: what I had to say  // of truth: admittedly
27 were: would have been  28 although: even if  32 showed: told
32 rehearsed: related to  34 in good time: very well  // pray: ask that
35 bear out: substantiate  // part: side
say, and set thereto also all that ever your own mind giveth you… that they may more hereafter say, lest you return not fully furnished for your purpose.”

The Sixth Chapter

Because the messenger thinketh that he may well mistrust and deny the miracles because reason and nature tell him that they cannot be done: therefore first the author showeth what unreasonableness would ensue… if folk would stand so stiff against all credence to be given to any such thing as reason and nature should seem to gainsay.

“And first where ye say—”

“Nay,” quoth he, “where they say…”

“Well,” quoth I, “so be it; where they say. For here ever my tongue trippeth. But now, therefore, first where they say… that they never saw any of these miracles themselves… and therefore the miracles be no proof to them, which, while they never saw them, are not bound to believe them: they seem either very negligent, if they nothing inquire when they mistrust and doubt of the truth in such a weighty matter, or, if they have diligently made search, then must it needs be… that they have heard of so many told and rehearsed by the mouths and writings of so good and credible persons… that they seem unreasonably suspicious if they think altogether lies… that so many true men, or men likely to be true, so faithfully do report. If these men were judges, few matters would take end at their hand—or, at the least, the plaintiff should have evil speed—if they would believe nothing but that were proved… nor reckon nothing proved but that they see themselves.

“Thus may every man reckon himself unsure of his own father, if he believe no man… or because all the proof thereof standeth but upon one woman, and that upon her which, though she can tell best, yet if it be wrong, hath greatest cause to lie. Let the knowledge of the father alone, therefore, among our wives’ mysteries; and let us see, if we believe nothing but that we see ourselves, who can reckon
himself sure of his own mother. For possible it were that he
were changed in the cradle… and a rich man’s nurse bring
home her own child for her master’s… and keep her master’s for
her own, to make her own a gentleman good cheap. And this were
no great mastery while the mother hath of her own child no
earmark.”

“Sir,” quoth your friend, “if I should answer them thus, and by these
examples prove them that they were of reason bound to believe
such miracles as were reported, because many credible men tell
them; forasmuch as else we should believe nothing but that we
see ourselves, and then were all the world full of confusion, nor no
judgment could be given but upon things done in the judge’s
sight—I should, I fear me, very feebly satisfy them. For they would soon
say that the examples be nothing like the matter; but ‘as it is
reason that I should believe honest men in all such things as may
be true, and wherein I see no cause why they should lie: so were it
against all reason to believe men… be they never so many, seem they
never so credible… whereas reason and nature (of which twain
every one is alone more credible than they all) showeth me plainly
that their tale is untrue; as it must needs if the matter be impossible—
as it is in all these miracles. And in such case though I can perceive
no profit that they can receive thereby, yet when I well see that it
could not be true, I must well see that it was not true. And thereby
must I needs know that if they can take no profit by lying, they
lie not for any covetousness, but even only for their special
pleasure.”

“Forsooth,” quoth I, “this is right merrily answered. And to say the
truth, as far as we be yet gone in the matter of these miracles, not much
amiss, nor very far from the point. But since this thing is much
material… as whereupon many great things do depend, we shall
not so shortly shake it off; but we shall come one step or twain nearer
to the matter. And first I will say to them that it were hard for them, and
not very sure, to believe that every man lieth… which telleth them a
tale for true that reason and nature seemeth to show them to be false and
impossible. For in this wise shall they in many things err and
clearly deceive themselves… and sometimes while they make themselves

2 changed: exchanged // nurse: wet-nurse  3 master’s: employer’s
4 good cheap: on the cheap // were: would be
5 great mastery: difficult achievement // while: when
5–6 of her own child no earmark: no way of identifying her own child
8 bound: obliged  10 that: that which
11 were all the world: would everyone in the world be  13 I fear me: I’m afraid
14 matter: matter in question  14–15 is reason: is reasonable; makes sense
18 whereas: wherever  19 every one is alone: each one by itself is // showeth: tell
20 matter: thing  21 in all: with regard to all  25 covetousness: greed // even: just
25 special: personal; own  27 right merrily: very wittily  29 much: very
30 material: pertinent; germane // as: i.e., as something  32 matter: real issue
32 were: would be  33 sure: safe // which: who  36 clearly deceive: completely delude
36 while: when  64/36—65/1 make themselves sure: convince themselves
sure of the wrong side, if they would with wagers contend and strive therein... they should upon the boldness of nature and reason lose all that ever they were able to lay thereon. If there were a man of India that never came out of his country... nor never had seen any white man or woman in his life... and since he seeth innumerable people black—he might ween that it were against the nature of man to be white. Now, if he shall, because nature seemeth to show him so, believe therefore that all the world lied if they would say the contrary, who were in the wrong—he that believeth his reason and nature, or they that against his persuasion of reason and nature shall tell him as it is of truth?"

Your friend answered that "reason and nature told not the man of India that all men should be black, but he believed so against reason, and against nature; for he had nothing to lead him to it but because himself saw no white—which was no reason—and he might by nature perceive, if he had learning, that the heat maketh his country black... and that of like reason, the cold of other countries must make the people white."

Well," quoth I, "and yet he cometh to his persuasion by a syllogism and reasoning almost as formal as is the argument by which ye prove the kind of man reasonable; whereof what other collection have you, that brought you first to perceive it, than that this man is reasonable... and this man... and this man... and this man... and so forth, all whom ye see? By example whereof, by them whom ye know... presuming, thereby, no man to be otherwise... ye conclude that every man is reasonable. And he thinketh himself surer in his argument than he thinketh you in yours. For he saw never other but black people... whereas ye see many men fools. As for that he heareth of others that there be white men elsewhere, this serveth nothing for your purpose if ye believe no witness against the thing that your reason and experience showeth you. And whereas ye say if the man of India had learning, he should perceive that it is not against nature, but, rather, consonant with nature, that some other men should in other countries be white... though all his countrymen be black: so, peradventure, those whose part ye do
sustain… if they had some learning that they lack… should well perceive that of reason they should give credence to credible persons… reporting them things that seem far against reason because they be far above reason; whereof we may peradventure have more perceiving in our communication hereafter, ere ever we finish that we have in hand. But in the meanwhile, to show you further what necessity there is to believe other men in things not only unknown, but also seeming impossible: The man of India that we speak of can by no learning know the course of the sun, whereby he should perceive the cause of his blackness, but if it be by astronomy; which cunning who can learn that nothing will believe that seemeth to himself impossible? Or who would not ween it impossible but if experience had proved it, that the whole earth hangeth in the air… and men walk foot against foot…

and ships sail bottom against bottom—a thing so strange, and seeming so far against nature and reason, that Lactantius, a man right wise and well-learned, in his work which he writeth De divinis institutionibus, reckoneth it for impossible… and letteth not to laugh at the philosophers for affirming of that point… which is yet now found true by experience of them that have in less

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

“It is not yet fifty years ago since the first man, as far as men have heard, came to London that ever parted the gilt from the silver, consuming shortly the silver into dust with a very fair water. In so far forth that when the refiners and goldsmiths of London heard first thereof… they nothing wondered thereof… but laughed thereat as at an impossible lie; in which persuasions if they had continued still… they had yet at this day lacked all that cunning.

“Yet will I not say nay but that a man may be too light in belief… and
be by such examples brought into belief too far. As a good fellow and
friend of mine lately, in talking of this matter of marvels and
miracles, intending merrily to make me believe for a truth a
thing that could never be, first brought in what a force the fire
hath that will make two pieces of iron able to be joined and cleave
together... and with the help of the hammer be made both one—which
no hammering could do without the fire. Which thing because I
daily see, I assented. Then said he further... that yet was more marvel
that the fire shall make iron to run as silver or lead doth... and
make it take a print. Which thing I told him I had never seen...
but because he said he had seen it, I thought it to be true. Soon
after this... he would have me to believe that he had seen a piece of
silver of two or three inches about, and in length less than a foot,
drawn by man’s hand through strait holes made in an iron...
till it was brought in thickness not half an inch about... and in
length drawn out, I cannot tell how many yards. And when I heard
him say that he saw this himself—then I wist well he was merrily
disposed."

"Marry, sir," quoth your friend, "it was high time to give him over,
when he came to that!"

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

"Well," said I, "what if there would, besides me, ten or twenty good,
honest men tell you the same tale... and that they had all seen the
thing done themselves?"

"In faith," quoth he, "since I am sent hither to believe you, I would in
that point believe yourself alone... as well as them all."

"Well," quoth I, "ye mean ye would believe us all alike. But what
would you then say if one or twain of them would say more?"

"Marry," quoth he, "then would I believe them less!"

"What if they would," quoth I, "show you that they have seen that the piece
of silver was over gilded... and, the same piece being still drawn through

1 fellow: colleague  3 merrily: for fun  4 brought in: brought up; adduced
8 assented: accepted 13, 15 about: around 14 strait: narrow // an: a piece of
17 wist well: well knew 17–18 merrily disposed: being facetious
19, 33 marry: goodness 19 give him over: be done with him
22 at leisure: given enough time
23–24 let you to say your pleasure: keep you from saying whatever you please
25 disposed merrily to make me a fool: being facetious to make a fool out of me
27 honest: reputable 29 hither: here 34 show: tell 35 over gilded: gilded over
the holes, the gild not rubbed off… but still go forth in length with the silver, so that all the length of many yards was gilded of the gilding of the first piece not a foot long?”

“Surely, sir,” quoth he, “those twain that would tell me so much more, I would say were not so cunning in the maintenance of a lie… as was the pilgrim’s companion… which, when his fellow had told at York that he had seen of late at London a bird that covered all Paul’s churchyard with its wings, coming to the same place on the morrow… said that he saw not that bird (but he heard much speech thereof), but he saw in Paul’s churchyard an egg so great that ten men could scant move it with levers. This fellow could help it forth with a proper side way; but he were no proper underpropper of a lie… that would diminish his credence with affirming all the first and setting a louder lie thereto.”

“Well,” said I, “then I have espied if ten should tell you so, ye would not believe them.”

“No,” quoth he, “not if twenty should.”

“What if a hundred would,” quoth I, “that seemed good and credible?”

“If they were,” quoth he, “ten thousand, they were worn out of credence with me when they should tell me that they saw the thing that myself knoweth by nature and reason impossible. For when I know it could not be done, I know well that they lie all—but be they never so many—that say they saw it done.”

“Well,” quoth I, “since I see well ye would not in this point believe a whole town, ye have put me to silence… that I dare not now be bold to tell you that I have seen it myself. But surely if witness would have served me… I ween I might have brought you a great many good men that would say, and swear, too, that they have seen it themselves. But now shall I provide me—tomorrow, peradventure—a couple of witnesses… of whom I wot well ye will mistrust neither nother.”

“Who be they?” quoth he. “For it were hard to find… whom I could better trust than yourself; whom, whatsoever I have merrily said, I could not in good faith but believe… in that you should tell me earnestly, upon your own knowledge. But ye use, my master saith,
to look so sadly when ye mean merrily… that many times men doubt whether ye speak in sport… when ye mean good earnest.”

“In good faith,” quoth I, “I mean good earnest now; and yet, as well as ye dare trust me, I shall, as I said, if ye will go with me, provide a couple of witnesses of whom ye will believe any one better than twain of me. For they be your near friends, and ye have been better acquainted with them; and such as, I dare say for them, be not often wont to lie.”

“Who be they,” quoth he, “I pray you?”

“Marry,” quoth I, “your own two eyes! For I shall, if you will, bring you where ye shall see it… no further hence than even here in London! And as for iron and latten to be so drawn in length, ye shall see it done in twenty shops, almost, in one street!”

“Marry, sir,” quoth he, “these witnesses indeed will not lie. As the poor man said by the priest—if I may be so homely to tell you a merry tale by the way…”

“A merry tale,” quoth I, “cometh never amiss to me.”

“The poor man,” quoth he, “had found the priest over-familiar with his wife; and because he spoke it abroad and could not prove it, the priest sued him before the bishop’s official, for defamation; where the poor man upon pain of accursing… was commanded that in his parish church, he should upon the Sunday, at High Mass time, stand up and say, ‘Mouth, thou liest!’ Whereupon, for fulfilling of his penance, up was the poor soul set in a pew… that the people might wonder on him… and hear what he said. And there, all aloud, when he had rehearsed what he had reported by the priest, then he set his hands on his mouth… and said, ‘Mouth, mouth, thou liest!’ And by and by thereupon, he set his hand upon both his eyes and said, ‘But eyes, eyes,’ quoth he, ‘by the Mass, ye lie not a whit!’ And so, sir, indeed… and ye bring me those witnesses, they will not lie a whit.

“Howbeit, sir, and though this be true—as in good faith I believe and am sure that it is—yet am I never the more bound by reason to believe them that would tell me a miracle. For though this

1.6

1 sadly: serious // mean merrily: mean something in jest
1–2 men . . . earnest: people think you might be joking… when you are dead serious
5 any: either 6 near: close 10, 14 marry: indeed 10 will: want
11 hence: away // even: right 15, 27 by: about
15 be so homely: take the liberty 16, 17 merry tale: funny story
20 spoke it abroad: said it in public 22 accursing: excommunication
25 fulfilling: carrying out // that: so that 26 might wonder on: could stare at
27 rehearsed: repeated 29 by and by thereupon: immediately after that
31 and ye: if you 33 howbeit: however // and though: even if
34 never the more bound: not at all the more obliged 35 tell: report to
thing be incredible to him that heareth it… and strange and
marvelous to him that seeth it—yet is it a thing that may be done. But
he that telleth me a miracle… telleth me a thing that cannot be done."

“I showed you,” quoth I, “this example to put you in mind that in
being overly hard of belief of things that by reason and nature
seem and appear impossible, where they be reported by credible
witnesses having no cause to lie, there is as much peril of
error as where men be too light of credence. And thus much
have I proved you onward: that if ye believe no man in such
things as may not be, then must it follow that ye ought to believe
no man in many things that may be; for all is one to you, whether
they may be or may not be, if it seem to you that they may not be.
And of truth, ye cannot tell whether they may be or may not be…
except they be two such things as imply contradiction; as one
self thing in one self part to be both white and black at once.
For else, many things shall seem to you such as all reason will
resist… and nature will in no wise admit… and yet they shall be
done well enough—and be in some other place in common use and
custom. But, now, because all your shift standeth in this—that of a
miracle told you, ye may with reason believe that all men lie…
because reason and nature, being more to be believed than all
they, telleth you that they say wrong… in that the thing reported
for a miracle cannot be done—I have showed you that nature and
reason doth show you that many things ‘may not be done’…
which yet indeed be done; so far forth that when ye see them done,
ye may right well account them as miracles, for anything
that reason or nature can show you by what natural order and cause
it could be done; but that ye shall still see reason stand quite
against it: as in the drawing of the silver or iron.”

The Seventh Chapter

The author showeth that neither nature nor reason do deny
the miracles to be true, nor do not gainsay but that
they may be well and easily done.

“Sir, saith he,” yet hit we not the point. For albeit that many
things be well done… and by nature… in which neither my wit

1. strange: surprising
2 marvel: amazing
3 may: can
4 showed: gave
5 hard of belief: resistant to believing
6 peril: danger
7 be too light of credence: give their credence too readily
8 peril: danger
9 onward: further
10 all is one: it’s all the same
11 except: unless
12 self: same
13 in no wise: by no means
14 all your shift: your whole dodge
15 order: procedure
16 well and: quite
17 wit: intellect
nor, haply, no man’s else can attain so near to nature’s
counsel that we can therein perceive her craft; but, like as some
rude people muse upon a clock that hath the spring (which is
the cause of its moving) secretly conveyed and closed in the
barrel, so marvel we and wonder on her work: yet always all those
things differ and be unlike to miracles, in that yourself will
agree with me—that when I believe that reason and nature teacheth me
surely that miracles be things that cannot be done, I am not in
this deceived, though I may be in such other things deceived…
as seem impossible and yet may be done. And therefore, as concerning
miracles—in which yourself will agree that I am not
by any mistaking of reason and nature deceived—ye may not
yourself, methinketh, say nay but that I may well, with
reason, believe them twain… against all them that will tell me they
have seen such things done… as yourself doth agree that they
twain (that is to wit, nature and reason) doth verily and truly
show me… cannot be done.”

“What manner of things be those?” quoth I.
“Marry, miracles!” quoth he. “Such as yourself will agree to be done
against nature!”

“Give us thereof,” quoth I, “some example.”
“As if men,” quoth he, “would now come tell me that at Our Lady of
Rouncivalle there were a dead child restored again to life.”

“Let that,” quoth I, “be one; and let another be that a bishop in the
building of his church, finding one beam cut a great deal too
short for his work, drew it forth, between another man and him,
four feet (and ye will) longer than it was… and so made it serve.”

“Be it, by my troth,” quoth he.

“Will we,” quoth I, “take for the third… that a man was by miracle in
a Pater Noster while… conveyed a mile off, from one place to another?”

“Be it so,” quoth he. “Now, they that should tell me,” quoth he, “that
they had seen these three miracles—were I bound to believe them?"

“Whether ye were bound,” quoth I, “or no, we shall see further after.
But, now, why should ye not of reason trust them, if the men be
credible… and earnestly report it… and peradventure on their
oaths depose it… having no cause to feign it… nor likely to lie and be
forsworn for naught?”
“I will,” quoth he, “not believe them, because that nature and reason are two records more to be believed than all they that bear witness against them.”

“Why,” quoth I, “what doth reason and nature tell you?”

“They twain tell me,” quoth he, “that those three things cannot be done which those men say they saw done.”

“Wot you well,” quoth I, “that reason and nature tell you so?”

“Yea, marry,” quoth he, “that I wot well they do. And I think yourself will agree that they tell me so.”

“Nay, by Saint Mary, sir,” quoth I, “that will I not! For I think that neither reason nor nature telleth you so… but, rather, both two tell you clean the contrary; that is to wit, that they both bear witness… that those three things and such other like… be things that may be well and easily done.”

“Yea?” quoth he. “Marry, this is another way! Then have we walked wrong a while, if ye prove that!”

“Methinketh,” quoth I, “nothing more easy to prove than that! For I pray you tell me,” quoth I, “doth reason and nature show you that there is a God, or not?”

“Faith showeth me that, surely,” quoth he, “but whether nature and reason show it me or no, that I doubt, since great-reasoned men and philosophers have doubted thereof. And some of them have been plainly persuaded and in belief… that there was none at all; and the whole people of the world, in effect, fallen from knowledge or belief of God… into idolatry and worship of maumets.”

“Nay,” quoth I, “there is little doubt, I trow, but that nature and reason giveth us good knowledge that there is a God. For albeit the Gentiles worshipped among them a thousand false gods—yet all that proveth that there was and is in all men’s heads a secret consent of nature… that God there is; or else they would have worshipped none at all. Now, as for the philosophers, though a very few doubted, and one or twain thought there was none, yet as one swallow maketh
not summer, so the folly of so few maketh no change of the
matter… against all the whole number of the old philosophers which,

Acts 17:22–29; Rom 1:19–20 as Saint Paul confesseth, found out by

nature and reason… that there was a God…

either Maker or Governor, or both, of all this whole engine of the
world; the marvelous beauty and constant course whereof
showeth well that it neither was made nor governed by chance.
But when they had by these visible things knowledge of his invisible
Majesty, then did they as we do: fall from the worship of

him to the worship of idols; as now do Christian men… not, as
heretics lay to the charge of good people, in doing reverence to

saints… or honor to their images, but in doing as do those
heretics themselves—making our belly or beneath-our-belly… or our

The idolatry of heretics goods, or our own blind affection

 Toward other creatures, or our own

proud affection and dotage toward ourselves… our maumets and
idols and very false gods. But surely both nature and reason
will declare and teach us that a God there is.”

“Well,” quoth he, “I will not stick in this, since Saint Paul saith so.”

“Then,” quoth I, “if reason and nature show you that there is a God,
doth not reason and nature show you also that he is almighty and
may do what he will?”

“Yes,” quoth he, “that is both natural to his Godhead… and by reason it
may well be perceived.”

“Then followeth it,” said I, “that reason and nature doth not show
you that those three miracles that we were agreed should stand for
examples… precisely could not be done; but they taught you only
that they could not be done by nature. But ye may (as ye now see)
perceive that they themselves teach that they may be done by God…
since they teach you that there is a God, and that he is almighty. And
therefore when ye will in no wise believe them that tell you they
have seen such miracles done, ye refuse not to believe such things
as cannot be done, but ye mistrust causeless the credence and faith of
honest men… in the report of such things… as by him that they said
did it… may well and easily be done.”

2 all the whole: the whole entire // old: early // which: who
5 all this whole engine: this whole entire mechanism
16 dotage toward: excessive fondness for // maumets: graven images
18 declare: show // stick in: balk at // so: that 20, 21, 25 show: tell
22, 24, etc. may: can // 22 what he will: whatever he wants to
23 to his Godhead: i.e., with respect to his Godhood // 27 precisely: absolutely
31 in no wise: by no means
33 mistrust causeless: are doubting without cause // credence: credibility
33 faith: truthfulness // 34 honest: reputable // 35 well and: quite
The Eighth Chapter

The messenger allegeth that God may nothing do against the course of nature. Of which the author declareth the contrary—and, over that, showeth that our Lord in working of miracles doth nothing against nature.

“Sir,” quoth he, “ye come, indeed, somewhat near me now. But yet seemeth me that reason and nature teach me still that I shall in no wise believe them that tell me they have seen such miracles done. For first if ye will grant me that they teach me that if they should be done, they must be done by God against the course of nature: so is it, then, that reason showeth me that God hath set all things, already from the first creation, to go forth in a certain order and course… which order and course men call ‘nature’; and that hath he of his infinite wisdom done so well, and provided that course to go forth in such a manner and fashion, that it cannot be amended. And therefore seemeth it that reason showeth me that God never will anything do against the course… which his high wisdom, power, and goodness hath made so good… that it could never be broken to the better. For if it might—then had our Lord not made his order and course perfect in the beginning. And therefore doth, as I say, reason and nature yet bear record against them that shall say they see such miracles, since God will never work against the course of nature, which himself hath already set in so goodly an order that it were not possible to be better, and the goodness of God will make no change to the worse.”

“Surely,” quoth I, “ye go now very far wide. For neither doth reason prove you that God—although it cannot otherwise be but that anything of the making of his goodness must needs be good—hath made, therefore, everything to be of sovereign perfection. For then must every creature be equal. Nor, also, that the whole work of his creation—though it have in itself sufficient and right wonderful perfection—that therefore it is wrought to the uttermost point of sovereign goodness that his Almighty Majesty could have made it of. For since he wrought it not naturally but willingly, he wrought it not to the uttermost...
of his power, but with such degrees of goodness as his high
pleasure liked to limit. For else were his work of as infinite perfection
as himself. And of such infinite, equal perfection was there

Note

by God brought forth nothing but only

the two Persons of the Trinity—that is to
wit, the Son and the Holy Ghost—of which two the Son was first
by the Father begotten; and after, the Holy Ghost by the Father and the
Son (‘after,’ I say, in order of beginning, but not in time) produced
and brought forth. And in this high generation and production did

the Doers work both willingly and naturally… and after the
utterest perfection of themselves; which they did only therein and in
none other thing. And therefore God might break up the whole world,
if he would, and make a better by and by, and not only change in the
natural course of this world some things to the better. Howbeit,

God in working of miracles doth nothing against nature, but
some special benefit above nature. And he doth not against you that
doth another a good turn which ye be not able to do. And therefore,
since God may do what he will, being almighty; and in doing of
miracles, he doth for the better: neither reason nor nature showeth
you that they which say they saw such miracles do tell you a
thing that cannot be done, since ye have no reason to prove that God
either cannot do it… or will not do it. For since he can do it, and it
may be that he will do it, why should we mistrust good and honest
men that say they saw him do it?”

The Ninth Chapter

The author showeth that albeit men may mistrust some of
the particular miracles, yet can there no reasonable man
neither deny nor doubt but that many miracles hath there
been done and wrought.

“Forsooth,” quoth he. “And yet, as for miracles, I were not, for all
this, bound to believe any. For I spoke never yet with any man
that could tell me that ever he saw any.”

“It may,” quoth I, “fortune you… to live so long that ye shall find

2 liked to limit: chose to allot 10 willingly: volitionally // after: according to
12 might: could 13 would: wanted to // by and by: immediately
16 doth not: acts not; i.e., does nothing 18 may: can // will: wants
19 sheweth: tells 20 they which: those who 21 reason: reasoning by which
23, 26 mistrust: doubt 23 honest: reputable 29 wrought: worked
30 were not: would not be 31 bound: obliged
31 believe any: i.e., believe any of them to be genuine
33 fortune you: be your fortune
no man that was by at your christening; nor when ye were
bishoped, neither.”

“Marry,” quoth he, “for aught I wot, I have lived so long already.”

“Why doubt ye not, then,” quoth I, “whether ye were ever christened or
not?”

“For every man,” quoth he, “presumeth and believeth that I am
christened, as a thing so commonly done that we reckon ourselves
sure that no man leaveth it undone.”

“If the common presumption,” quoth I, “sufficiently serve you to set
your mind in surety—then, albeit miracles be nothing commonly
and customably done, nor that no presumption can sufficiently
serve for the proof of this miracle or that, yet hath there ever from
the beginning of the world, in every nation, Christian and heathen, and
almost every town, at sundry times so many miracles and marvels
been wrought beside the common course of nature… that I think through
the world it is as well believed universally that miracles and
marvels there be… as anything is believed that men look upon.
So that if common presumption serve you, ye may, as I said, as
well believe that miracles be done… as that yourself was ever
christened. For I dare well say that there are a thousand that believe
there hath been miracles done… against one that believeth that ye were
ever christened—or ever wist whether ye were born or not.

“Nor the doctors of Christ’s church did never mistrust the
wonders and marvels that the paynims tell and write to have
been done by their false gods; but assigneth them to have been
done by the devil through God’s sufferance, for the illusion of
them that with idolatry had deserved to be deluded. And whether
they be miracles—by which name we commonly call the wonders
wrought by God—or marvels done by the
devil, it forceth not for this purpose of
ours. For if ye grant that the devil may
do any by God’s sufferance, ye cannot say nay but God may
much more easily do them himself.

“And since ye be a Christian man and receive Scripture, I might in
this matter,” quoth I, “have choked you long ago… with the manifold
miracles and marvels that be showed there.”
The Tenth Chapter

The author proveth that many things daily done by nature or craft whereof we nothing marvel at all... be more marvelous and more wonderful in deed than be the miracles that we most marvel of and repute most incredible.

“Nay,” quoth he, “surely—though it hath done me good to hear what ye would say—yet I neither doubt nor, I suppose, no good man else... but that God hath beside the common course of nature wrought many miracles.

“But yet of those that men tell of as done in your time... by which ye would it should seem that it were well proved that the praying to saints, going on pilgrimages, and worshipping of images were well and sufficiently proved... although there were none other proof thereupon—of these miracles did I mean; in the report of which methinketh I need not believe a common fame of this miracle and that, begun by some silly woman seeking Saint Zita when she sigheth for miscasting of her keys. Of these miracles I speak, and all such as men say nowadays be done at divers pilgrimages by divers saints or divers images, in which methinketh that such as be told to be done... which nature and reason saith be impossible, I may well mistrust the tellers. Or else how many of them shall make me a sufficient proof of an impossible matter? One or two, or three either, seemeth me too few, to trust their credence in a thing so incredible. And if I shall not believe them till I find many records, I ween I were fain to wander the world about ere I proved many miracles sufficiently—of such, I say, as ye prove your pilgrimages by.”

“Your few words,” quoth I, “have wrapped in them many things... that seem somewhat, as they be couched together. Which when we see them unfolded, and consider each part asunder, then may we better examine them and better see whereof they serve.

“First ye speak of seeking to saints for slight causes, as for the

3 craft: skill // nothing: in no way 4 deed: fact; reality 9 beside: outside 12 would it should: would have it 14, 27, 28 prove(d): validate(d) 14 although: even if 15 of... mean: these are the miracles I had in mind 16 common fame: widespread rumor 17 seeking: seeking the help of; i.e., going to the shrine of 18 sigheth for miscasting: is distressed over a misplacing 19 divers: various 20 pilgrimages: pilgrimage sites 22 may well mistrust: can justifiably be skeptical of 24 matter: thing 24–25 their credence: i.e., the credibility of 25 in: with regard to 25 believe them: i.e., believe supposed miracles to be authentic ones 26 records: witnesses // ween I were fain to: think I would have to 30 somewhat: to be something; to have some merit // couched: lumped 31 asunder: separately 33 seeking to saints: going to saints’ shrines // slight: trivial
loss or miscasting of Kit’s keys. Then ye would wit how many
ye must hear say they saw a miracle ere ye should of reason believe
it. Thirdly, ye think ye were likely to go long ere ye should find any
proved true. Finally, when ye say that ye mean only those
miracles that men tell of as done at pilgrimages, ye seem to put
still a difference between those miracles wrought in pilgrimages…
and such as are wrought by God elsewhere. The cause whereof I must
further ask you after. For I perceive not well what ye mean by
that.

“But first, whereas ye speak still as though ye might mistrust
them, were they never so many, because they tell you a thing
that reason and nature saith is ‘impossible’—methinketh that ye

A miracle is impossible

to nature.

should now change that word. For I have

already proved that reason and nature say not

that a miracle is impossible, but only that

it is impossible to nature. And they confess, both, that miracles be
possible to God; and they that report them do report them for things
done by God. And therefore, they do report you none impossible
tale.

“For the clearer consideration whereof, let us resort to the miracles
which we were agreed should stand for examples. And first, if men
should tell you that they saw before an image of the Crucifix a
dead man raised to life, ye would much marvel thereof—and so
might ye well. Yet could I tell you somewhat that I have seen myself
that methinketh as great a marvel—but I have no lust to tell
you, because that ye be so circumspect and wary in belief of any
miracles… that ye would not believe it for me… but mistrust me for it.”

“Nay, sir,” quoth he, “in good faith, if a thing seemed me never so
far unlikely, yet if ye would earnestly say that yourself have seen
it, I neither would nor could mistrust it.”

“Well,” quoth I, “then ye make me the bolder to tell you. And yet will
I tell you nothing… but that I would, if need were, find you good
witness to prove it.”

“It shall not need, sir,” quoth he. “But I beseech you, let me hear it.”

“Forsooth,” quoth I, “because we speak of a man raised from death to

1 miscasting: misplacing // Kit: A general term for “girl” or “woman.”
1 would wit: want to know // 3 go: travel // long: a long way / a long time
5, 6 pilgrimages: pilgrimage sites // 5 put: posit // 8 after: later
8 perceive not well: do not quite understand // 10 might: could (rightly)
20 resort: turn // 22 the Crucifix: Christ on the cross // 24 somewhat: something
25 methinketh: seems to me // last: desire // 26 because that: because
27 for: on account of // 28 in good faith: really and truly
28–29 never so far: no matter how extremely
29 earnestly say: say in all seriousness
34 it shall not need: that will not be necessary
There was in the parish of Saint Stephen’s in Walbrook (in London, where I dwelled before I came to Chelsea) a man and a woman—which are yet quick and quething—and young were they both. The eldest, I am sure, passed not twenty-four. It happed them, as doth among young folk, the one to cast the mind to the other. And after many lets (for the maiden’s mother was much against it), at last they came together and were married in Saint Stephen’s Church—which is not greatly famous for any miracles; but yet yearly, on Saint Stephen’s Day, it is somewhat sought unto and visited with folks’ devotion. But, now, short tale to make… this young woman (as manner is in brides, ye wot well) was at night brought to bed with honest women. And then after that went the bridegroom to bed; and everybody went their ways, and left them twain there alone. And the same night—yet abide, let me not lie; now, in faith, to say the truth, I am not very sure of the time. But surely, as it appeared afterward, it was of likelihood the same night, or some other time soon after… except it happened a little before.”

“No force for the time,” quoth he.

“Truth,” quoth I. “And as for the matter, all the parish will testify for truth, the woman was known for so honest. But for the conclusion: the seed of them twain turned in the woman’s body… first into blood… and after into shape of man-child. And then waxed quick, and she great therewith. And was within the year delivered of a fair boy; and forsooth, it was not then (for I saw it myself) passing the length of a foot. And I am sure he is grown now an inch longer than I!”

“How long is it ago?” quoth he.

“By my faith,” quoth I, “about twenty-one years.”

“Tush,” quoth he, “this is a worthy miracle.”

“In good faith,” quoth I, “never wist I that any man could tell that he had any other beginning. And methinketh that this is as great a miracle as the raising of a dead man.”

“If it seem so,” quoth he, “to you, then have you a marvelous seeming; for I ween it seemeth so to no man else.”
“No?” quoth I. “Can ye tell what is the cause? None other, surely, but that the acquaintance and daily beholding taketh away the wondering; as we nothing wonder at the ebbing and flowing of the sea, or the Thames, because we daily see it. But he that had never seen it… nor heard thereof… would at the first sight wonder sore thereat, to see that great water come wallowing up against the wind… keeping a common course to and fro… no cause perceived that driveth it. If a man born blind had suddenly his sight, what wonder would he make to see the sun, the moon, and the stars; whereas one that hath seen them sixteen years together… marvelleth not so much of them all… as he would wonder at the first sight of a peacock’s tail. And very cause can I see none… why we should of reason more marvel of the reviving of a dead man… than of the breeding, bringing forth, and growing of a child unto the state of a man. No more marvelous is a cuckoo than a cock… though the one be seen but in summer and the other all the year. And I am sure if ye saw dead men as commonly called again by miracle as ye see men brought forth by nature, ye would reckon it less marvel to bring the soul again into the body… keeping yet still its shape, and its organs not much perished… than of a little seed to make all that gear newly—and make a new soul thereto. Now, if ye never had seen any gun in your days, nor heard of any before: if two men should tell you, the one that he had wist a man in a Pater Noster while conveyed and carried a mile off, from one place to another, by miracle, and the other should tell you that he had seen a stone more than a man’s weight carried more than a mile in as little space by craft—-which of these would you, by your faith, take for the more incredible?”

“Surely,” quoth he, “both twain were very strange. But yet I could not choose but think it were rather true that God did the one than that any craft of man could do the other.”

“Well,” quoth I, “let us, then, to our third example. If it were showed

5 sore: greatly  6 water: body of water  10 together: in succession
17, 19 again: back  21 gear: stuff  // thereto: as well  23 wist: known
23–24 a Pater Noster while: the time it takes to say an Our Father  27 space: time
27, 31 craft: skill  29 were very strange: would be very astonishing  32 to: turn to
32 showed: told
you that Saint Erconwald, or his sister, drew out a piece of timber…

Note  that was cut too short for the roof in making
Barking Abbey, should this be so incredible

to you to believe—that they drew in length a piece of wood by the
power and help of God’s hand—when we see daily a great piece of
silver, brass, latten, or iron drawn alength into small wire… as
wonderfully by man’s hand?”

The Eleventh Chapter

The author showeth that a miracle is not to be mistrusted
though it be done in a small matter and seemeth upon a slight
occasion.

“Now, though ye would peradventure (as ye seem to do) reckon
this cause very slight for God to show such a high miracle… since
there might have been without miracle a longer piece of timber
gotten; and so ye would haply mistrust it for the slender occasion,
resembling it to the miscasting of some good housewife’s keys—God
hath, I ween, so much wit of himself… that he needeth not our
advice to inform him what thing were sufficient occasion to
work his wonders for. But and if ye read in the books of Cassian,
Saint Gregory, Saint Augustine, Saint Jerome, and many other holy,
virtuous men, ye shall (except ye believe them not) learn and
know that God hath for his servants done many a great
miracle… in very small matters. And so much the more are we
bounden to his goodness in that he vouchsafeth so familiarly in
small things to show us so great a token of his mighty Godhead. And
no reason were it… to withdraw his thank and honor because of
his familiar goodness. And if ye peradventure would not believe their
writings… go to Christ’s Gospel, and look on his first miracle…
whether he might not have provided for wine without miracle. But

5 great: big  6 drawn alength: elongated // small: thin
7 wonderfully: astonishingly  10 though: even if // seemeth: i.e., seemingly
15 for; on account of // slender: unimportant  16 resembling: likening
16 miscasting: misplacing  17 ween: think
17 so much wit of himself: so much sense on his own  18 were: would be (a)
19 and if: if  21 except: unless  24 bounden: beholden
25 Godhead: Godhood; divinity  26 no reason were it: no sense would it make
26 withdraw: withhold (from him) // thank: credit  27 familiar: down-home
27 their: i.e., those Church fathers’  28 on: at  29 might: could
Wherefore Christ turneth such was his pleasure: in a small matter… 1.11
water into wine (Jn 2:6–11)
Lk 23:8–9
to do a great miracle… for some show of his Godhead among them whom he vouchsafed; whereas, on the other side, before
Herod, that would fain have seen some miracle—where it stood upon his life, and might have delivered him from the Jews!—yet would he not vouchsafe either to show the proud, curious king one miracle… or speak one word. So the times, places, and occasions, reason is that we suffer to rest in his arbitrament… and not look to prescribe and appoint at our pleasure where, when, and wherefore God shall work his miracles… and else blaspheme them and say we will not believe them.”

The Twelfth Chapter

The author somewhat noteth the froward minds of many folk that would be very hard to believe a man in a miracle upon his oath… and very light in a shrewd tale to believe a woman on her word.

“Now, where ye require how many witnesses should be requisite and suffice to make you think yourself in reason to have good cause to believe so strange a thing: methinketh that right few were sufficient of them that would say they saw a great good thing done by the power and goodness of God… except it be hard for us to believe… either that God is so mighty that he may do it… or so good that he would do it.

“But, because ye would wit of me how many records were requisite—that thing standeth not so much in number as in weight. Some twain be more credible than some ten. And albeit that I see not greatly why I should mistrust anyone that seemeth honest and telleth a good tale of God… in which there appeareth no special cause of lying: yet, if any witnesses will serve you, then would I wit of you… how many yourself would agree. For I now put

2 show: manifestation 3 vouchsafed: i.e., saw fit to give one to
4 side: hand // before: in the presence of
5 that would fain have seen: who would have loved to see
5–6 stood upon: concerned 7 vouchsafe: deign 9 is: i.e., dictates
9 suffer: allow // rest in: remain in; be up to // arbitrament: discretion
12 believe them: i.e., believe them to be bona fide miracles
14 somewhat noteth: comments a little on // froward minds: perverse dispositions
15 hard to believe: resistant to believing; slow to believe 15, 16 in: about
16 light: ready; quick // shrewd tale: report of something bad
17 word: i.e., mere word, as opposed to an oath 18 require: ask
20 strange: singular; out-of-the-way 22 except: unless 23 may: can
25 would wit of: want to know from // records: witnesses
30 special cause of lying: particular reason to lie
31 would I wit: I want to know from // yourself: you yourself // agree: agree to
case that there came ten diverse honest men, of good substance, out of ten diverse parts of the realm… each of them with an offering… at one pilgrimage (as, for example, at Our Lady of Ipswich), and each one of them affirming upon their oath a miracle done upon themself… in some great sudden help… well appearing to pass the power of craft or nature. Would you not believe that among them all, at the leastwise twain of those ten said true?”

“No, by our Lady,” quoth he—“not and there were ten and twenty.”

“Why so?” quoth I.

“Marry,” quoth he, “for, were they never so many, having none other witness… but each man telling his tale for himself, they be but single all—and less than single. For every miracle hath but one record… and yet he not credible in his own cause. And so never a miracle well proved.”

“Well,” said I, “I like well your wisdom, that ye be so circumspect… that ye will nothing believe without good, sufficient, and full proof.

A merry supposed tale

“I put you, then,” quoth I, “another case:

that ten young women not very specially known for good, but taken out at adventure, dwelling all in one town, would report and tell that a friar of good fame, hearing their confessions at a pardon, would have given them all in a penance to let him lie with them. On your faith, would ye not believe… that among so many, some of them said true?”

“Yes, that I would,” quoth he, “by the Mary Mass: believe they said true all ten—and durst well swear for them and they were but two!”

“Why so?” quoth I. “They be as single witnesses as the others of whom I told you before. For none of them can tell what was said to another. And yet they be unsworn, also; and therewith be they but women, which be more light and less to be regarded; dwelling all in one town, also, and thereby might they the more easily conspire a false tale.”

“They be,” quoth he, “witnesses good enough for such a matter, the thing is so likely of itself—that a friar will be womanish, look the holy whoreson never so saintly.”
“Ye deny not,” quoth I, “but God may as easily do a good turn by miracle… as any man may do an evil by nature?”

“That is true,” quoth he, “and he list.”

“Well,” quoth I, “see now what a good way ye be in… that are, of your own good, godly mind, more ready to believe two simple women… that a man will do naught, than ten or twenty men… that God will do good!”

The Thirteenth Chapter

The author showeth the untoward mind of many men… which in miracles so highly touching the honor of God and weal of their own souls… will neither believe other folk that tell them… nor themselves vouchsafe to go prove them.

“But since that this kind of proof will not suffice you… I dare say if ye would seek and inquire, ye should find many done in your days… in the presence of much people.”

“Where should I see that?” quoth he.

“Ye might,” quoth I, “upon Good Friday, every year these two hundred years till within these five years… that the Turks have taken the town, have seen one of the thorns that was in Christ’s crown… bud and bring forth flowers in the Service time, if ye would have gone to the Rhodes—"

“So far?” quoth he. “Nay, yet had I liefer have God’s blessing to believe that I see not… than go so far therefor.”

“I am well apaid,” quoth I, “thereof. For if ye had liefer believe than take the pain of a long pilgrimage, ye will never be so stiff in any opinion… that ye will put yourself in jeopardy for pertinacity and stubborn standing by your part.”

“Nay, marry,” quoth he, “I warrant you that I will never be so mad to hold till it wax too hot. For I have such a fond fantasy of mine own: that I had liefer shiver and shake for cold in the midst of summer… than be burned in the midst of winter.”
“Merrily said!” quoth I. “But yet in earnest, where such a solemn yearly miracle is wrought... so wondrously, in the face of the world, before so great a multitude—it is a great untowardness, in a thing so highly touching the honor of God and health of our own soul, both to mistrust all them that say they have seen it... and, either of sloth or incredulity, not vouchsafe himself to prove it.”

“If I should have gone,” quoth he, “and found it a lie—then had I walked a wise journey! And on the other side, if I should have seen there such a thing myself—yet could I scantly reckon myself sure.”

“No?” quoth I. “That were a strange case.”

“Not very strange,” quoth he. “For where ye speak of miracles done before a multitude—a man may be deceived therein right well.”

The Fourteenth Chapter

The messenger maketh objection that miracles showed before a multitude... may be feigned; and by the author showed how the goodness of God bringeth shortly the truth of such falsehood to light (with examples thereof, one or two rehearsed), and further showed that many miracles there be which no good Christian man may deny to be true.

Some priest, to bring up a pilgrimage in his parish, may devise some false fellow feigning himself to come seek a saint in his church... and there suddenly say that he hath gotten his sight. Then shall ye have the bells rung for a miracle. And the fond folk of the country soon made fools. Then women coming thither with their candles. And the parson, buying of some lame beggar three or four pairs of their old crutches, with twelve pennies spent in men and women of wax... thrust through, divers places, some with arrows and some with rusty knives, will make his offerings for one seven-year... worth twice his tithes.”

“This is,” quoth I, “very truth, that such things may be... and sometimes,
peradventure, so be indeed. As I remember me that I have heard my
father tell, of a beggar… that in King Henry’s days (the Sixth)
came with his wife to Saint Alban’s, and there was walking about
the town begging a five or six days before the king’s coming
thither… saying that he was born blind and never saw in
his life… and was warned in his dream that he should come out of
Berwick (where he said he had ever dwelled) to seek Saint Alban…
and that he had been at his shrine… and had not been helped. And
therefore he would go seek him at some other place… for he had heard
some say since he came… that Saint Alban’s body should be at Cologne;
and indeed, such a contention hath there been. But of truth, as I
am surely informed, he lieth here at Saint Alban’s… saving some
relics of him which they there show enshrined. But, to tell you
forth: when the king was come and the town full, suddenly this
blind man… at Saint Alban’s shrine… had his sight again… and a
miracle solemnly rung… and Te Deum sung… so that nothing
was talked of in all the town but this miracle. So happened it

Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester then… that Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, a
great, wise man and very well learned,

having great joy to see such a miracle, called the poor man unto
him. And first showing himself joyous of God’s glory so showed
in the getting of his sight, and exhorting him to meekness… and to
none ascribing of any part the worship to himself… nor to be
proud of the people’s praise… which would call him a good and a
godly man thereby—at last he looked well upon his eyes… and asked
whether he could never see nothing at all… in all his life before.
And when as well his wife as himself affirmed fastly no, then he
looked advisedly upon his eyes again… and said, ‘I believe you very well;
for methinketh that ye cannot see well yet.’

‘Yes, sir,’ quoth he, ‘I thank God and his holy martyr, I can see now
as well as any man!’

‘Ye can?’ quoth the Duke. ‘What color is my gown?’ Then, anon, the
beggar told him.

‘What color,’ quoth he, ‘is this man’s gown?’ He told him also;
and so forth, without any sticking, he told him the names of all
the colors that could be showed him. And when my lord saw that, he bade him walk faitour, and made him be set openly in the stocks. For though he could have seen suddenly by miracle the difference between diverse colors, yet could he not by the sight so suddenly tell the names of all these colors... but if he had known them before; no more than the names of all the men that he should suddenly see.”

“Lo, therefore I say,” quoth your friend, “who may be sure of such things, when such pageants be played before all the town?

I remember me now what a work I have heard of... that was at Leominster in the King’s father’s days; where the prior brought privily a strange wench into the church, that said she was sent thither by God... and would not lie out of the church. And after, she was grated within iron grates, above in the rood loft; where it was believed she lived without any meat or drink—only by angels’ food. And divers times she was houseled (in sight of the people) with a host unconsecrated... and, all the people looking upon, there was a device with a small hair that conveyed the host from the paten of the chalice... out of the prior’s hands into her mouth, as though it came alone; so that all the people, not of the town only, but also of the country about, took her for a very quick saint... and daily sought so thick to see her that many that could not come near to her cried out aloud, ‘Holy maiden Elizabeth, help me!’ and were fain to throw their offering over their fellows’ heads, for press. Now lay the prior with holy maiden Elizabeth nightly in the rood loft... till she was after taken out and tried in the keeping by my lady the King’s mother. And by the longing for meat, with voidance of that she had eaten (which had no saintly savor), she was perceived for no saint... and confessed all the matter.”

“In faith,” quoth I, “it had been great alms the prior and she had been burned together at one stake! What came of the prior?”

Quoth he, “That can I not tell; but I ween he was put to such punishment as the poor nun was... that had given her in penance to say
Ps 56:1  
this verse—“Miserere mei, Deus, quoniam conculcavit me homo”—with a great threat that and she did so anymore, she should say the whole psalm. But as for holy Elizabeth, I heard say she lived and fared well… and was a common harlot at Calais many a fair day after—where she laughed at the matter full merrily.”

“The more pity,” quoth I, “that she was so let pass.”

“That is truth,” quoth he. “But, now, what say you? What trust can we have—or at the least way, what surety can we have—in such things, when we see them feigned so shamefully in the face of the world… so openly, and so much people abused so far… that they would not have letted to swear, and some to jeopard their lives thereon, that all this work was wrought by God’s own hand… till the truth came to light, and the drab driven out of the church in the devil’s name?”

“Verily,” said I, “there was abusion in the one side… and great folly in the other side. And as that noble duke Humphrey wisely found out the falsehood of that bisson beggar, so did that noble lady the King’s mother prudently decipher… and found out that beastly filth. And to say the truth, there was cause enough in both these parties whereof the people might reasonably gather so much suspicion that if they had made thereupon sufficient inquisition and search, they could never have been so far abused. For both might they well mistrust a beggar’s word… whom they had but newly known—and well likely to lie for to win, first, favor, and after, money—and also men might well think that a young she-saint… was not meetly to be enshrined quick… in a monastery, among a meinie of monks. And yet in conclusion, because no such feigned wonders should infame God’s very miracles, his goodness shortly brought them both to knowledge. And so doth his especial cure and providence bring ever shortly such falsehood and faitery to light, to their shame and confusion; and as he did in Bern, a great city in Almaine, bring to knowledge the false ‘miracles’ whereby certain friars abused the people… for which they were openly burned. And so God always bringeth such false ‘miracles’ to light.”

“Nay, nay,” quoth he, “there be many such, I warrant you, that never come to light, and are still taken for very good.”

1–2 “Miserere . . . homo”: “Have mercy on me, God, for man has trampled me down.”

2 great: big  
3 and she did so anymore: if she ever did the same thing again

3 should: would have to  
4 heard say: heard it said that

6 at the matter: about the whole thing  
7 full: quite

9 surety: certainty  
10, 28 feigned: faked

11 much: many  
12 letted: hesitated  
13 jeopard: stake

14 drab: slut (was)  
15 bisson: supposedly blind

16 abusio: deception  
17 in: on

18 bisson: supposedly blind  
19 prudently: sagaciously

20 decipher: do some detective work

22 inquisition: inquiry  
23 search: investigation

24 far abused: badly deceived  
25 feigned: faked

26 meely: appropriately  
27 quick: alive

28 meinie: bunch  
29 infame: discredit

30 care: care  
31 fakery: fakery

32 confusion: embarrassment  
33 Almaine: Germany

34 abused: took a bad advantage of  
35 openly: publicly

36 good: genuine
“Ye cannot very well warrant it,” quoth I. “For since God brought to
light the false, feigned miracle of the priests of the idol Bel in the old
time (as appeareth in the fourteenth chapter of the prophet Daniel), it
is more likely that among Christian men he will suffer no such
things long lie hidden. And also, how can ye warrant that many of
those miracles be false? For while there is no doubt but many be
true, and ye know not any which ye precisely know for false,
ye be not sure whether any be such or not!”

“Marry,” quoth he, “that reason holdeth as well on the other side!
For since I know not any which I precisely know for true, I know
not whether any be true or not.”

“Nay,” quoth I, “that argument will not serve you so. For though no
man bindeth you to believe that every thing is true that is told
for a miracle—yet some there be of which ye must needs reckon yourself
sure, and of which ye cannot, if ye be a Christian man, have any
scruple or doubt.”

“Yea?” quoth he. “Fain would I wit which were one of those.”

“Marry,” quoth I, “all that are written in the Gospel!”

“Marry,” quoth he, “that I wot well. But them we speak not of; for
they were done by God himself.”

“Why,” quoth I, “be they not so all? If ye will not agree that ye be sure
of any which be told by saints… what say you by the miracles of
the apostles, written by Saint Luke?”

“Nay,” quoth he, “ye mistake me yet; for I do not mean any mistrust
in the miracles done of old time by God for his apostles or
holy martyrs, in corroboration and setting forth of the faith. I
mean only these miracles that men tell and talk of nowadays,
to be done at those images… where these pilgrimages be—and where
we see some of them ourselves… proved plainly false. And yet told
for so true, and so many false shrews to affirm it, so many
simple souls trust it, so much foolish folk believe it, that a man
may well with reason mistrust all the remnant!”

2 feigned: faked  6 while: since  7, 10 precisely know for: know for a fact are
9 marry: well 17 fain would I wit: I would love to know 18 marry: good heavens
19 marry: of course // wot: know 21 why: well 22 by: about
24 ye mistake me yet: you’re still getting me wrong 28 pilgrimages: pilgrimage sites
30 false shrews: fraudulent scoundrels 32 mistrust: be skeptical of // remnant: rest
“Ye have,” quoth I, “more often than once spoken of a difference between
the miracles done by God in old time… and these miracles that are done,
or told to be done, nowadays at pilgrimages. But surely if ye grant the
miracles done of ‘old’ time, we need no more for the proof of all our matter. For I trow that pilgrimages, and
miracles done at them, be very old things… and not things newly begun nowadays… except ye call a thousand years ago, or fourteen hundred years ago, ‘nowadays.’ For I am very sure that so long ago, and yet longer, too, did good Christian people pray to saints,
in great veneration; and many wonderful miracles did our Lord work
for the comprobation of his high pleasure, to the conservation and increase of the devotion of his Christian people, therein—as we find largely written and reported in the godly books of holy Saint Gregory, Saint Augustine, Saint Jerome, Saint Eusebius, Saint Basil, Saint Chrysostom, and many another old holy doctor of Christ’s church whose books were not unwritten this thousand years. And whereas ye say that of miracles many be nowadays feigned, so may it be that some were then also—but neither then nor now, neither, were nor be all feigned. And any being true, all were they right few, sufficed for our purpose. For if God had but with one miracle declared that the thing contenteth and pleaseth him in his church, it must needs suffice for the Church against all the heretics in the world that ever would bark against the Church therein. And therefore there can be no doubt in the matter where God hath declared his pleasure by so many a thousand; and that in every time, not only nowadays, but also a thousand years, or fourteen hundred years, and yet more, too, before our days. And as for feigned miracles, of which ye speak so much: albeit that some such hath been, yet I verily think that neither of old time nor now, Christ among Christian people suffereth not such things to happen often, nor such delusion to last long, but shortly (to their shame, as it hath appeared in some) doth utter and make open their falsehood; as himself said of all such—‘That ye whisper one in another’s ear shall be preached out aloud upon the ridge of the house roof.’”

4, 6 pilgrimages: pilgrimage sites   6 all our matter: our whole case   // trow: believe
8 except: unless   11 had: held   13 comprobation: attestation
15 largely: extensively   17 old holy doctor: early theologian
18 were not unwritten: did not go untranscribed   20, 21, 30 feigned: faked
21–22 all . . . sufficed: even had they been very few, would have sufficed
23 contenteth: is all right with   27 where: given that   // declared: made known
32 suffereth not: does not allow
34 as it hath appeared in: as has been made apparent with   // utter: reveal
34 open: manifest   35 that: that which; what
The author showeth that if of those miracles that are
told and written to be done at divers pilgrimages, and
commonly believed for very true, we certainly knew some
falsely feigned, yet were that no cause to mistrust the
remnant.

“But be it that among so many miracles as be daily told and
written done at divers pilgrimages… between which miracles and
others why ye put a difference, we shall, as I said before, know
further your mind hereafter; and be it also that of such as long
have been reputed and still taken for true, yourself undoubtedly
knew some for very false: would ye therefore think that among all
the remnant, there were never one true? What if ye find some
fair woman painted… whose color ye had went were natural?
Will ye never after believe that any woman in the world hath a fair
color of herself? If ye find some false flatterers that long seemed
friendly, will ye take ever after all the world for such? If some
prove stark hypocrites… whom the world would have sworn for
good and godly men, shall we therefore mistrust all others for their
sake, and ween there were none good at all?”

“By my troth,” quoth he, “I rode once in good company (and, to
A merry tale say the truth, for good company) to
Walsingham in pilgrimage, where a good
couple’s horse so fell in halting… that he was fain to hire another…
and let him go loose—which was so lean and so poor, and halted so sore,
that empty as he was, he could scant keep foot with us. And when we
had went we should have left him behind, suddenly he spied a
mare—and forth he limped on three legs so lustily that his
master’s horse with four feet could scant overtake him. But
when he caught him and came again, he swore in great anger all
the oaths he might swear… that he would trust ‘halting Sir Thomas’
the worse while he lived.”
“What was that ‘halting Sir Thomas’?” quoth I.

“Marry,” quoth he, “their parish priest; as he told us, ‘as lean and as poor and as halting as his horse—and as holy, too.’ But since he would while he lived mistrust the halting priest for his halting horse—if I find a holy whoreson halt in hypocrisy, I shall not fail while I live… to trust all his fellows the worse!”

“Well,” quoth I, “ye speak merrily… but I wot well ye will do better, whatsoever ye say. Nor, I am sure, though ye see some white sapphire or beryl so well counterfeited, and so set in a ring, that a right good jeweler will take it for a diamond—yet will ye not doubt, for all that, but that there be in many other rings already set right diamonds indeed. Nor ye will not mistrust Saint Peter for Judas. Nor, though the Jews were, many, so naughty… that they put Christ to death—yet ye be wiser, I wot well, than the gentlewoman was… which in talking once with my father, when she heard say that our Lady was a Jew, first could not believe it, but said, ‘What? Ye mock, iwis! I pray you, tell truth!’ And when it was so fully affirmed that she at last believed it—’And was she a Jew,’ quoth she, ‘so help me God and halidom, I shall love her the worse while I live!’ I am sure ye will not do so… nor mistrust all for some, neither men nor miracles.”

The Sixteenth Chapter

The author showeth that whoso would inquire should soon find that at pilgrimages be daily many great and undoubted miracles wrought and well known. And specially he speaketh of the great and open miracle showed at Our Lady of Ipswich of late upon the daughter of Sir Roger Wentworth, Knight.

“And as for the point that we spoke of concerning miracles done in our days at divers images where these pilgrimages be: yet could I tell you some such done so openly, so far from all cause
of suspicion, and thereto testified in such sufficient wise, that he might seem almost mad that, hearing the whole matter, will mistrust the miracles. Among which I durst boldly tell you for one…

the wonderful work of God that was, within these few years, wrought in the house of a right worshipful knight, Sir Roger Wentworth, upon divers of his children, and especially one of his daughters—a very fair young gentlewoman of twelve years of age, in marvelous manner vexed and tormented by our ghostly enemy the devil; her mind alienated and raving, with despising and blasphemy of God, and hatred of all hallowed things… with knowledge and perceiving of the hallowed from the unhallowed, all were she nothing warned thereof. And after that… moved in her own mind, and admonished by the will of God, to go to Our Lady of Ipswich. In the way of which pilgrimage, she prophesied and told many things done and said at the same time in other places… which were proved true; and many things said lying in her trance… of such wisdom and learning… that right cunning men highly marveled to hear of so young an unlearned maiden, when herself wist not what she said, such things uttered and spoken… as well-learned men might have missed with a long study; and finally, being brought and laid before the image of our blessed Lady, was there, in the sight of many worshipful people, so grievously tormented, and in face, eyes, look, and countenance so grisly changed, with her mouth drawn aside, and her eyes laid out upon her cheeks, that it was a terrible sight to behold.

“And after many marvelous things… at the same time showed upon divers persons by the devil (through God’s sufferance): as well all the remnant as the maiden herself, in the presence of all the company, restored to their good state, perfectly cured and suddenly.

“And in this matter no pretext of begging, no suspicion of feigning, no possibility of counterfeiting, no simpleness in the seers; her father and mother, right honorable and rich, sore abashed to see such chances in their children; the witnesses… great number, and many of great worship, wisdom, and good experience; the maiden herself too young to feign; and the fashion

1 thereto: in addition; also // testified: testified to; attested
4 wonderful: astonishing 5 right worshipful: very distinguished
6, 27 divers: several 6 especially: in particular 7 fair: lovely
8 marvelous manner: a terrible way // ghostly: spiritual
9 alienated: possessed 10, 11 hallowed: blessed 11 perceiving: distinguishing
11–12 all . . . thereof: when she had been given no information as to which was which
13 admonished: enjoined // in: along 17 right cunning: very learned
18 of: from 19 wist: knew // uttered: disclosed 21 image: statue
22 worshipful: reputable 26 marvelous: terrifying // showed: visited
27 sufferance: refraining from preventing all this 28 the remnant: the rest; these others
30 suddenly: instantaneously 32 feigning: fakery // counterfeiting: subterfuge
32 simpleness: gullibility 33–34 sore abashed: extremely embarrassed
34 chances in: things happen to 35 worship: prestige
36 feign: be putting on an act // fashion: behavior
itself too strange for any man to feign. And the end of the matter virtuous: the virgin so moved in her mind with the miracle…

that she forthwith, for aught her father could do, forsook the world and professed religion in a very good and godly company at the Minoress, where she hath lived well and graciously ever since.”

The Seventeenth Chapter

The messenger layeth forth objections against miracles done at pilgrimages… of which he confesseth many to be true. But he layeth causes and reasons whereby he saith that many men be moved to believe and think that those miracles that be done there be done by the devil, to set our hearts upon idolatry by the worshipping of images instead of God.

“But, now, albeit, as I said, that I might allege you this miracle, and prove it you in such wise that I wot well ye would be as far out of all doubt thereof… as ye would be deep in the marvel of the miracle—and peradventure divers others could I show you done of late at divers pilgrimages, and prove them well, too—yet would I fain first hear of you what distinction and difference is that that ye make, and wherefore ye make it, between the miracles done of old time and these that be nowadays done at these pilgrimages.”

“Sir,” quoth he, “somewhat, a little, I touched it in the beginning, and made, in manner, a glance thereat. But loath were I to hit it with a full shot and a sharp, as I have seen some with such reasons cleave the prick in twain… that they seemed to bear over the butt and all. Which reasons I would be loath in so sore manner to allege, lest I might haply give you some occasion to think that either I set to somewhat of mine own… or else, at the leastwise, liked well that side and were a favorer of that faction.”

“Nay, nay,” quoth I, “fear not that, hardily; for neither am I so suspicious to mistrust that one thinketh evil because he defendeth

1 strange: abnormal // for any man to feign: for anyone to fake
5 Minoress: convent of the Poor Clares // well and graciously: very holily
8, 17, 21 pilgrimages: pilgrimage sites // confesseth: acknowledges
13 might: could // allege: cite 14 wot: know 18 fain: like to // of: from
19 wherefore: why 22 touched: touched on 23 in manner: so to speak
23 a glance thereat: an oblique stab at it
24 a full shot and a sharp: a full-force and direct shot 24, 26 reasons: arguments
25 cleave the prick in twain: split the target in two // bear: knock // butt: support
26 sore: strong (a) // allege: adduce 27 haply: perhaps
28 set to: was adding in // somewhat: something 30 hardly: by no means
31 to: as to // mistrust: suspect // one: someone // evil: badly
the worse part well by way of argument and reasoning… and also, I trust that all their shots shall be so far too feeble to bear over the butt… that few of them shall touch the mark—many too faint to pierce the paper. And some too high… and some too short… and some walk too wide of the butt by a bow! And therefore I require you spare not to bring forth all that ever ye have heard, or that ye think may be said, in the matter.”

“Sir,” quoth he, “since ye can hear it so indifferently, I shall not spare to speak it. And surely, to begin with, all that I think true… I will not fail to confess. For albeit that I have long stuck with you… to withstand any credence to be given to miracles done nowadays—in which I have much the longer stuck because of some whom I have known, ere this, so far from the belief of any miracles at all… that in good faith, they put me half in doubt whether they believe that there were any God at all… if they durst for dread and shame have said all that they seemed to think—yet, to say the truth, I never heard anything said so sore therein… that ever moved me to think that any reason would bear the importunate mistrust of them that among so many an open miracle as is daily in divers places done… would ween that none at all were true. But verily, as I began a little to touch in the beginning, whether these miracles be made by God, and for good saints, or by the devil for our deceit and delusion—albeit I believe, and ever will, as the Church doth—yet some men, among, some such things say therein… that I am driven to do as I do in other articles of the faith: lean fast unto belief, for any reason that I find to make them answer with. For first they take for a ground that the devil may do miracles. Or if we list not to suffer them called by that name…

Miracles the matter shall be thereby nothing amended; for if we will have only called by the name of ‘miracles’ things by God done above nature—yet will we not deny but that God suffereth the devil to work wonders… which the people cannot discern from miracles. And therefore when they see them, ‘miracles’ shall they call them, and for miracles they shall take them. Now, since it so is that the devil may do
such things: whereby shall we be sure that God doth them? And since the devil may do them, and we be not sure that God doth them: why may not we as well believe that the devil doth them?"

"Marry," said I, "ye told me that ye set naught by logic... but now ye play the logician outright! Howbeit, that argument men may turn on the other side, and say that since God may do them much better than the devil, and we be not sure that the devil doth them, why should we not rather believe that God doth them— which may do them better? And much more reason it is where a wonderful work is wrought... there to ascribe it to God, the Master."

The devil doth nothing but of all masteries, rather than the devil, that can do nothing but by sufferance... except we see some cause that cannot suffer that work to be reckoned God's."

"Well," quoth he, "then is it reason that we show you some such cause. It is," quoth he, "cause enough... in that we see that God hath in Scripture forbidden such imagery—and that under great malediction; as in the law which yourself spoke of before,

Ex 20:4 "Non facies tibi sculptile." And in the psalm 'In exitu Israel de Aegypto,' where he first by the mouth of the prophet describeth the folly of such as worshippeth those images... that 'hath ears, and cannot hear,' 'hands, and cannot feel,' 'feet, and cannot go,' 'mouth, and cannot speak.' All which absurdities and unreasonable follies appeareth as well in the worship of our images as in the paynims' idols. And after, he showeth the maledictions that shall fall thereupon, saying, 'Like might they be to them—all such as make them, and all such as putteth their trust in them.' And forthwith he declareth in whom good men have their trust... and the profit that proceedeth thereupon... saying, 'Domus Israel speravit in Domino; adiutor eorum et protector eorum est' ('The house of Israel hath put their trust in our Lord; the helper and defender of them is he'). Now, when the words of God be clear, openly and plainly upon this side—what reason is it to believe the comments and glosses of men such as ye brought forth right now...
wherewith ye would wind out against the true texts of God? What should we give credence to the example of men’s doings against the plain commandment of God’s writings? And when that only Christ is our Savior and our Mediator to bring our nature again to God… and our only proctor and advocate before his Father… and may help us best, and will help us most: what shall we make either our Lady or any other creature our advocate, or pray to them— which of likelihood hear us not? For there can none of them be present at so many places at once… as they be called upon. And if they were, yet are they no nearer us than God himself—nor so fain would that we did well as he that died for us. And therefore when we not only do them reverence (which I were content were done them… for God’s sake, as ye said before), but also pray to them—we do Christ and God great injury. For if we pray to them as mediators and advocates for us, we take from Christ his office and give it them. If we ask help and health of them—then make we them plain gods, and betake to them the power of the Godhead. For only God is it that giveth all good, as witnesseth Saint James: ‘Every good and very perfect gift cometh from above, descending from the Father of lights.’ And surely if we consider how we behave us to them—though ye say that all the honor given to saints redoundeth unto God (since it is done, as ye say, not for their own sakes, but for his), yet would not I ween… God be well content that we should for his sake do to any creature like honor as to himself. For Scripture saith that he will not give his glory from him, nor to any other creature like honor as to himself. And therefore the schools, as I hear say, devise a treble difference in worshipping, calling the one dulia, the reverence or Hyperdulia worship that man doth to man, as the Latria bondsman to the lord; the second, hyperdulia, that a man doth to a more excellent creature, as to angels or saints; the third, latria, the veneration, honor, and adoration that creatures doth only to God. In which of these parts ye put the worshipping of saints, I am neither so well seen therein to tell nor so curious greatly to care. But this I see

1 wind out against: get around  1, 6 what: why  2 against: as opposed to 3 given: given  4 only Christ: Christ alone  5 again: back  6 may: can  10–11 so fain would that we did well: so ardently want us to do well 12–13 I were content were done them: would be fine with me that they be done 14 injury: insult  16 ask . . . of them: ask of them help and healing 19–20: James 1:17.  23 would not I ween: I would not think  25–26: See Isaiah 42:8.  27 schools: universities  34–35 so well seen therein: well enough versed in them
well: If any of all these three kinds of worship be better than other…the images hath it. For they have all that ever we can do. For what
do we to God when we do worship him in that fashion that they call
latria… but we do the same to saints and images both? If it stand
in kneeling… we kneel to saints and their images. If in praying…
we pray as bitterly to them as to God. If in censing and setting up
of candles… we cense them also—and set some saint seven candles
against God’s one. So that whatsoever fashion of worshipping latria
be, the same is as largely done to saints and images as to God. And
this not unto images only—which, though they have no life, have
yet some shape and fashion after man—but, as men ween, unto pigs’
bones also, sometimes. For what reverent honor is there daily done
under the name and opinion of a saint’s relic… to some old
rotten bone that was haply sometime, as Chaucer saith, a bone of
some ‘holy Jew’s sheep’! See we not that some one saint’s head is showed in
three places? And some one whole saint’s body lieth in diverse countries,
if we believe the lies of the people. And in both the places is the one
body worshipped, whereas the one or the other is false… and one body
mistaken for another—an evil man, haply, for a good. And yet
will the priests of both places take offerings and toll men thither
with miracles, too. In which case either must ye say that the miracles
of the one place be false and feigned… or else that miracles make not your
matter good, nor prove your pilgrimages true. And yet might all
this gear be much the better borne if it were true that ye defend
the things with… when ye say that in worshipping of saints and
images, men worship neither the one nor the other as gods, but
the images for the saints and the saints for God. But, now, as it
seemeth, the matter is in deed far otherwise. For the people pray to
the saints for their necessities—putting, thereto, trust for their petitions
in the saints themselves, as though God gave it not, but they.

Note
And in the images put the people their
trust instead of the saints themselves. For albeit
that it might stand with reason, as ye have answered me, that, presupposed
the miracles in these pilgrimages to be done by God, the

1 worship: veneration  2, 4, etc. images: statues  2 hath / have: get
3, 26 worship: venerate  4 stand: consist  6 bitterly: intensely  9 largely: liberally
11 some shape and fashion after man: some humanlike shape and features
11 ween: suspect  13–15: See the prologue to the Pardoner’s Tale.
14, 19 haply: perhaps  14 sometime: at one time  15 showed: displayed
20 toll: lure  22 the one place: i.e., the one place or the other // feigned: faked
22–23 make not your matter good: do not substantiate your contention
23 true: legitimate  24 gear: stuff  25 worshipping: venerating
28 deed: fact; actuality  29 thereto: moreover  33 with: to
people might then with reason go seek and visit such places as
God by miracle declared that he would have himself or his holy
saints sought and honored—yet, now, this answer toucheth
the point but in part, and matcheth not the whole matter. For the
people do not only visit these places and there do all the worship
to the saints that they can possibly do to God (with hope of their
help from the saints themselves… which they should well wit only to be
given by God), and thus, by this demeanor, make the saints God’s
fellows—that is to say, the servants matches with their Master,
and the creatures mates to the Maker—but also use themselves in as
religious fashion, and as fervent affection, to the images of stone or
tree… as either to saint or God. And plainly take these images for the
saints themselves and for God himself. And put in these images of their
pilgrimages their full hope and whole trust, that they should put in
God.

“Which, besides that I have said before, appeareth well in this:
that they will make comparisons between Our Lady of Ipswich
and Our Lady of Walsingham… as weening that one image more of
power than the other; which they would never do but if instead of
our Lady they put their trust in the image itself. And the people in
speaking of our Lady… ‘Of all Our Lady’s,’ saith one, ‘I love best Our
Lady of Walsingham.’ ‘And I,’ saith the other, ‘Our Lady of Ipswich.’ In
which words what meaneth she but her love and affection to
the stock that standeth in the chapel of Walsingham or Ipswich?

“What say you when the people speak of this fashion in their pains
and perils: ‘Help, Holy Cross of Bradman!’ ‘Help, our dear Lady of
Walsingham!’ Doth it not plainly appear that either they trust in the
images in Christ’s stead and our Lady’s—letting Christ and our Lady
go—or take, at the leastwise, those images so… that they ween they
were verily, the one Christ, the other our Lady herself? And so, every
way, the faith and devotion withdrawn from God, that should have
it, and our hearts by these images blinded and set upon the dead
stocks and stones! Now see the good fruit, also, that followeth thereupon.
I let pass over the faivery and falsehood that is therein used among—
sometimes by the priests, sometimes by beggars—in feigning of false
miracles. Look what devotion men come thither with. With the

1 with: in accord with  // seek: seek out  2 declared: made known
3 sought: approached  3–4 toucheth the point but in part: is only partly on-target
4 matcheth not the whole matter: does not take care of the whole problem
5 worship: reverence  7 wit: know  8 demeanor: behavior
9 fellows: colleagues; confreres  // matcher: peers  10 mates: equals
10 use: conduct  11 as fervent: i.e., show as fervent an
11, 12, etc. image(s): statue(s)  11 of: i.e., made of  12 tree: wood
13 of: at  14 pilgrimages: pilgrimage sites  16 that: what
18, 29 ween(ing): think(ing)  19 but if: unless
24 stock: tree stump (as a contemptuous term for “statue”)  25 of: in
28 in Christ’s stead and our Lady’s: instead of in Christ and our Lady
30 every: either  31 withdrawn: withheld  // that: who  32 dead: lifeless
34 faivery: fraud  // falsehood: deception  // used: perpetrated
34 among: on occasion  35 feigning: making up
most come they that most abuse themselves; such, I mean, as most
trust have, and blind faith, in these blind images. But the most
part that cometh… cometh for no devotion at all, but only for
good company, to babble thitherward and drink drunk there… and
dance and reel homeward. And yet here is not all. For I tell you
nothing now of many a naughty pack, many a fleck and his make,
that maketh their images’ meetings at these wholesome hallows.
And many that seemeth an honest housewife at home… hath help of a
bawd to bring her to mischief as she walketh abroad about her
pilgrimages. I heard once, when I was a child, the good Scottish
Friar Donald friar Father Donald, whom I reckon surely
for a saint… if there be any in heaven—I
heard him preach at Paul’s Cross that ‘our Lady was a virgin, and
yet at her pilgrimages be made many a foul meeting.’ And loud
Mark this, ye Londoners! he cried out, ‘Ye men of London, gang on
yourselves with your wives to Willesden, in the devil’s name, or else keep them at heme with you—with sorrow!’
And surely so… many good men ween it were best, considering that
those voyages be but wandering-about vanity or superstitious
devotion—and the next door to idolatry, when men have their
affections instead of God bound to blocks and stones! And, now,
since that this gear is such, what marvel is it though (as I said
before) the devil be glad to give attendance thereon, and do for his
part what he may to help his own devices forward? Or what
marvel is it though God in this accursed world, when we fall from
him to others, and from the honor of himself to his saints; when
we do as the paynims did—instead of God, worship maumets—and all this by falling to follow men’s glosses before his own
texts; what wonder is it though God again serve us as he served
them… and suffer the devil delude us as he did them, and make us
lean to false miracles as we fall willfully to false gods? Thus say
they,’’ quoth he, “that speak on that side. And yet much more than I
can call to mind. But surely, since ye willed me to forbear nothing, I
have, as I could, rather set to somewhat… not of mine own opinion,
but of mine own invention… than anything left out that I
could remember which I had ever heard any man lay to prove the miracles done at pilgrimages to be uncertain by whom they be wrought—or, rather, to prove that they should not be God’s miracles, but the devil’s wonders.”

The Eighteenth Chapter

The author deferreth the answer to the aforesaid objections… and first by Scripture he proveth that the church of Christ cannot err in any necessary article of Christ’s faith. And in this chapter be those words of Christ specially touched, “Super cathedram Mosi sederunt [etc.]: quae dicit vobis, facite; quae autem faciunt, nolite facere,” concerning the authority of the Church.

“Surely,” quoth I, “for my part, I can you very good thank; for ye have not faintly defended your part, as though it were a corrupted advocate… that would by collusion handle his client’s matter feebly for the pleasure of his adversary, but ye have said therein… I cannot tell whether as much as any man may say, but certainly, I suppose, as much as ye either have heard any man say or can yourself say. And at the leastwise much more than I have heard of any man else… or could have said of myself. And undoubtedly (as ye spoke of shooting, in the beginning), this gear, how near it goeth to the prick, we shall see after. But this I promise you: it would fain bear over the butt and all. For if it might hold and be bidden by, and were as well able to be proved true… as I trust to prove it false, the butt we shot at were quite gone… for any surety that we could reckon of our faith and Christendom. But, now, to come to the point… Since it is agreed already, between us, that at these images and pilgrimages, ‘miracles’ be there… either showed by God, for the comprobation of his pleasure therein, or wonders wrought by the devil, for our delusion and damnation: if it may either appear to us that they be not done by the devil… then will it well follow that they be done

9–10 specially touched: discussed in particular
10–11: “On the chair of Moses sit . . . : what they say, do; what they do, don’t do” (Mt 23:2–3).
13 surely: assuredly // can you very good thank: thank you very sincerely
15 advocate: defense attorney 17 may: could 19 of: from 20 of myself: on my own
20 as: since 21 gear: stuff 22 prick: bull’s-eye // after: later
22–23 it . . . all: i.e., in hitting bull’s eye it would have to knock over the support and all
23 might: could // bidden: abided 24 butt: target 25 were: would be
25 quite: entirely // surety that we could reckon: sureness that we could count on having
26 Christendom: Christianity 27 pilgrimages: pilgrimage sites 28 showed: performed
28 comprobation: confirmation 30 may: can // appear: be made evident
by God; or if it be proved to be done by God for the good of his church… then will it be clear enough that they be no wonders wrought by the devil, to the deceit of Christian people. And since that either other of these parts proved… implieth the reproof of your purpose, I will assay to show, and trust right well to prove you, the truth of our side… by some one of these ways, or, peradventure, by both: that is to wit, as well in proving that God doth these miracles… as in reproving and confuting that they should be done by the devil. And first would I fain meet with your objections and answer them forthwith, while they be fresh, saving that meseemeth better for the while to defer them… forasmuch as some things there be whereupon it will be requisite that we first be both agreed; without which we were likely to walk wide in words and run all at riot, so loose that our matter could neither have ground, order, nor end.

“Now, if I were in this matter to dispute with a paynim… that would make the question between their miracles and ours: albeit I should have a clear matter in the end, yet must it needs be a long matter, and much intricated, ere it should come at the end. And whole books would it hold, both the confuting of theirs… and unto them the assertion of our own—especially for that they receive not our Scripture… and between them and us nothing common to ground upon but reason. And if we should dispute with a Jew, less labor should we have, since that we should have with him, though he deny the New Testament, yet reason and the Old Testament agreed upon—wherein we should not vary for the text… but for the sentence and understanding. For therein we should have him stiffly withstand us.

“But, now, since we shall in our matter dispute and reason with those that agree themselves for Christian men, our dispicions are so much the shorter… in that we must needs agree together in more things. For we must agree in reason where faith refuseth it not; and, over that, we shall agree upon the whole corpus of Scripture—as well the New Testament as the Old. But in the interpretation we may, peradventure, stick. Is it not so?”
“Yes,” quoth he.

“Well,” quoth I, “is there any other thing wherein ye think that we shall vary... but the interpretation of the Scripture?”

“No that I remember,” quoth he, “except the conclusion itself whereupon we talk—as of the worshipping of images, or praying to saints— in which men think there can be no great question... if the Scripture be well interpreted.”

That that was said to the apostles was said to their successors.

“Ye do,” quoth I, “agree that such things as are mentioned in the Gospel... spoken by Christ unto Saint Peter and other his apostles and disciples... were not only said to themselves, nor only for themselves, but to them for their successors in Christ’s flock... and, by them, to us all; that is to wit, every man as shall appertain to his part?”

“Whereby mean you that?” quoth he.

Mt 5:20; 19:17–23 “I mean,” quoth I, “as, for example, when he said, ‘Nisi abundaverit iusticia vestra plus quam scribarum et Pharisaecorum, non intrabitis in regnum caelorum’ (‘Except your justice abound and exceed the justice of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall never come in heaven’); and where he saith, ‘If thou wilt enter into the kingdom of heaven, keep the commandments’— did not he say such things to them for all Christian men that should come after?”

“I think yes,” quoth he, “for the second word, concerning the commandments. But as for the first, that their justice should be better than the justice of the scribes and Pharisees... peradventure he spoke specially to his apostles themselves—that they should not be like the scribes and Pharisees, which commanded others many things... and did nothing themselves."

“That is in my mind,” quoth I, “well taken; and so doth holy Saint Augustine expound it. But, since ye think he said that word to his apostles specially, rather than to all his whole flock: whether think you that he said it only to them, or else to all others, also, that should after come in their places and succeed them in office?”

3 vary: differ 5 worshipping: venerating 7 well: rightly
15 whereby mean you that: what do you mean by that 19, 25, 26 justice: righteousness
24 word: statement 27, 32 specially: specifically 28 which: who
31 said that word: addressed that statement 32 all his whole: his whole entire
“Nay, before God,” quoth he, “to all the bishops he said it—and prelates and spiritual rulers of his church… that ever shall be in the Church—forbidding them to bind and lay upon other poor men’s backs importunable burdens… to the bearing whereof themselves will not once put forth a finger.”

“Very well said,” quoth I. “What think you, then, of that he said, ‘Do ye such things as they bid you do; but do not as ye see them do’?”

“In that would our Lord,” quoth he, “that all the people should do all that the prelates should command… as far as was commanded in the Law, by God; but he meant no further. And therefore he said that they sat ‘upon the chair of Moses’… and he willed that they should for that cause be obeyed. And therein he meant in such things only as they should command… that were by God commanded the people… in the law given to Moses. And that Christian men, in like wise, obey the bishops and prelates… commanding only such things as himself hath commanded his people in his Gospel and his own law.”

“And in nothing else?” quoth I. “What meaneth it, then, that our Lord, in the parable of the Samaritan bearing the wounded man into the inn (of his Church), and delivering him to the host after that himself had dressed his wounds with ‘wine and oil’ and left with the host the two groats (of the two Testaments), promised the host besides: that whatsoever the host would bestow upon him more, he would, when he came again, recompense him therefor? And also, in that place that we spoke of, our Savior said that the scribes and Pharisees besides the law of Moses (on whose seat they sat)… did lay great fardels, and fast bound them, on other men’s backs… to the bearing whereof they would not move a finger themselves; and yet, for all that, he bade the people do what their prelates would bid them… though the burden were heavy… and let not to do it though they should see the bidders do clean the contrary. For which he added, ‘But as they do… do not you.’”

“By our Lady,” quoth he, “I like not this gloss! For it maketh all for the
bonds by which the laws of the Church bind us to more ado…
than the Jews were, almost, with Moses’ law! And I wot well Christ
Mt 11:28; Acts 15:10; Gal 5:13; Rom 8:21; Jas 2:12    said, ‘Come to me… ye that be overcharged…
and I shall refresh you.’ And his apostles
said that the bare law of Moses—besides
the ceremonies that were set to by the scribes and the Pharisees—
were more than ever they were able to bear and fulfill; and therefore
Christ came to call us into a law of liberty. And that was in taking
away the band of those weary ceremonial laws. And therefore
saith our Savior of the law that he calleth us unto—‘My yoke,’ saith
Mt 11:30     he, ‘is fit and easy, and my burden but
light.’ Whereby it appeareth that he meant
to take away the strait yoke and put on a more easy, and to take off
the heavy burden and lay on a lighter. Which he had not done if he
would lade us with a fardelful of men’s laws… more than a cart can
carry away.”

“The laws of Christ’s church,” quoth I, “be made by himself and his
Holy Spirit… for the governance of his people—and be not, in
hardness and difficulty of keeping, anything like to the laws
of Moses. And thereof durst I, for need, make yourself judge. For if ye bethink you well… I ween if ye were at this age now to choose,
you would rather be bound to many of the laws of Christ’s
The laws made by the Church
are of less difficulty than
the laws made by Christ.
Church… than to the circumcision alone.
Nor, to as much ease as we ween that
Christ called us, yet be not the laws that
have been made by his church of half the
pain, nor half the difficulty, that his own be… which himself
putteth in the Gospel, though we set aside the counsels. It is, I trow,
more hard not to swear at all… than not to forswear; to forbear
each angry word than not to kill; continual watch and prayer…
than a few days appointed. Then, what an anxiety and solicitude
is there in the forbearing of every idle word! What a hard threat,
after the worldly account, for a small matter! Never was there, almost,
so sore a word said unto the Jews by Moses… as is to us by Christ
in that word alone… where he saith that we shall of every idle

3 overcharged: overburdened  5 the bare law of Moses: just the law of Moses by itself
5 besides: apart from  6 ceremonies: observances // set to: added  9 band: bond
9 weary: wearisome  11 fit: made-to-fit  12 appeareth: is made clear
13 strait: tight-fitting  15 fardelful: sackful  21, 24 ween: think  28 though: even if
32 hard: severe  33 after the worldly account: from an earthly point of view
33 matter: thing  34 sore: distressing // word said: thing said
35 word: statement
word give account at the Day of Judgment. What say ye, then, by

Mt 19:3–9 divorces restrained, and liberty of divers
wives withdrawn, where they had

liberty to wed for their pleasure… if they cast a fantasy to any that they
took in the war?”

“One of that ware is enough,” quoth he, “to make any one man war!”

“Now, that is merrily said,” quoth I—“but though one eye were enough
for a fletcher… yet is he, for store, content to keep twain; and would
though they were sometime sore both… and should put him to some
pain. What ease, also, call you this: that we bound to abide all

sorrow and shameful death, and all martyrdom, upon pain of perpetual
damnation, for the profession of our faith? Trow ye that these easy
words of his ‘easy yoke’ and ‘light burden’ were not as well spoken to his
apostles as to you? And yet what ease called he them to? Called he not
them to watching, fasting, praying, preaching, walking; hunger,
thirst, cold, and heat; beating, scourging, imprisonment, painful
and shameful death? The ease of his yoke standeth not in bodily ease,
nor the lightness of his burden standeth not in the slackness of any
bodily pain (except we be so wanton… that whereas himself had

not heaven without pain, we look to come thither with play!), but

Look not to come to heaven it standeth in the sweetness of hope… whereby
with play.

Note we feel in our pain a pleasant taste of

heaven. This is the thing, as holy Saint
Gregory Nazianzen declareth, that refresheth

men that are laden and maketh our yoke easy and our burden
light; not any delivering from the laws of the Church—or from
any good temporal laws, either—into a lewd liberty of slothful
rest. For that were not an easy yoke, but a pulling of the head out of
the yoke! Nor it were not a light burden… but all the burden

discharged—contrary to the words of Saint Paul and Saint Peter
both… which as well understood the words of their Master as these
men do, and as a thing consonant and well agreeable therewith do
command us obedience to our superiors and rulers, one and other, in
things by God not forbidden… although they be hard and sore.

“But see for God’s sake how we be run a great way further than I thought to go when I began… and have left that we should go forth with.”

“It is no loss,” quoth he, “for there is a good thing well touched by the way.”

“Well,” quoth I, “let us go back again where we left. Since ye agree that Christ spoke his words not to his apostles only, for their own time, but such things as he said to them, he meant to all that should follow them—and thereof somewhat he spoke to them for the priests

*Mt 5:13*

only (as when he said, ‘Vos estis sal terrae’; ‘Ye be the salt of the earth’), and somewhat to the whole flock (as when he said, ‘Mandatum novum do vobis: ut diligatis invicem sicut ego dilexi vos’; ‘I give you a new commandment: that you love together as I have loved you’)—tell me, then, I require you: when Christ said to Saint Peter, ‘Satan hath desired to sift ye as men sift corn; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith shall not fail,’ said he this to him as a promise of the faith to be by God’s help perpetually kept and preserved in Saint Peter only?

*Jn 13:34; Lk 22:31–32*

Or else in the whole Church—that is to wit, the whole congregation of Christian people professing his name and his faith, and abiding in the body of the same… not being precided and cut off—meaning that his faith should never so utterly fail in his church but that it should whole and entire abide and remain therein?”

“Marry,” quoth he, “this is good to be advised of. For though Christ, for the more part, such things as he spoke to one spoke to all—

*Mt 13:37*

according to his own words ‘Quod uni dico, omnibus dico’ (‘That I say to one, I say to all’)—yet some things he said and meant particularly, as he spoke it.

*Mt 14:28*

As when he bade Saint Peter come upon the water to him, he bade not the remnant come so. And so may it peradventure be that this word was spoken and meant toward Peter alone.”

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1 although: even if 2 sore: distressing 4, 8 left: veered off (from) 4, 31 that: that which; what 4 go forth: be going ahead 6 touched: treated of 6 by: along 8 where: to where 11 thereof . . . them: in some part, what he said to them was 14 somewhat: in some part 16 together: one another 17 require: ask of 19 corn: wheat 25 precided: excommunicated 28 marry: wow 28 good to be advised of: a good thing to reflect on 29 more: most 34 remnant: rest 35 word: thing
“That will be,” quoth I, “very hard to hold. For his faith after failed. But since that upon his first confession of the right faith, that Christ was God’s Son, our Lord made him his universal vicar

Peter head of the Church and, under him, head of his church; and that for his successor he should be the first,

upon whom and whose firmly confessed faith he would build his church… and (of any that was only man) make him the first and chief head and ruler thereof: therefore he showed him that his faith—that is to wit, the faith by him confessed—should never fail in his church.

Nor never did it, notwithstanding his denying. For yet stood still the light of faith in our Lady, of whom we read in the Gospel continual assistance to her sweetest Son, without fleeing or flitting. And in all others we find either fleeing from him one time or other… or else doubt of his resurrection after his death—his dear mother

Our Lady’s candle only except. For the signification and remembrance whereof the Church yearly, in the Tenebrae lessons, leaveth her candle burning still… when all the remnant, that signifies his apostles and disciples, be one by one put out. And since his faith in effect failed, and yet the faith that he professed abode still in our Lady, the promise that God made was, as it seemeth, meant not to him… but as head of the Church. And therefore our Lord added thereto, ‘And thou being one of these days converted… confirm and strengthen thy brethren.’ In which, by these words, our Savior meant and promised that the faith should stand forever; so that the gates of hell should not prevail thereagainst. Or else might ye say that these words spoken to Saint Peter—‘Feed my sheep’—was meant but for himself… and no commandment to any successor of his, or any bishop or prelate. And by that means might ye say also that these words of Christ’s promise made unto his disciples—that the Holy Ghost should instruct them of all things—were only meant for themselves in their own persons, and not that ever he should instruct his church after their days. And when he said, ‘Wheresoever be two or three gathered together in my name, there am I myself among them,’ we shall say by this means… that he meant but of his own disciples in his own time, while he was here with them; and not that he would be likewise
present with such other congregations in his church after. And finally, then were these words frustrate—where he said, ‘Lo, I am with you all the days to the world’s end’—if he should mean it but with them that heard him speak it. Then should it appear… that he had intended a church only of them and for their time. And then, from their death hither, all were done.”

“Verily, sir,” quoth he, “I can well agree that all such things was spoken by Christ to make them sure that the faith should never fail in his church. Howbeit, if I durst doubt in that point, one thing is there that somewhat sticketh in my mind.”

“Doubt on,” quoth I, “between us twain, and spare not; nor let not to tell me what moveth you.”

“Sir,” quoth he, “I think that God setteth no more by faith than he doth by charity. But as for charity and good works, with virtuous living—shall cool and decay in the Church, as our Savior saith in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew: ’Because iniquity shall abound, the charity of many men shall cool.’ And surely methinketh it is well near all gone already.”

“God forbid!” quoth I. “For albeit that it greatly day by day decayeth… and much people naught… yet be there many good men about—and shall be always, though they be few in comparison of the multitude. And yet is it not all one, of other virtues and of faith—that is to wit, of knowledge and belief of the articles of our faith; I mean of such articles as we be of necessity bound to believe. For albeit that the flock of Christ shall never lack good and devout, virtuous people, yet shall both the best be sinners… and also, much more the multitude shall ever have the faith that I speak of… than shall have the goodness of living.”

“Why so?” quoth he.

“For two causes,” quoth I. “One, the malice of the people whereby they will not be so ready to live well as to believe well. For the people themselves will better keep the faith than other virtues, since it is a thing of less labor to know what they should believe—and to believe it, also, when they know it—than it is to work well. For

It is less labor to believe than to work well.
though the knowledge and belief bring many men to the labor of good works, yet the world, commonly, and the frailty of our flesh, with the enticement of our ghostly enemies, make us willingly and wittingly, well knowing and believing the good, yet to walk in the worse; as doth sometimes the sick man that, believing his physician, and having had also, right often, good proof by his own experience to his pain before, that some certain meat or drink shall do him harm… doth yet, of an importunate appetite, fall for his little pleasure to his great pain and hurt.

“Another cause is,” quoth I, “the goodness of God, which, how far soever his people fall from the use of virtue, shall not, yet, as himself hath promised, suffer them to fall from the knowledge of virtue; not only for the manifestation of his justice—that their own conscience may condemn them in doing the things that themselves know to be naught—

but also to the intent they may still have among them a perpetual occasion of amendment. For if the faith were once gone, and the church of Christ fallen in that error… that they believed vice to be virtue, and idolatry to be the right way of God’s worship—then had they no rule to guide them to better. And therefore, while we be not in error of understanding and faith, howsoever we fall… or how often soever we sin… we see the way to turn again by grace to God’s mercy. But if faith were gone, all were gone; and then had God here no church at all.”

The Nineteenth Chapter

The author proveth that if the worship of images were idolatry, then the Church, believing it to be lawful and pleasant to God, were in a misbelief and in a deadly error. And then were the faith failed in the Church; whereof Christ hath promised the contrary, as is proved in the chapter before.

“Surely, sir,” quoth he, “that God made not his church for a while, but to endure till the world’s end—that is there no Christian man but
he will well agree. And since his church cannot stand without faith, which is the entry into Christendom (for as Saint Paul saith, ‘Accedentem ad Deum oportet credere’; ‘Whoso will come to God must needs believe’), no man will deny but that faith is, and always shall be, in his church. And that his church not in faith only, and the knowledge of the truths necessary to be known for our soul health, but also to the doing of good works and avoiding of evil… is, hath been, and ever shall be specially guided and governed by God and the secret inspiration of his Holy Spirit.”

“Well,” quoth I, “then… if the Church have faith, it erreth not in belief.”

“That is truth,” quoth he.

“It should err,” quoth I, “if it believed not all the truths that we be bound to believe.”

“What else?” quoth he.

“What and we believed,” quoth I, “all that is true… and, over that, some other thing not only false, but also displeasant to God? Did we not then err in our necessary belief?”

“Whereby mean you that?” quoth he.

“As thus,” quoth I: “if that one believeth in all the three Persons of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—and therewith were persuaded that there were a fourth Person besides, equal and one God with them.”

“He must,” quoth he, “needs err in his necessary belief, by which he is bound to believe in the Trinity. And that fellow believeth in a Quaternity!”

“That is,” quoth I, “the whole Trinity and one more.”

“But we be not only not bound,” quoth he, “to believe in any more… but also bound not to believe in any more.”

“Very well,” quoth I, “then erreth he as much, and as far lacketh his right belief, that believeth too much… as he that believeth too little; and he that believeth something that he should not… as he that believeth not something that he should.”

“What else?” quoth he. “And what then?”

“Marry, this,” quoth I: “If we believe that it were lawful and well done to
pray to saints, and to reverence their images, and do honor to their relics and visit pilgrimages; and then where we do these things, they were in deed not well done… but were displeasant to God… and by him reputed as a diminishment, and a withdrawing, of the honor due to himself… and therefore, before his Majesty, reproved and odious and taken as idolatry: were not this opinion a deadly, pestilent error in us… and a plain lack of right faith?"

“Yes, before God,” quoth he.

“But ye grant,” quoth I, “that the Church cannot err in the right faith necessary to be believed, which is given and always kept in the Church by God.”

“Truth,” quoth he.

“Then followeth it,” quoth I, “that the Church in that it believeth saints to be prayed unto, relics and images to be worshipped, and pilgrimages to be visited and sought… is not deceived, nor doth not err; but that the belief of the Church is true therein. And thereupon also followeth that the wonderful works done above nature… at such images and pilgrimages, at holy relics, by prayers made unto saints… be not done by the devil, to delude the church of Christ therewith, since the thing that the Church doth… is well done and not idolatry, but by the great honor done unto saints… God himself the more highly honored, in that his servants have so much honor for his sake. And thereof followeth it… that himself maketh the miracles, in comprobation thereof.

“Also, if it be true that ye have granted—that God keepeth, and ever shall keep, in his church the right faith and right belief by the help of his own hand, that hath planted it—then can it not be that he shall suffer the devil to work wonders like unto his own miracles to bring his whole church into a wrong faith. And then, if those things be not done by the devil, I trow ye will not then deny but they be done by God. And so is yet again our purpose doubly proved. First, in that ye grant that God will not suffer his church to err in his right faith; secondly (which pursueth thereupon), by that he hath by many a visible miracle declared… that this faith and manner of observance is very pleasant and acceptable unto him—which
miracles, since they be proved to be done upon good ground and cause, appear well to be done by God, and not by our ghostly enemy.”

_The Twentieth Chapter_

The messenger allegeth that the perpetual being and assistance of Christ with his church to keep it out of all damnable errors… is nothing else but his being with his church in Holy Scripture; whereof the author declareth the contrary.

“How think you?” quoth I. “Is there anything in this matter amiss?”

“I cannot well tell,” quoth he, “what I might answer thereto. But yet methink that I come to this point by some oversight in granting.”

“Well,” quoth I, “men say sometimes, when they would say or do a thing and cannot well come thereon, but miss, and oversee themselves, in the assay—‘It maketh no matter,’ they say; ‘ye may begin again and amend it; for it is neither Mass nor Matins.’ And albeit in this matter ye have nothing granted but that is in my mind as true as the Matins or the Mass either—yet if ye reckon yourself over-swift in granting, I give you leave to go back and call again what ye will.”

“In good faith,” quoth he, “full hard were it in mine own mind… otherwise to think but that God shall always keep the right belief in his church. But yet, since we come to this conclusion by the granting thereof… let us look once again thereupon. And what if men would say (as I heard once one say myself) that God doth, peradventure, not keep always faith in his church… to give them warning with… when they do well and when the contrary; but since he hath given them, and left with them, the Scripture— in which they may sufficiently see both what they should believe and what they should do—he letteth them alone therewith, without any other special cure of his upon their faith and belief. For therein they may see all that them needeth, if they will look and labor therein. And if they will not—the fault is their own sloth and folly! And whoso be willing to amend and be better… may always have light to see how… by recourse to the reading of Holy Scripture; which

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2 appear well: are clearly shown  //  ghostly: spiritual  
4 allegeth: claims
5 assistance: active presence  //  declareth: asserts  
9 matter: argument
10 well: really  //  might: could  
11 methink: it seems to me
11 oversight: careless mistake  
12 would: want to  
13 well come thereon: quite get at it  
14–15 may begin again: can start over  
18–19 call… will: retract whatever you want to  
20–21 full… but: it would in my own view be very hard to think otherwise than
23 let us look once again thereupon: let’s take another look at it  
24 one: someone
26 warning: notice  //  when they: i.e., as to when they  
30 cure… upon: tending… to  
31 them needeth: is necessary for them
32 sloth: laziness  //  folly: foolishness  
33 whoso: whoever
shall stand him in like stead as ye said before that God kept the faith for, by his special means, in his church.”

“If this,” quoth I, “were thus, whereof should Christ’s promise serve, ‘Ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad finem saeculi’ (‘I am with you all the days till the end of the world’)? Wherefore should he be here with his church… if his being here should not keep his right faith and belief in his church?”

“Marry,” quoth he, “these words well agreeth withal! For God is, and shall be until the world’s end, with his church in his Holy Scripture! As Abraham answered the rich man in hell, saying, ‘They have Moses and the prophets’… not meaning that they had them all at that time present with them… but only that they had their books. And so Christ, forasmuch as the Scripture hath his faith comprehended therein (according to his own words, ‘Scrutamini scripturas, quia scripturae sunt quae testimonium perhibent de me’; ‘Search you the Scriptures, for they bear witness of me’), therefore he said, ‘Ego vobiscum sum usque ad finem saeculi’ (‘I am with you to the end of the world’)—because his Holy Scripture shall never fail… as long as the world endureth.

‘Heaven and earth,’ saith he, ‘shall pass away, but my words shall never pass away.’

“And therefore in his Holy Writing is he with us still; and therein he keepeth and teacheth us his right faith if we list to look for it; and else, as I said, our own fault and folly it is.”

“If God,” quoth I, “be none otherwise with us but in Holy Scripture, then be those words of Christ ‘I am with you to the world’s end’ somewhat strangely spoken… and unlike the words of Abraham whereunto ye resemble them. For Christ left never a book behind him of his own making… as Moses did, and the prophets. (And in their books was he spoken of, as he was in the Gospel.) Wherefore, if he had spoken and meant of Scripture, he would have said that

3 whereof should Christ’s promise serve: then to what avail would be Christ’s promise
5 wherefore: why 5, 6 should: would 8 marry: good heavens
8 well agreeth withal: are quite compatible with that
14 comprehended: contained 25 list: care 31 resemble: liken
32 making: writing 34 spoken and meant of: been speaking of and meaning
they should have with them still his evangelists and writers of his
gospels, as Abraham said ‘they have Moses and the prophets’…
which were the writers of the Books that the Jews had. Christ,
also, said ‘I am with you till the end of the world’—not ‘I shall be,’
“but ‘I am’… which is the word appropriated
to his Godhead. And therefore that word
am is the name by which our Lord would, as he told Moses,
Ex 3:9–15
be named unto Pharaoh, as a name which
from all creatures (since they be all
subject to time) clearly discerneth his Godhead—which is ever
being and present, without difference of time past or to come.
In which wise… he was not in his Holy Scripture; for that had
beginning… and at those words spoken, was not yet all written.
For of the chief part, which is the New Testament, there was yet at
that time never one word written. And also, we be not sure, by any
promise made, that the Scripture shall endure to the world’s end…
although I think verily the substance shall. But yet, as I say, promise
Mt 24:35
have we none thereof. For where our Lord
saith that his ‘words’ shall not pass away…

nor one iota thereof be lost, he spoke of his promises made, indeed,
as his faith and doctrine taught: by mouth and inspiration. He
meant not that of his holy scripture in writing there should never an
iota be lost—of which some parts be already lost; more, peradventure,
than we can tell of. And of that we have, the books in
some part corrupted with miswriting. And yet the substance
of those words that he meant be known… whereas some part of the
writing is unknown. He saith also that his Father and he should
send the Holy Ghost… and also that he would come himself. Whereto
all this, if he meant no more but to leave the books behind them and go
their way? Christ is also present among us bodily, in the Holy

Christ is bodily present in the Sacrament. And is he there present with
us for nothing? The Holy Ghost taught
many things… I think unwritten, and whereof some part was
never comprised in the Scripture yet unto this day—as the article
which no good Christian man will doubt of… that our blessed Lady
was a perpetual virgin, as well after the birth of Christ as before.

3 which: who 10 discerneth: distinguishes
13 at those words spoken: i.e., at the time that those words ("I am with you . . .") were spoken
15 never: not // sure: assured 20 spoke: was speaking 21 taught: i.e., were taught
24 that: that which 25 with miswriting: through miscopying 27 should: would
28 whereto: to what end 29 but to: than that they would
33 unwritten: not in writing 34 comprised in: incorporated into // as the: such as that
35 doubt of: i.e., doubt the truth of
“Our Savior also said unto his apostles that when they should be accused and brought in judgment, they should not need to care for answer; it should even then be put in their minds. And that he meant... not only the remembrance of Holy Scripture (which before the paynim judges were but a cold and bare alleging), but such words newly given them by God, inspired in their hearts, so effectual... and confirmed with miracles... that their adversaries, though they were angry thereat, yet should not be able to resist it. And thus, with secret help and inspiration, is Christ with his church—and will be to the world’s end—present and assistant. Not only spoken of in writing.”

The Twenty-first Chapter

The author showeth that if it so were indeed as the messenger said—that is to wit, that Christ continued with his church none other wise but only by the leaving of his Holy Scripture to them... and that all the faith, also, were only therein—then should it yet follow that as far as the necessity of our salvation requireth, God giveth the Church the right understanding thereof. And thereupon followeth further that the Church cannot err in the right faith. Whereupon is inferred eftsoons all that the messenger would have fled from before. And thereon also specially followeth that all the texts of Holy Scripture which heretics allege against images... or any point of the common belief of Christ’s Catholic Church... can nothing serve their purpose.

“But now would I wit... since ye reckon him none other wise present than in Holy Scripture... whether, then, doth he give his church the right understanding of Holy Scripture, or not?”

“What if he do not?” quoth he.

“Marry,” quoth I, “then yourself seeth well... that they were as well
without! And so should the Scripture stand them in as good stead
as a pair of spectacles should stand a blind friar!"

“That is very truth,” quoth he. “But therefore hath his wisdom and
goodness provided it so to be written that it may be well understood… by the collation and consideration of one text with another.”

“May it not also be,” quoth I, “that some of them which do read it
diligently… and diligently compare and consider every text, how it may stand with other… may yet, for all that, mistake and misunderstand it?”

“Yes,” quoth he, “it may be so. For else had there not been so many heretics as there hath been.”

“Very truth,” quoth I. “But, now, if all the faith be in Holy Scripture… and no part thereof anywhere else… but that it must be therein, altogether, learned: were it then sufficient to understand some part aright… and some other part wrong… in the necessary points of our faith? Or must we, as far forth as concerneth the necessity thereof, misunderstand no part?”

“We must,” quoth he, “mistake no part, as far as necessarily concerneth our faith; but we must have so the right understanding of altogether… that we conceive no damnable error.”

“Well said!” quoth I. “Then if we must, we may. For if we may not… we must not. For our Lord bindeth no man to an impossibility.”

“We may,” quoth he.

“If we may,” quoth I, “then may we either by good hap fall into the right understanding… or else by natural reason come to it… or else by supernatural grace be led into it.”

“That is truth,” quoth he. “Needs must it be one of these ways.”

“Well,” quoth I, “we will not yet search which; but I would first wit whether Christ have a church in the world continually, and so shall have to the world’s end, or else hath one sometimes… and sometimes none at all. As we might think that he had one while he was here himself… and peradventure a while after… and haply none at all never since, nor shall not again—we wot ne’er when.”

“Nay,” quoth he, “that cannot be, in no wise, but that he must needs have his church continue still somewhere. For else how could he

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1 without: i.e., without it
3, 12 very truth: quite true
4, 21, etc. may: can
4 well: rightly
5 collation: comparison
6 them which: those who
8 stand: accord // other: another // mistake: misinterpret
12 all the: the whole
15 necessary: essential
20 altogether: the whole thing
24 hap: luck
27 needs must it: it must necessarily
29 wit: (like to) know
32 haply: perhaps
33 wot ne’er: have no idea
34 in no wise: by no means
35 still: uninterrupted

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be with them continually to the world’s end—in Scripture or otherwise— if they with whom he promised to be… and continue to the world’s end… should not continually so long endure? Or how

Mt 28:20

‘Lo, I am with you all the days to the world’s end,’ if before the world’s end he were away some days?—as he were indeed from the Church some days, if in some days he had no church.”

“Well,” quoth I, “yet would I wit one thing more: can he have a church without faith?”

“Nay,” quoth he, “that were impossible.”

Church

“Forsooth,” quoth I, “so were it. For his Church

Faith

church is a congregation of people

Reason

gathered into his faith. And faith is the first substantial difference discerning Christian men from heathen—as reason is the difference dividing man from all the kinds of brute beasts. Now, then, if his church be, and ever shall be, continual, without any times between (in which there shall be none); and without faith it may never be; and no part of the faith is (as ye say) elsewhere had but in Holy Scripture… and all it must be had; and also, as we were agreed a little while before, there must be none error adjoined thereto; and therefore, as far as toucheth the necessity of faith, no part of Scripture may be mistaken, but all must be understood rightly… and may be rightly understood either by hap, reason, or help of grace: it necessarily followeth that by one or other of these ways, the church of Christ hath always, and never faileth, the right understanding of Scripture, as far as belongeth for our necessity.”

“That followeth indeed,” quoth he.

“Well,” quoth I, “let pass for the while what followeth further; and since the Church so hath… let us first agree by which of these three ways the Church hath it: whether by hap, reason, or grace.”

“By hap,” quoth he, “were a poor having. For so might it hap to have and hap to fail.”

15 discerning: distinguishing 17 kinds: species 19, 23, 24 may: can 20 as ye say: according to you 23 toucheth the necessity of faith: concerns the essentials of the faith 23 mistaken: misinterpreted 25, 32 hap: luck 27 faileth: lacks 33 by hap: by luck // were: would be 33–34 hap to have and hap to fail: happen to have it and happen to lack it
“Then,” quoth I, “since it hath it ever, it cannot be by hap. What think you, then, of reason?”

“As little,” quoth he, “as any man thinketh! For I take reason for plain enemy to faith!”

“Ye take, peradventure, wrong,” quoth I. “But thereof shall we see further after. But now since ye so think... ye leave but the third

The Spirit of God leadeth the Church into all truth.

“No, surely,” quoth he.

“Verily,” quoth I, “where reason may between divers texts stand in great doubt which way to lean, I think that God with his Holy Spirit leadeth his church into the consent of the truth... as himself said that the Holy Ghost (whom he Jn 16:13 would send) should lead them into all truth. He said not that the Holy Ghost should at his coming write them all truth, nor tell them all the whole truth by mouth, but that he should by secret inspiration lead them into all truth. And therefore surely, for a true conclusion, in such means by God himself—by the help of his grace (as yourself graneth)—the right understanding of Scripture is ever preserved in his church from all such mistaking whereof might follow any damnable error concerning the faith. And thereof doth there first follow that besides the Scripture itself, there is another present assistance and special cure of God... perpetual with his church... to keep it in the right faith, that it err not by misunderstanding of Holy Scripture—contrary to the opinion that ye purposed when ye said that Christ’s being with his church was only the leaving of his Holy Scripture to us. And over this, if God were no other wise present than ye speak of, yet since it is proved that his church, for all that, ever hath the right understanding of Scripture, we be come to the same point again that ye would so fain flit from. For if the Scripture (and nothing but the Scripture) doth contain all thing that we be bound to believe,
and to do, and to forbear; and that God also therefore provideth for
his church the right understanding thereof, concerning
everything necessary for us that is contained in Scripture: then
must there needs follow thereupon… the thing that ye feared lest
ye had wrongly and unadvisedly granted; that is to wit, that
God always keepeth the right faith in his church. And thereupon followeth
further… the remnant of all that is in question between us:
that the faith of the Church in the worship that it believeth to be
well given unto saints, relics, and images… is not erroneous, but
right. And thereupon followeth also that the miracles done at such
places be none illusions of damned spirits, but the mighty
hand of God—to show his pleasure in the corroboration thereof,
and in the excitation of our devotion thereto.”

“Indeed,” quoth he, “we be come back here with going forward,
as men walk in a maze.”

“Ye have not, yet,” quoth I, “lost all that labor. For though ye have
half a check in this point, yet have ye (if ye perceive it) mated
me in another point… by one thing that is agreed between us
now.”

“What is that?” quoth he.

“This,” quoth I, “that I have agreed as well as you: that God hath
given his church the right understanding of Scripture in as far forth
as belongeth to the necessity of salvation.”

“In what point,” quoth he, “hath that mated you?”

“Why,” quoth I, “see you not that? Nay, then will I not tell you… but if
ye hire me; or if I tell you, yet shall ye not win the game thereby.
For since ye see it not yourself, it is but a blind-mate.”

“Let me know it yet,” quoth he, “and I am agreed to take none
advantage thereof.”

“On that bargain be it,” quoth I.

“Ye wot well,” quoth I, “that against the worshipping of images
and praying to saints, ye laid certain texts of Scripture… to
prove it forbidden… and reputed of God for idolatry. For answer
whereof… when I laid that men must lean to the sentence that the
Church and holy doctors of the Church give to those texts, ye

1 forbear: refrain from doing       5 wrongly and unadvisedly: incorrectly and rashly
7 remnant: rest—8 worship: veneration—9 well: rightly
16 lost all that labor: wasted all that effort—17, 18, 24 in: on—18 agreed: settled
21 agreed: assented to // as you: i.e., as you have—23 belongeth: pertains
23 necessity of: essentials for—25 why: oh // but if: unless
26 hire me: pay me (to)—31 against: with regard to // worshipping: venerating
32, 34 laid: claimed—33 reputed of God for: regarded by God as
34 lean to: go along with // sentence: meaning(s)—35 holy doctors: theologians
The Church cannot said they were but men’s false glosses against God’s true texts. And now, since ye grant, and I also, that the Church cannot misunderstand the Scripture to the hindrance of the right faith, in things of necessity; and that ye also acknowledge this matter to be such… that it must either be the right belief, and acceptable service to God, or else a wrong and erroneous opinion and plain idolatry: it followeth of necessity that the Church doth not misunderstand those texts that ye or any other can allege and bring forth for that purpose, but that all these texts be so to be taken and understood… as they nothing make against the Church, but all against your own opinion in this matter.

“And thus have ye suddenly answered yourself… to all those texts, out of hand, with a gloss of your own… as true as any text in the Bible, and which all the world will never avoid… except they would make the Scripture serve the Church of naught—or rather to their hindrance than furtherance in the faith. For so were it… if it might be that God giveth them not the good understanding thereof, but suffereth them to be deceived and deluded in errors… by the mistaking of the letter.”

“Marry,” quoth he, “this is a blind-mate indeed!”

“Surely,” quoth I, “these two things seem to me two as true points… and as plain to a Christian man… as any petition of Euclid’s geometry is to a reasonable man. For as true as it is that every whole thing is more than its own half; as true is it indeed—and to every Christian man, faith maketh it as certain—

Two things most perfect and true in any such article as God upon pain of loss of heaven will that we believe; and thereupon necessarily followeth that there is no text of Scripture well understood… by which Christian people are commanded to do the thing which the Church believeth that they may lawfully leave undone, nor any text whereby we be forbidden anything which the Church believeth that they may lawfully do.”
Because the messenger had in the beginning showed himself desirous and greedy upon the text of Scripture… with little force of the old fathers’ glosses, and with dispraise of philosophy and almost all the seven liberal sciences:

the author therefore incidentally showeth what harm hath happed sometimes to fall to divers of those young men whom he hath known to give their study to the Scripture only, with contempt of logic and other secular sciences, and little regard of the old interpreters. Wherefore the author showeth that in the study of Scripture, the sure way is with virtue and prayer… first to use the judgment of natural reason, whereunto secular literature helpeth much. And secondly, the comments of holy doctors. And thirdly—above allthing—the articles of the Catholic faith, received and believed through the church of Christ.

“And for because we speak of Scripture now… and that the Church in things needly requisite to salvation hath the right understanding of Holy Scripture; wherein I perceive ye be studious of the text alone, without great force of the old fathers’ interpretations, or any other science—of which ye reckon all seven, save grammar, almost to serve for naught—I have of you so good opinion… that I trust all your study shall turn you to good. But surely I have seen to some folk so much harm to grow thereof… that I never would advise any man else in the study of Scripture to take that way.”

“Why so?” quoth he.

“For I have known,” quoth I, “right good wits… that hath set all other learning aside—partly for sloth, refusing the labor and pain to be sustained in that learning; partly for pride, by which they could not endure the redargution that should sometimes fall to their part in dispicsions. Which affections… their inward, secret favor toward themselves… covered and cloaked under the

3 desirous and greedy upon: eager for and avidly focused on
4, 20 force: taking into account 4, 10, 20 old: early
4 glosses: explanations; interpretations // dispraise: disparagement
5 all the seven liberal sciences: all seven of the liberal arts
6 incidentally showeth: mentions in passing 7, 30–31 fall to: befall
7 divers: some 10 showeth: asserts 11 sure way: safe course
14 comments: commentaries // holy doctors: biblical exegetes
14 allthing: everything 15 received: accepted 16 through: throughout
18 needly: necessarily 19 be studious of: are studying
21–22 almost to serve for naught: to be of almost no use
24 to grow thereof: come of that 27 wits: minds; intellects
28 for sloth: out of laziness // refusing: shunning // labor: effort
30 redargution: refutation 31 part: side // dispicsions: debates
31 affections: dispositions 32 favor: partiality
pretext of simplicity… and good Christian devotion borne to the
love of Holy Scripture alone. But in little while after, the damnable
spirit of pride that unawares to themselves lurked in their hearts…
5
hath begun to put out his horns and show himself. For then
have they longed… under the praise of Holy Scripture… to set out to
show their own study. Which because they would have seem the
more to be set by… they have first fallen to the dispraise and derision
of all other disciplines. And because in speaking or preaching of
such common things as all Christian men know, they could not
10
seem excellent, nor make it appear and seem that in their study
they had done any great mastery: to show themselves therefore
marvelous, they set out paradoxes and strange opinions…
against the common faith of Christ’s whole church. And because they
have therein the old holy doctors against them… they fall to the
15
contempt and dispraise of them, either preferring their own
fond glosses against the old cunning and blessed fathers’ interpretations—
or else lean to some words of Holy Scripture that seem
to say for them… against many more texts that plainly make against
them; without receiving or ear giving to any reason or authority
of any man quick or dead, or of the whole church of Christ, to the
20
contrary. And thus once proudly persuaded a wrong way, they
take the bridle in the teeth and run forth like a headstrong
horse, that all the world cannot pluck them back; but with
sowing sedition, setting forth of errors and heresies, and
spicing their preaching with rebuking of priesthood and
prelacy… for the people’s pleasure—they turn many a man to ruin,
and themselves also. And then the devil deceiveth them in their
blind affections.

“They take for good zeal to the people their malicious envy. And
25
for a great virtue their ardent appetite to preach; wherein they
have so great pride for the people’s praise… that preach I ween they
would… though God would his own mouth command them the
contrary.”

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40
for a great virtue their ardent appetite to preach; wherein they
have so great pride for the people’s praise… that preach I ween they
would… though God would his own mouth command them the
contrary.”

“Why should ye ween so?” quoth he. “Or whereby can ye be sure that ye

4 his: its  // himself: itself  5–6 set out to show: put on display; show off
7 set by: esteemed  // fallen to: applied themselves to  7, 15 dispraise: disparagement
11 done any great mastery: accomplished any great feat  12 marvelous: extraordinary
12 strange: startling; unconventional  14 old holy doctors: early theologians
15 preferring: pitting  16 fond: idiotic  // cunning: learned
17 lean to: base themselves on  18 say for them: back them up  // make: go
19 receiving: accepting  // ear giving: (even) listening  // reason: reasoning
20 quick: living  23 that: so that  // pluck: pull  25 rebuking: criticizing
27 in: with regard to  28 blind affections: reckless passions
29 zeal to: strong concern for  31, 34 ween: think  32 though: even if
32 his: i.e., with his  34 so: that
do not now misconstrue their good mind? Hard is it, oftentimes, to judge another man’s deed that hath some appearance of evil, because the purpose and intent may make it good. And what peril is it, then, where the deed appeareth good, there to judge the mind and intent for naught… which who can see but God? As the Scripture saith, ‘Dominus autem intuetur cor’ (‘Only God beholdeth the heart’). And therefore saith our Savior, ‘Judge not before the time.’"

“I judge not,” quoth I, “but upon open things and well apparent. For I speak but of those whose erroneous opinions in their preaching… and their obstinate pride in the defense of their worldly worship… well declareth their minds. And some have I seen which, when they have for their perilous preaching been by their prelates prohibited to preach, have, that notwithstanding, proceeded on still… and, for the maintenance of their disobedience, have amended the matter with a heresy, boldly and stubbornly defending… that since they had cunning to preach, they were by God bound to preach… and that no man, nor no law that was made or could be made, had any authority to forbid them. And this they thought sufficiently proved by the words of the Apostle

\[ Acts 5:29 \]
\[ ‘Oportet magis oboedire Deo quam hominibus.’ \]

As though these men were apostles now specially sent by God to preach heresies and sow sedition among Christian men… as the very apostles were indeed sent and commanded by God to preach his very faith to the Jews!

One of this sort, of this new kind of preachers, being demanded why that he used to say in his sermons about… that nowadays men preached not well the Gospel, answered that he thought so… because he saw not the preachers persecuted, nor no strife nor business arise upon their preaching. Which things, he said and wrote, was the fruit of the Gospel, because Christ said, ‘Non veni pacem mittere, sed gladium’ (‘I am not come to send peace into the world, but the sword’). Was not this a worshipful understanding—that because Christ would make a division among infidels, from the remnant of them to win some, therefore these apostles would sow some cockle of dissension among the Christian people… whereby Christ might
How strife and persecution lose some of them? For the fruit of strife among the hearers and persecution of the preacher cannot lightly grow among Christian men but by the preaching of some strange novelties, and bringing up of some newfangled heresies, to the infection of our old faith.

“One wist I that was for his pertinacity in that opinion… that he would and might and was bound to preach, any prohibition notwithstanding—when he was, after divers bold and open defenses thereof, at last before folk honorable and few… reasoned with, and not only the law showed him to the contrary of his opinion (which law was made at a general council), but also by plain authority of Holy Scripture proved that his opinion was erroneous: he so perceived himself satisfied… that he meekly acknowledged his error, and offered to abjure it and to submit himself to penance. But on the morrow, when he came forth in open presence of the people… and there saw many that had oft heard him preach: of his secret pride, he fell in such an open passion of shame that those should hear him go back with his word… which had before had his sermons in great estimation, that at the first sight of the people… he revoked his revocation… and said aloud, that he might well be heard, that his opinion was true… and that he was the day before deceived in that he had confessed it for false. And thus he held his own stubbornly, without reason… till the books were showed him again… and himself read them before all the people… so that he perceived the audience that stood about him… to feel and understand his proud folly… in the defense of his indefensible error. And thereupon at the last… yielded himself again. Such secret pride had our ghostly enemy conveyed into the heart of him… which, I assure you, seemed in all his other outward manner as meek a simple soul as a man should have seen in a summer’s day. And some of them let not with lies and perjury to defend themselves; and some to stand in defense of their errors, or false denying of their own deed, to their great peril of the fire… if their judges were not more merciful than their malice deserveth. And all this done because (as themselves doth at last confess) they think if they abjure, they shall after be suffered to preach again. Such a scabbed

1 strife: conflict  3 lightly: easily; readily  4 strange: alien 5 bringing up: bringing in; introducing  7 wist I: I knew  8 might: could 8 bound: obliged  9 divers: several  // open: public 11 to the contrary of: that runs counter to 12 a general council: This was the Fourth Lateran Council, held in 1215; see its third canon. 14 perceived: considered  18 in such an open passion: into such an obvious feeling 19 with: on // which had before had: who before had held  21 aloud: loudly 22 opinion: contention // true: correct  23 deceived: mistaken 24 without reason: irrationally  25 himself: he himself  29 ghostly: spiritual 32 let: scruple  35 deserveth: merits  37 after: afterward // suffered: allowed 37 scabbed: scabby
itch of vainglory catch they in their preaching... that though all the world were the worse for it, and their own life lie thereon, yet would they long to be pulptised. And this, I say, hath come of some that have with contempt of all other learning... given them to Scripture alone. Whose affections of pride and sloth hath not in the beginning been perceived to themselves... but have accounted their vices for devotion."

"Would ye, then," quoth he, "condemn that manner of study... by which a man hath so great affection to the Scripture alone... that he, for the delight thereof, feeleth little savor in anything else? But that we should lose time in philosophy—the mother of heresies!—and let Scripture alone?"

Nothing can be compared to Scripture.

"Nay," quoth I, "that mind am I not of. There was never thing written in this world that can in any wise be comparable with any part of Holy Scripture. And yet I think other liberal sciences a gift of God also... and not to be cast away... but worthy to wait, and as handmaids to give attendance, upon divinity. And in this point I think not thus alone. For ye shall find Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine, Saint Basil, and many of the old holy doctors, openly and plainly of the same opinion. And of divinity reckon I the best part to be contained in Holy Scripture. And this I say for him that shall have time thereto... and from youth intendeth to-the-Church-ward, and to make himself, with God's help, meet for the office of a preacher. Howbeit, if any man either happen to begin so late... that he shall, peradventure, have no time thereto; or else, any man of youth to have that fervent appetite unto Scripture... that he cannot find in his heart to read anything else (which affection whoso happeth to have given Very good counsel him... is very fortunate, if he with grace and meekness guide it well)—then would I counsel him... specially to study for the virtuous framing of his own affections... and using great moderation and temperance in the preaching to other men. And in allthing to flee the desire of praise and show of cunning, ever mistrusting his own inclinations,
and live in dread and fear of the devil’s subtle sleight and inventions. Who though he lie in continual wait upon every preacher, to catch him into pride if he can—yet his highest enterprise and proudest triumph standeth in the bringing of a man to the most abuse of that thing… that is of his own nature the best. And therefore great labor maketh he, and great boast if he bring it about, that a good wit may abuse his labor… bestowed upon the study of Holy Scripture.

“For the sure avoiding whereof, my poor advice were in the study thereof… to have a special regard to the writings and comments of old holy fathers. And yet ere he fall in hand with the one or the other… next grace and help of God (to be gotten with abstinence and prayer and cleanness of living), before all things were it necessary to come well and surely instructed in all such points and articles as the Church believeth. Which things once firmly had, and fastly for undoubted truths presupposed, then shall reason and they be two good rules to examine and expound all doubtful texts by, since the reader shall be sure that no text is so to be understood as it standeth against them both… or against any point of the Catholic faith of Christ’s church. And, therefore, if it seem to stand against any of them, either shall the light of natural reason with the collation of other texts… help to find out the truth, or else (which is the surest way) he shall perceive the truth in the comments of the good holy doctors of old, to whom God hath given the grace of understanding; or, finally, if all that he can either find in other men’s works… or invent, by God’s aid, of his own study… cannot suffice to satisfy, but that any text yet seem unto him contrary to any point of the Church’s faith and belief, let him then, as Saint Augustine saith, make himself very sure that there is some fault either in the translator… or in the writer… or, nowadays, in the printer—or, finally, that for some Lean to the faith of the Church. one let or other, he understandeth it not aright.

And so let him reverently acknowledge his ignorance—lean and cleave to the faith of the Church as to an undoubted truth, leaving that text

1 sleight: trickery  2 inventions: schemes  5 most abuse: worst misuse
5, 7 his: its  6, 7 labor: effort  7 wit: mind; intellect // abuse: misuse
8 bestowed upon: spent on  9 were: would be  11, 24 comments: commentaries
11 old holy fathers: early fathers of the Church
11 ere he fall in hand: before he gets involved  12 the one: i.e., either the one
12 next to; right after  14 well and surely: very solidly  16 fastly: steadfastly
18 doubtful: unclear; question-raising // so: in such a way  19, 21 stand(eth): go(es)
22 with . . . of: i.e., along with a putting together of this scriptural text with others
22 find out: arrive at  23 surest: safest  24 holy doctors: theologians
26 invent: come up with // of: by  27 study: reflection
29–30 make himself very sure: completely rest assured
30 there is some fault: i.e., some mistake has been made  30, 31 in: i.e., by
31 writer: transcriber // for: because of  32 let: hindrance
to be better perceived when it shall please our Lord with his light
to reveal and disclose it. And in this wise shall he take a sure way…
by which he shall be sure of one of two things: that is to wit,
either to perceive and understand the Scripture right… or else, at
the leastwise, never in such wise to take it wrong… that ever may
turn his soul to peril.”

The Twenty-third Chapter

The messenger objecteth against the counsel of the
author… in that he would that the student of Scripture
should lean to the commenters and unto natural reason—
which he calleth enemy to faith. And thereupon the
answer of the author to those objections, specially
proving that reason is servant to faith, and not enemy…
and must with faith and interpretation of Scripture needs
be concurrent.

“Sir,” quoth he, “I will not say nay but this way will do well. Howbeit,
I fear me that we were likely to build up many errors if we
square our timber and stones by these three rules—men’s glosses,
reason, and faith… not that we find in Scripture, but that we bring
with us to Scripture. For first, as for the commenters that ye speak of,
either their comments tell us the same tale that the text doth…
or else another. If they tell me the same: I believe them only because
the text saith the same. And if they tell me another: then believe
I them not at all; nor naught I should, except I should believe men
better than God. And as for reason, what greater enemy can ye find
to faith than reason is?—which counterpleadeth faith in every
point! And would ye then send them twain forth to school together,
that can never agree together… but be ready to fight together and
either scratch out other’s eyes by the way? It seemeth also somewhat
strange… that when God hath left us in his Holy Scripture well and
sufficiently his doctrine whereby he would we should have

5–6 in . . . peril: to take it wrong in such a way as might put his soul in danger
10 lean to: rely on
12–13 specially proving: proving in particular
14 needs: necessarily
15 concurrent: compatible
16 say nay but: deny that
21 comments: commentaries
24 naught: not at all
25 better than: i.e., more than I believe
26 counterpleadeth: contradicts
28 together: with one another
29 either scratch out other’s eyes: scratch each other’s eyes out
29 by the way: on the way (to school)
30 well and: good and; quite
warning of all such things as he would we should believe and

What is left us in Scripture do, or leave undone, and hath left us the
Scripture for none other cause but for that
it should stand unto us for the witness of his will (declared us by
writing, that we should not say nay but we were warned), and none other
cause why the Scripture should be given us but to tell us his pleasure
and stir us to fulfill it… we shall now not shape our faith after the
Scripture… but first frame us a faith ourselves, and then shape the
Scripture of God thereby, and make it agree thereto. This were indeed a
good, easy way for a slothful mason that were an evil workman—
to make him a square, and a ruler, of lead… that when he list not to
take the labor to hew the stone to the square, he may bend the
square to the stone, and so shall he yet bring them together, at the
leastways.”

“As for the old commenters,” quoth I, “they tell you the same tale
that the text doth; but they tell it you more plain, as we shall more
talk of after. But surely ye beguiled me now, in that ye set reason so
short; for verily, I would never have went that ye would in Scripture
like worse a wise man than an unreasonable reader. Nor I cannot see
why ye should reckon reason for an enemy to faith… except ye reckon
every man for your enemy… that is your better and hurteth you not. Thus
were one of your five wits enemy to another, and our feeling should
abhor our sight… because we may see further by four miles than we
may feel. How can reason (but if reason be unreasonable) have more
disdain to hear the truth of any point of faith… than to see the
proof of many things natural… whereof reason can no more attain
to the cause than it can in the articles of the faith; but still, for any
power that reason hath to perceive the cause, she shall judge it impossible
after she prove it true… but if she believe her eye better than
her wit.

An adamant stone

“When ye see the adamant stone draw
iron to it, it grieveth not reason to look
thereon… but reason hath a pleasure to behold the thing that passeth
her power to perceive. For it is as plainly against the rule of reason

1 warning: notification // would we should: would have us
2 4 by: in
3 say nay but: deny that // warned: notified; informed
5 7 after: according to
8 frame: fashion
9, 22 were: would be
10 way: course of action // evil: bad
11 that: so that
12 12 list… hew: doesn’t want to go to the trouble of hewing
13, 24 may: can
15 old commenters: early commentators
17 after: later
17 now: i.e., just now // set: sold
18 went: thought
19 worse: less well
20 except: unless
22 wits: senses
23 abhor: loathe
24, 29 but: unless
24 unreasonable: irrational
30 wit: understanding
31 the adamant stone: i.e., a magnet
33 passeth: surpasses
34 perceive: understand
that a heavy body should move alone any other motion than downward… or that any bodily thing should draw another without touching… as is any article of the faith. Nor never was there yet cause by reason assigned that men may perceive for probable… but only that it is a secret property of the stone—which is as much to say as ‘I wot ne’er what.’ And yet, as I say, reason can believe that thing well enough… and be not angry therewith, nor strive against it. And yet all the rules that ever she learned tell her still that it may not be.”

“Yea,” quoth he, “but a man’s own eyes tell him that it may be. And that must needs content him.”

“May a man, then, better trust his eyes,” quoth I, “than his wit?”

“Yea, marry!” quoth he. “What may he better trust than his eyes?”

“His eyes may,” quoth I, “be deceived and ween they see that they see not, if reason give over its hold… except ye think the juggler blow his galls through the goblet’s bottom… or cut your girdle before your face in twenty pieces and make it whole again… and put a knife into his eye and see never the worse. And turn a plum into a dog’s turd in a boy’s mouth.”

Now happened it madly that even with this word came one of my folk and asked whether they should make ready for dinner!

“Abide,” quoth I, “let us have better meat first!” And therewith your friend and I began to laugh.

“Well,” quoth I, “make no haste yet for a little while.” And so went he his way, half out of countenance, weening that he had done or said somewhat like a fool—as he was one that was not very wise indeed… and wont so to do. And then said I to your friend, “Now ye see that reason is not so proud a dame as ye take her for. She seeth done indeed by nature that she cannot perceive how… and is well contented therewith. She seeth a fond fellow deceive her sight and her wit therewith, and taketh it well and merrily, and is not angry that the juggler will not teach every man his craft. And ween ye then that she will take it so highly that God himself, her Master and Maker, should do what him list… and then tell her what, and tell her not how? I pray you,” quoth I, “that our Lord was born of a virgin, how know you?”

4 probable: plausible 5 secret: hidden 6 wot ne’er: have no idea 7 strive: put up a fight 8 may not: cannot 10, 12, etc. may: can 12 wit: mind 13 marry: of course 14, 25, 32 ween(ing): think(ing) 14 that: that which; what 15 except: unless 15, 32 juggler: magician 16 galls: oak apples; i.e., little balls 16 girdle: belt 18 worse: less well 20 even with this word: at the very moment that this was said 21 folk: servants 22 abide: wait // let us have better meat: let’s get better food 25 out of countenance: flustered 26 wise: sensible 30 fond: silly 31 wit: understanding // well and merrily: quite cheerfully 33 so highly: with such indignation 34 what him list: what he pleases 35 pray: ask
“Marry,” quoth he, “by Scripture!”

“How know you,” quoth I, “that ye should believe the Scripture?”

“Marry,” quoth he, “by faith!”

“Why,” quoth I, “what doth faith tell you therein?”

“Faith,” quoth he, “telleth me that Holy Scripture is things of truth written by the secret teaching of God.”

“And whereby know you,” quoth I, “that ye should believe God?”

“Whereby?” quoth he. “This is a strange question. Every man,” quoth he, may well wot that!”

“That is truth,” quoth I. “But is there any horse, or any ass, that wotteth that?”

_Balaam’s ass_ “None,” quoth he, “that I wot of… but if

Nm 22:28–30 Balaam’s ass anything understood thereof.

For he spoke like a good reasonable ass.”

“If no brute beast can wit that,” quoth I, “and every man may, what is the cause why that man may and other beasts may not?”

“Marry,” quoth he, “for man hath reason and they have none!”

“Ah, well, then,” quoth I, “reason must he needs have, then, that shall perceive what he should believe. And so must reason not resist faith, but walk with her… and as her handmaid so wait upon her… that, as contrary as ye take her, yet of a truth, faith goeth

_Faith goeth never without reason._

will then wax copious and chop logic with her mistress… and fare sometimes as she were frantic: so if reason be suffered to run out at riot… and wax overly high-hearted and proud, she will not fail to fall in rebellion toward her mistres’s faith. But on the other side, if she be well brought up and well guided and kept in good temper, she shall never disobey faith, being in her right mind. And therefore let reason be well guided, for surely faith goeth never without her.

“Now, in the study of Scripture—in devising upon the sentence, in considering what ye read, in pondering the purpose of divers comments, in comparing together divers texts that seem contrary and be not—albeit I deny not but that grace and God’s especial
help is the great thing therein, yet useth he for an instrument
man’s reason thereto. God helpeth us to eat, also… but yet not without
our mouth. Now, as the hand is the more nimble by the use of some
feats, and the legs and feet more swift and sure by custom of
going and running, and the whole body the more wieldy and lusty
by some kind of exercise, so is it no doubt but that reason is by

Reason by liberal arts is study, labor, and exercise of logic,
quickened. philosophy, and other liberal arts corroborated
and quickened… and the judgment

both in them and also in orators, laws, and stories much
ripened. And albeit poets be with many men taken but for painted
words, yet do they much help the judgment… and make a man
among other things well furnished of one special thing…
without which all learning is half lame.”

“What is that?” quoth he.

“Marry,” quoth I, “a good mother wit! And therefore are, in mine
opinion, these Lutherans in a mad mind… that would now
have all learning save ‘Scripture only’ clean cast away… which
things (if the time will serve) be, as me thinketh, to be taken and had,
and with reason brought, as I said before, into the service of divinity.

And as holy Saint Jerome saith, ‘the Hebrews well despoil the Egyptians’
when Christ’s learned men take out of the pagan writers the riches
and learning and wisdom that God gave unto them, and employ the
same in the service of divinity about the profit of God’s chosen
children of Israel the church of Christ, which he hath of the
hard, stony paynims made the children of Abraham.”

The Twenty-fourth Chapter

The messenger maketh objections against the author…
in that he counseled the student of Scripture to bring the
articles of our faith with him for a special rule to construe
the Scripture by. And the author confirmeth his counsel
given in that behalf, declaring that without that rule,
men may soon fall into great errors in the study of Holy Scripture.

With this your friend held, as he said, himself “somewhat content” that reason was not “so great an enemy to faith” as she seemed; but yet he thought that she should have need rather to be well bridled than to bear much rule in the interpretation of Scripture. But as for the other point—that we should needs bring the faith with us already, as a rule to learn the Scripture by, when we come to the Scripture to learn the faith by—that thing he thought in no wise convenient, but a thing, he said, “much like as if we would go make the cart to draw the horse.”

“Well,” quoth I, “we shall see anon whether the cart draw the horse or the horse the cart. Or whether we be yet haply so blind that we see not well which is the cart, which is the horse.”

“First,” quoth I, “tell me, how old would ye that one were ere he come to the study of Scripture?”

“By my faith,” quoth he, “I would have a Christian man’s child begin therein very young… and therein continue all his life.”

“In good faith,” quoth I, “that like I not amiss… so that ye do not mean that ye would have him all his life learn nothing else. And yet that could I suffer too, and allow right well, in some. But yet, if he did never in his life learn aught else… how old think ye that he should be… ere he learned the articles of his belief in the Bible?”

“I cannot readily tell,” quoth he, “for I have not seen it assayed.”

“Well,” quoth I, “since we be not sure how long it would be in learning there… were it not best, then, that for that while, he were taught his Creed before, in his own mother tongue?”

“I deny not that,” quoth he, “that he should con his Creed before, because every Christian man’s child, by the law, should know his faith as soon as he could. But I say he should not therewith take upon him to judge and examine Holy Scripture thereby.”
“Well,” quoth I, “let this Christian child of ours alone for a while; and let us consider, if there were a good old idolater that never had heard in all his life anything of our belief, or of other god than only the man in the moon… whom he had watched and worshipped every frosty night—if this man might suddenly have the whole Bible turned into his own tongue, and read it over, think ye that he should thereby learn all the articles of the faith?”

“I think,” quoth he, “that he might.”

“Think ye so?” quoth I. “I put case that he believed that all the Book were lies!”

“Marry,” quoth he, “that may he by the Book itself learn the contrary! For the Book in telling its tale affirmeth its tale and teacheth it to be true.”

“Ye say very truth,” quoth I, “if it were all one to read a thing and learn a thing. But now might there be another book made also, with lesser wonders and fewer, and thereby less unlikely… and yet all untrue. And how should his mind give him then that this book telling so incredible wonders should be true?”

“Nay,” quoth he, “that thing must he needs believe, or else he can perceive nothing.”

“Well,” quoth I, “then is there one point of faith, one great lesson, to be learned without the Book—that must be learned somewhere, either by God or man—or else the whole Book will do us little service. And of whom we shall learn that… we shall see hereafter. But now suppose that this old idolater were thoroughly persuaded in his mind that all the Book were true. Think you, then, that he should find out therein all the articles of our faith?”

“I think,” quoth he, “that he should.”

“Think ye so?” quoth I. “Be it so, then. But think ye that he shall find them out all in a week?”

“Nay,” quoth he, “that can he not do.”

“Well,” quoth I, “then… since he shall not, at the leastwise, find them out all on a day… let us leave him a little while in seeking… and we shall return again after to him, and look what he shall have found. And in the mean season we shall go look again upon our good little godson, the boy, pardie, that we christened right now and

5, 8 might: could 6 turned into his own tongue: put into his own language
9, 25 all the: the whole 9, 11, etc. Book: Bible
11 marry: good heavens // that may he: of that he can 11, 22 by: from
14 all one: entirely the same 22 without: outside of 34 after: later
34 look: see 35 mean season: meantime 36 pardie: by golly // right: just
taught him his Creed and set him to Scripture. Were it need that
this child knew no more of his faith but his Creed before he go
to Scripture?"

"Methinketh," quoth he, "that it were enough."

"Be it so, then," quoth I.

"What if it should fortune him to find some text of Scripture
that should seem to him to be contrary to his Creed? As, for example,
if he happened upon the reading of these
words—'Dii estis, et filii Excelsi omnes'

('Gods be ye all, and the children of the High God')—what if he would
ween that since in these words it is said all good men be the 'children'
of God, our Savior Christ were not God's only-begotten Son,
but his son in such wise as God by the prophet calleth all good
men?"

"That could he not think," quoth he. "For he should in other parts
of Scripture find many places that should show him well the
contrary."

"Well said," quoth I, "and very truth. But, now, in the meantime…
will ye that he shall believe as that text shall seem to sound to
him, against his Creed… till he have found another text in
Scripture… that answereth it, and seemeth to him to say more
plainly the contrary?"

God's children by generation and acceptance

"Nay," quoth he, "not one hour! For he
seeth that though other good men be
called 'God's children' and 'gods,' yet
as they be not very gods, so be they not God's very, natural
children, by generation… but by acceptation; whereas the Creed
saith of our Savior that he is God's 'only-begotten Son'—
that signifieth him to be his son by generation!"

"That is," quoth I, "very true… and well and reasonably considered…
and according unto the very, right faith. But now consider… that ye
make him by and by fall to the squaring of his stones… like that
slothful mason that ye spoke of, with his leaden rule. For now ye make
him to examine the truth of this text of the Psalm… by the article
of the faith… which he brought with him—and by a collection and
discourse of reason. And so, forthwith, ye find both these rules

6 it should fortune him to: he should by chance
11 ween: thin
19–20 seem to sound to him: seem to him to imply
21 answereth it: goes against that understanding of his
26 very: actual; real
29 that signifieth him to be: which implies that he is
30 well and reasonably considered: very logically thought out
31 according unto: in accord with
32 by and by: immediately
33 slothful: lazy
35 collection: deducing
36 discourse of reason: process of reasoning
necessary to the discussion of Scripture. Of which twain ye would
in the beginning admit neither nether.

“But now go further. What if he would upon this text, ‘Homines
Ps 36:6 et iumenta salvabis, Deus’ (‘God, thou shalt
save both man and beasts’), ween that
beasts had immortal souls, as men have… and that man and beast should
be both saved at last—and so, that no deadly sin should be
punished with everlasting pain—till he came to other texts that
should prove well the contrary? Were that best? Or else were it better
that besides his Creed, he had knowledge before of these articles of our
faith—that only our souls be immortal, and not beasts’ also, and that
the pain of hell shall be for sinners everlasting—and that he may
thereby, with reason joined thereto, perceive that this text, ‘Thou
shalt save both men and beasts,’ is meant by some other kind of
saving and preserving here in this world, and not of bringing both
to heaven?’

“All this may he know,” quoth he, “by Scripture itself well enough!”
“That wot I well,” quoth I. “And yet, as plain as Christ speaketh of
Origen hell in the Gospel, Origen, for all that,
which neither was a naughty man nor
unlearned in Scripture, could not so clearly see it… but that he said
the contrary. And took the words of Christ in a wrong sense. And
would, peradventure, with one that would stick only upon the
words of Scripture (leaving the right sense thereof, which God and
his Holy Spirit hath taught his Church) bring him to a bay
therein… that he should be fain—not our child only, but also a well
elderly man and in Scripture well forward—to take him in conclusion
to the faith of Christ’s church.

“Now, if our child should read on the text of Scripture without
care of the comments, and without any further instruction
of the points of our faith than be specified in our common
Our common creed was made by the apostles.

creed… made in the beginning, as a brief
remembrance, by the apostles… not
setting out in so short a thing, and

clearly declaring, all that we be bound to believe: albeit that

2 neither nether: neither the one nor the other
3 upon: on the basis of
5 ween: think 6, 7 should: would 7 deadly: mortal
14 by: with reference to 18 wot: know 20 which: who // naughty: bad
23 one: someone // stick: fix; focus 24 leaving: prescinding from
25 to a bay: to such an impasse 26 fain: constrained // well: very
27 well forward: very advanced
27 take him in conclusion: betake himself in the end 29 read on: keep reading
30 care of the comments: concerning himself with the commentaries
31 of the: on the 32 made: composed 33 remembrance: reminder
35 declaring: explaining // bound: obliged
he should well find in Scripture many plain and open texts
whereby the Godhead of our Savior, and his equality with his
Father, may well and sufficiently be proved—yet were he not unlikely
by such other texts as seem to show him to be less than
his Father… to fall into the sect and heresy of the Arians. And
against those other texts proving his equal Godhead… to devise such
false glosses as they did. Whereas being before taught and confirmed
by the faith of the Church… that our Savior is one God,
and one equal substance, with his Father, he shall well perceive and
understand thereby that all the texts that seem to make him
less… be nothing to be understood of his Godhead, but of his
manhood only. As when we commonly speak of ourselves, and of
our own nature, and say ‘we’ shall die, and worms eat ‘us’ up
and turn ‘all’ to dust… we mean all this by our body only, and
nothing intend thereby to deny the immortality of our
soul.

“We may not dine today if I should reckon you the tenth part
of such things as we must needs (upon loss of heaven) believe…
which neither our child with his only Creed, and much less
our old idolater without creed, should so find out by Scripture…
but that they were both well likely to take the Scripture to the
wrong part… except we take with us for a rule of interpretation
the articles of our faith.”

*The Twenty-fifth Chapter*

25 The author, taking occasion upon certain words of
the messenger, declareth the preeminence, necessity, and
profit of Holy Scripture… showing, nevertheless, that many
things have been taught by God without writing, and
many great things so remain—yet unwritten—of truths
necessary to be believed. And that the New Law of Christ is
the law so written in the heart… that it shall never out of
his church. And that the law there written by God is a
right rule to interpret the words written in his Holy
Scripture. Which rule with reason and the old interpreters…
the author showeth to be the very sure way to wade with… in the great stream of Holy Scripture.

“Why, then,” quoth he, “this were as much to say as that God had not well written his Holy Scripture, if he have caused it to be written so as men may be so soon deceived therein… that they were as likely—and as it seemeth by you, more likely—to fall into a false way than find out the true! And better were it, then, that God had not given us the Scripture at all… than to give us a way to walk wherein we were more likely to sink than save ourselves!”

“Holy Scripture,” quoth I, “both is such as I have said… and yet nothing followeth it thereupon that God hath not caused it to be written well, or that it had been better to have kept it from us. And albeit that in this point were a great occasion of a long tale… in declaring and making open that God hath in that writing of Holy Scripture used so high wisdom, and showed such a wonderful temperance, that the very strange/familiar fashion thereof… may to good men and wise well declare… that as it was written by men… so was it indited by God—yet, passing over the praise, I will speak one word or twain for the answer of such blame as ye lay thereto.

For it is almost a common thing among men to speak sometimes… as though they could amend the works of God. And few men be there, I ween, but they think that if they had been of God’s counsel in the making of the world… though they dare not be so bold to say that they could have made it better… yet if they might have ruled it, he should have made many things of another fashion. And for all that, if he would yet call us all to counsel… and change nothing till we were upon everything all agreed, the world were well likely till Doomsday to go forth on as it goeth already—saving that I wot ne’er whether we would all agree to be winged.

“But as for the Scripture, shortly: God hath so devised it that he hath given the world therein an inestimable treasure as the case standeth. And yet we should haply nothing have needed thereof… if the wounds of our own folly had not of our great necessity and God’s great goodness required it. For at our creation he gave but

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1 very sure: really safe // to wade with: by which to wade
5 may be so soon deceived: can so easily get tripped up 8 walk: proceed 11 nothing followeth it thereupon: in no way does it follow from that
13 in . . . tale: this point provides a great opportunity for a long discourse 14 declaring: explaining // open: evident 15 used: employed // so: such
16 temperance: mingling; putting together // strange: foreign; unfamiliar 17 declare: show 18 indited: composed 19 answer: rebuttal
19 blame: blameworthiness 21 works: doings 22 ween: suspect 22 of God’s counsel: consulted by God 24 to: as to // might: could
25 should: would // of: in 29 saving . . . would: only I don’t know that we wouldn’t 31 shortly: to put it succinctly
33 nothing have needed thereof: have had no need of it 34 necessity: poverty
two precepts or three... by his own holy mouth, to our first parents. And as for all that was for them to do besides, the reason which he had planted in their souls... gave them sufficient warning. Whereof the whole sum stood, in effect, in the honor of God and God’s friends... with love of each to the other... and to their offspring and to their Tree of Knowledge. And that was for them continual.

The precepts given by God’s mouth were three. Twain commanding generation and eating; the third forbidding theTree of Knowledge. Whereas the other twain, albeit they were thereto bound by the precept, yet were not they and their posterity bound thereto at all hours and all places. But need was it in the beginning to give them knowledge thereof... forasmuch as they had no hunger to warn them of the one... nor sensual, rebellious appetite to warn them of the other. But after that they were by God once admonished thereof—then did reason interpret the remnant; whereby they wist that they should eat for conservation of their bodies, and engender for propagation of their kind. And since they perceived that these two things was the end and intent of those commandments... they thereby, consequently, knew when it was time and place and occasion convenient to fulfill them. But when they had once, at the subtle persuasion of the devil, broken the third commandment, in tasting the forbidden fruit; being then expelled out of Paradise: then, concerning their food and engendering, not only reason oft showed them... what was honest and profitable, but also sensuality... what was beastly and pleasant; which sensuality labored so busily to cause man to set by delight above good and convenient... that for the resistance thereof, it then became to be the spiritual business and occupation of man... so to preserve and bring up the body... that it were not suffered to master the soul; and so to rule and bridle sensuality... that it were subject and obedient unto reason—as God willed the woman to be subject and obedientiary of man. Wherein God would that we were learned rather to suffer our sensual parts complain and mourn...
than to follow their own hurt and ours too. As it had been
better for our father Adam and us all... that he had suffered his
wife, our mother Eve, to be sad and angry both—and, like a woman,
to weep too—than to have eaten the apple for fellowship, to please her
with.

“Now did all the sin anon spring up, for the more part, upon
the occasion of feeding and engendering; whereof sprung covetousness,
glutony, sloth, wrath, and lechery. And many times
pride and envy, as one perceiving himself in these things in
better condition or worse than another... so began to conceive a
setting by himself... with contempt of other, or envy and hatred
to some other—saving that pride sometimes also sprang out of the
soul, and so liked itself that it envied the better, as Cain did
Abel; and for to be the more set by, pride longed superfluously to
get by covetousness and greediness many folks’ livings in his own
hands, to make other folks serve him and honor and hang
upon him for necessity.

“And of all these mischiefs was always sensuality ready to administer
The windows of the body matter... and by all the doors and windows
of the body—by feeling, tasting,
smelling, sight, and hearing—ceased never to send in occasions
to the soul; nor the devil never ceased, for his part, diligently
to put forward. Against whom did reason resist... with good
counsel given to the soul; and good spirits appointed by
God... gave their help also; and God assisted with his aid and
grace... where he found the person willing to work therewith.
And in this manner continued man long time—not without
revelation of Christ once to come. Which faith delivered to
the father... went by the mouth to the son... and so, from child
to child, heard and believed among them. And whatso were
God’s pleasure besides (that nature and reason could not plainly
show them), God, of his goodness, by special message gave them
undoubted knowledge—as he did to Noah, Lot, and Abraham,
and divers others—whereof some be since written and comprised
in Scripture... and of likelihood not all. For well probable is it
that the patriarchs in divers things that they did… as in their divers marriages, and some such other things as then were by them well done for the time—were to them appointed specially by God, for causes well known to himself… and unknown to us, and the things now forbidden us… and therefore to us unlawful, except God’s like ordinance or dispensation should hereafter, in general or particular, be revealed to the contrary.

“But so was it after… that the world waxing worse, right good and virtuous lineages declined and decayed. And by the lewd conversation of evil people, fell by disorder in such a blindness… that albeit some were there always that perceived well their duty, yet were the common people of the children of Israel by custom of sin so darkened in their natural knowledge… that they lacked in many things the right perceiving… that reason, had it not been by evil custom corrupted, might verily well have showed them.

“For the remedy whereof, God, of his endless mercy, by the law written with his own finger unto Moses in the tables of stone—by the Ten Commandments—put in remembrance again certain conclusions of the law of nature… which their reason (overwhelmed with sensuality) had then forgotten. And to the end that they should keep his behests the better, he gave them a great heap of the laws—and ceremonies—more, to keep them in straitly, for straying abroad in riot. And wrought great wonders that they should well see… that those things were his own deed—whereby they might have the more dread to transgress them. And there, in writing, he gave a warning also of Christ: that God would once send them one springing of themselves… to whom they should give hearing in stead of Moses. Of whom also (as well before as after), by patriarchs and prophets, by figures and prophecies, God ceased not in such wise to foreshow his coming, his cause, his living, his

3 well: morally 6 except: unless (and until) 9 after: later // waxing: getting
10 decayed: deteriorated // lewd conversation: vile consorting
11 disorder: breach of public order // in: into 19 tables: tablets
20 conclusions: dictates 24 ceremonies: rituals
25 keep them in straitly: tightly restrain them in
25–26 for straying abroad in riot: lest they should wildly stray all over the place
27 deed: doing 28 dread: fear 28–29 a warning: an intimation
29 once: one day 29–30 one springing of themselves: a descendant of theirs
31 stead: (the) place 33 foreshow: foretell; prognosticate
dying, his resurrection, and his holy acts… that if pride and envy had not letted it… the figures and prophecies set and compared with his coming, conversation, and doings might well have made all the Jews to know him. And for the perceiving and good understanding of the law written, he sent always some good men whose words, well living, and sometimes also manifest miracles showed therewith, never left them destitute of sufficient knowledge that longed to learn the Law… not to plead it, and for glory to dispute it, but to teach it again meekly—and, as man’s frailty could suffer it, especially to fulfill and keep it.

“Yet after all this—when the world was in a more decay and ruin of all virtue—then came our Savior Christ to redeem us with his death… and leave us his New Law, whereof was long before prophesied by the prophet Jeremiah.

Jer 31:31–33
‘Lo, the days be coming,’ said our Lord, ‘when I shall order and dispose to the house of Israel and the house of Judah a new covenant’ (or ‘testament’). ‘I shall give my law in their minds. And I shall write it in their heart. And I will be their Lord, and they shall be my people.’ This law written in men’s hearts… was, according to the words of the prophet, first brought by our Savior to the house of Israel and the house of Judah, to whom, as himself saith, he was specially sent. ‘I am not sent,’ saith our Lord, ‘but unto the sheep that are perished of the house of Israel.’ And also he said, ‘It is not good to take the bread from the board of the children and cast it to dogs.’ But yet not only the ready towardness of some paynims… caused them to be partakers of that bread, but also, soon after, the stubbornness and obstinate infidelity of the Jews… caused Saint Paul and the apostles to say unto their face, ‘The Gospel of Christ was ordained by God to be first preached unto you. But since that ye refuse it—lo, we depart from you to the Gentiles.’ And so was in their stead… the Church gathered of all the world abroad. All which notwithstanding, both were there at that time out of the Jews converted and made many a good Christian man—

2 letted: prevented
3 conversation: demeanor
6 well: upright
8 plead: push // dispute: argue over
11 more decay: worse (state of) decline
10 suffer it: allow
20 according to: in accordance with
22 himself: he himself
23 specially: expressly
26 board: meal table
27 towardness: tractableness
28 paynims: pagans
29 infidelity: unbelief
35 abroad: at large
and many of the same people turned unto Christ since—and in conclusion
the time shall come… when the remnant that shall be
then left… shall save themselves by the same faith.

“This is called the law of Christ’s faith, the law of his holy
Gospel. I mean not only the words written in the books of his
evangelists… but, much more specially, the substance of our faith
itself; which our Lord said he would write in men’s ‘hearts’…
not only because of the secret operation of God and his Holy
Spirit in justifying the good Christian—either by the working with
man’s good will… to the perfection of faith in his soul, or with
the good intent of the offerers… to the secret infusion of that virtue
into the soul of an innocent infant—but also for that he first without
writing revealed those heavenly mysteries by his blessed mouth…
through the ears of his apostles and disciples into their holy hearts.

Or rather, as it seemeth, it was inwardly infused into Saint Peter’s
heart… by the secret inspiration of God, without either writing
or any outward word.

“For which cause, when he had, upon Christ’s question demanding,
‘Of whom say you that I am?’ answered and said,

‘Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God, which art come
into this world’—

Mt 16:15–17

“Our Savior said again unto him,
‘Thou art blessed, Simon, the son of
John… for neither flesh nor blood hath revealed and showed this
to thee… but my Father, that is in heaven.’ And thus it appeareth that the

Peter, prince of the apostles

faith came into Saint Peter’s heart—as
to the prince of the apostles—without

hearing, by secret inspiration; and into the remnant by his

The law, ere ever it was
written in the Book, was
written in men’s hearts.

confession and Christ’s holy mouth. And
by them in like manner—first without
writing, by only words and preaching—
so was it spread abroad in the world…
that his faith was by the mouths of his holy messengers put into
men’s ears, and by his holy hand written in men’s hearts, ere ever
any word thereof, almost, was written in the Book. And so was it
convenient, for the law of life rather to be written in the lively minds of men… than in the dead skins of beasts. And I nothing doubt but all had it so been that never Gospel had been written, yet should the substance of this faith never have fallen out of Christian folks’ hearts, but the same Spirit that planted it, the same should have watered it, the same should have kept it, the same should have increased it.

“But so hath it liked our Lord… after his high wisdom to provide that some of his disciples have written many things of his holy life, doctrine, and faith; and yet far from all. Which, as Saint John saith, the world could not have comprehended.

These books are tempered, by the secret counsel of the Holy Ghost, so plain and simple… that every man may find in them that he may perceive; and yet so high, again, and so hard… that no man is there so cunning but he may find in them things far above his reach, far too profound to pierce unto. Now were to the Christian people the points of Christ’s faith (with which points our Lord would have them charged) known, as I say, and planted, before; and by reason thereof, they far the better understood those books. And although there might haply be some texts which were not, yet, of necessity for them to perceive—yet by the points of their faith were they warned, that no text might there be construed contrary to their faith.

“And none evangelist was there, nor none apostle, that by writing ever sent the faith to any nation… but if they were first informed by word, and that God had begun his church in that place.

“And for my part, I would little doubt but that the evangelists and apostles both… of many great and secret mysteries spoke much more openly and much more plainly by mouth, among the people, than ever they put it in writing, forasmuch as their writings were likely enough at that time to come into the hands of pagans and paynims—such hogs and dogs as were not meet to have those precious pearls put upon their noses, nor that holy food to be dashed in their teeth. For which cause Saint

1 convenient: fitting // lively: living
2–3 nothing doubt but all: have no doubt that even
3 never Gospel had: not one Gospel had ever 6 kept: tended
8 liked: pleased // after: in accord with 12 comprehended: contained
13 tempered: made up; composed (in such a way as to be)
14–15 that he may: what he can 15, 23 perceive: understand
17 cunning: knowledgeable 22 haphly: perhaps 23 points: articles
24 warned: put on guard // that: so that 27 but if: unless
28 word: spoken word 31 secret: esoteric 35 paynims: heathens
Peter in his first sermon unto the Jews... abstained from the declaration of Christ’s Godhead and equality with his Father—as our Savior himself, when the Jews that were unworthy to hear it... were offended with that he told them plainly, that he was the Son of God, withdrew the doctrine from them again... and covered it with the verse of the prophet, ‘I have said ye be gods, and sons of the high God, all’; as though he would say, ‘What grieveth it you that name in me... which name God by the prophet hath given to all good men?’ In which demeanor he denied not the truth that he had said of himself... but he blinded their willfully winking eyes... in hiding and putting up again the jewel that he began to bring forth and show them, the bright luster whereof their bleared eyes might not endure to behold.

“And what marvel though the apostles thus did in their speech before infidels, or writing that might come into pagans’ hands, when it appeareth upon the epistles of Saint Paul... that among the Christian flock, where he taught them by mouth, he told them not all the truths at one tale—not only for that it were too long, but also for that in the beginning they could not, haply, well have abided it. And therefore, as Christ said to his disciples, ‘I have more to say to you, but ye be not able to bear it yet’ (which once appeared, what time that, upon the disclosing of the great mystery of the Holy Sacrament, the Holy Flesh of his Body, the hearers said, ‘Who can abide this hard word?’ and therewith went, almost all, their way), so did Saint Paul, I say, by the Corinthians: not teach them all at once. And therefore he saith in his epistle to them, ‘I have given you hitherto but milk, and not strong meat’; and ‘wisdom speak we,’ saith he, ‘among folk that be perfect.’ Nor I mean not this—that there were any points of the substance of the faith which he showed to the clergy, that he kept from the lay people... or showed unto one man, that he kept from another—but that to no man,
lightly, he showed all at once. But because some came from the Jews, and some came of the Gentiles: therefore, as they were, so were they handled, not only by grace but also by wisdom; and not only in the points of the faith, but also in the rites and ceremonies…

5 either of the Church or of Moses’ law—whereof some ceremonies were forthwith abolished; some not by and by; and some taken into the church of Christ and observed still. But in conclusion, when they were meet therefor, they were all taught all that God would have them bound to believe. And then doubt I nothing but that many things that now be very dark in Holy Scripture… were by the apostles (to whom our Lord ‘opened their wits that they might understand Scripture’) so plainly declared that they were by the people well and clearly understood. I say not all the whole Scripture, in which it may be that many a secret mystery lieth yet covered… concerning the coming of Antichrist, and the The manner of the Final day, manner, and fashion of the Final Judgment doth lie covered. Judgment… which shall never be fully disclosed till the times appointed by God’s high Providence meet and convenient for them. And from time to time, as it liketh his Majesty to have things known or done in his church, so is it no doubt but he tempereth his revelations… and in such wise doth insinuate and inspire them into the breasts of his Christian people… that by the secret instinct of the Holy Ghost, they consent and agree together in one—except heretics, that rebel and refuse to be obedient to God and his church.

20 Heretics Who be thereby cut off from the lively tree of that vine… and, waxing withered branches, be kept but for the fire—first here, and after in hell—except they repent and call for grace… that may graft them into the stock again. But as it may be that many things be there not all at once revealed and understood in the Scripture, but by sundry times and ages more things and more by God unto his church disclosed (and that as it shall like his high goodness and wisdom to dispense and dispose); and as it may be, also, in things to be done…
may fall in his church variety, mutation, and change: so am I
very sure that the Holy Ghost that God sent into his church—and
Christ himself, that hath promised unto the end of the world
to persevere and abide in his church—shall never suffer his catholic
church neither to agree to the making of any law that shall be to
God damnably displeasant… nor of any truth that God would were
believed, to determine or believe the contrary. For then had Christ,
which is all truth, broken his promise… and (which were
blasphemy and abominable to think) were waxen untrue.

And therefore, over this, as it may be that, as I said before, some things
in Holy Scripture be not yet fully perceived and understood, so am
I very sure that the Church neither doth nor can do damnably
construe it wrong—which it should if they should construe it so as it
should make an article of misbelief and of a false, erroneous
faith. As if they should by misconstruction of the Scripture
bring up and believe that Christ were one God, and equal, with his
Father, and with the Holy Ghost… if the truth were otherwise in deed.
And therefore, since the Church (in which Christ is assistant, and his
Holy Spirit) cannot to God’s displeasure and their damnation
fall in any false belief… in any such substantial point of the
faith: it must needs be, therefore, that Arius and all other heretics
be drowned in damnable errors. The contrary opinion of whose
exeクable heresies… the Church was in the beginning taught… by
the mouth of Christ himself. And after, of his blessed apostles…
which read and declared the Scriptures among the people in their
time, showing them in what wise the words of Holy Scripture
proved the truth of such articles of the faith… as they taught them
by mouth. And how such texts as seemed the contrary… were not
contrary in deed. And therewith declared them of those texts the
right understanding.

“And albeit that our Savior showed and plainly proved that in
the Scripture was given good tokens and sufficient knowledge of
him, yet to the intent we should well know that his own word
and ordinance needeth none other authority but himself; but is
to be believed and obeyed be it written or not written, some

1 fall: come about  3 that: who  4 suffer: allow  6 damnably: mortally
6 displeasant: offensive  8 which is: who is  // were: would be
9 were waxen untrue: would have turned untruthful  10 over this: furthermore
12 can do: can  // damnably: condemnable; mortally
15 misconstruction: misinterpretation  16 bring up: come up with
17 otherwise in deed: actually otherwise  18 assistant: actively present
20 fall in: fall into  // in any: with regard to any  22 drowned: sunk; submerged
22 damnable: condemnable; mortally sinful  25 which: who
25 read: interpreted  // declared: explained  26 wise: way(s)
29 deed: fact  // declared: made known to  31 showed: stated
32 good tokens: authentic portents
things did he therefore bid to be done… and some things also
to be believed… whereof we have in Holy Scripture no writing in
the world. Saint Paul commandeth
the people of Thessalonica, in his epistle,
to keep the traditions that he took them either by his writing or by
his bare word. For the words that he
said among them… our Lord had told
them him for them. And therefore he writeth unto the Corinthians
that of the holy housel, the Sacrament of the Altar, he had showed
them the matter and the manner by mouth… as our Lord had himself

There was more things taught of the Sacrament than was
written.

There was learned the manner and form of Consecration. There was
Of the water put with the
wine in the chalice

learned much of the mystical gestures and ceremonies used in the Mass. And
if any man doubt thereof, let him
consider where should we else have the beginning of the water put
with the wine into the chalice. For well we wot that the Scripture
biddeth it not. And every wise man may well wit, then, when
the Gospel speaketh only of wine… there durst no man in this
world have been so bold to put anything else thereto. For when
the Gospel speaketh of wine only… turned into his Precious Blood,
what man would adventure to make any mixture of water? And now
is the Church so well ascertained of God’s pleasure therein without
any Scripture… that they not only dare put in water, but also dare
not leave it out. And whereby knew the Church this thing… but by
God and his holy apostles… which taught it in their time? And
so went it forth from age to age, continued in the Church until
this day, begun by God in the beginning… without any mention
made in Holy Scripture.

“Howbeit, Luther saith because it is not ‘commanded by Scripture,’
we may choose therefore whether we will do it or leave it. For

The ground of all Luther’s
heresies

this one point is the very fond foundation
and ground of all his great heresies:
that a man is not bound to believe anything

5 took: handed on to  6 his bare word: just his spoken word  //  words: things
8 him: to him  9 housel: Eucharist  //  showed: made known to
13 of that matter: on that subject  17 ceremonies: rituals  20 wot: know
21 biddeth: commands  //  every wise man: everyone with any sense  //  may: can
21 wit: know  23 put: add  25 adventure: venture
25 make any mixture of water: mix in any water  26 ascertained: assured
29 which: who  34 leave it: not do it; drop it  35 fond: foolish
37 bound: obliged
but if it may be proved evidently by Scripture. And thereupon
goeth he so far forth… that no scripture can be evident to
prove anything that he list to deny. For he will not agree it for
evident, be it never so plain. And he will call evident for him
that text that is evident against him. And sometimes, if it be too
plain against him, then will he call it no scripture—as he
playeth with the Epistle of Saint James. And because the old holy
doctors be full and whole against him… he setteth them all at naught.
And with these worshipful, wise ways he proclameth himself a
conqueror… whereas, besides all the remnant, wherein every
child may see his proud, frantic folly, he is shamefully put to flight
in the first point: that is to wit, that nothing is to be believed for
a sure truth but if it appear proved and evident in Holy Writ. And
yet had that point at the first face some visage of probability. Howbeit,
to say the truth, he were a lewd lorel that would nothing
do that his master would bid him, nor nothing believe that his
master would tell him, but if he take it him in writing—as Luther
playeth with Christ. Of whose words or acts he will believe nothing…
extcept he find it in Scripture… and that plain and evident.
Now must he by that means condemn the church of Christ for
that they sanctify not the Saturday, which was the Sabbath
day instituted by God among the Jews—commanding the ‘Sabbath
Of the changing of the Sabbath day’ to be kept holy. And albeit
the matter of the precept is moral, and the
day legal… so that it may be changed,
yet will there, I ween, no man think that ever the Church would
take upon them to change it without special ordinance of God.
Whereof we find no remembrance at all in Holy Scripture. By what
scripture is evidently known that every man and woman hath
power to administer the Sacrament of Baptism? Let it be showed…
either by commandment, counsel, license, or example expressed
in Scripture.

“Many things are there like… which, as holy doctors agree, were
taught the apostles by Christ, and the Church by the apostles,
and so come down to our days by continual succession from
theirs. But I will let all others pass over, and speak but of one.
“Every good Christian man, I doubt not, believeth that our blessed Lady was a perpetual virgin—as well after the birth of Christ as before. For it were a strange thing that she should after that blessed birth… be less minded to cleanness and purity, and set less by her holy purpose and promise of chastity… vowed and dedicated unto God, than she did before. For surely whoso considereth the words of the Gospel in Saint Luke shall well perceive that she had vowed virginity. For when the angel had said unto her,

‘Lo, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a child, and thou shalt call his name Jesus,’ she answered him, ‘How may this be? For as for man, I know none’; which, though it be spoken but for the time then present—yet must it needs signify that she never would know none, after the manner of speaking. By which a nun might say, ‘As for man, there meddleth none with me,’ signifying that never there shall. And in common speech is that figure much in use, by which a woman saith of one whom she is determined never to marry, ‘We may well talk together, but we wed not together,’ meaning that they never shall wed together. And in such wise meant our Lady when she said, ‘How may this be? For I know no man,’ meaning that she never would meddle with man; or else had her answer nothing been to purpose. For the angel said not, ‘Lo, thou art conceived’; which if he had said, she might well have marveled only for that she knew no man already. But when he said, ‘Thou shalt conceive,’ this could be no marvel unto her for that she knew no man already. And therefore, since she marveled how it might be that ever she should conceive and have a child, it must needs be that her answer meant that she never would meddle with man. And therefore she marveled—because he said it should be, and she knew not how it could be… but that way by which she was at full point with herself that it should never be. So that then he showed her how it should come about: by the Holy Ghost coming into her, and the power of God on high shadowing her. And then she assented, and said, ‘Lo here the handmaid of God; be it done to me after thy word, as thou tellest me.’ And thus

3 were: would be  4 set less by: attach less importance to  5 purpose: intention
11, 20 may: can  12 know none: have no carnal knowledge of any
14 after the manner of speaking: according to common usage
15 meddleth none: is none who has intercourse  // signifying: implying
16 common: ordinary  // figure: kind of expression  17 one: someone
21, 29 meddle with: have intercourse with a
22 had . . . purpose: her answer would have been not at all to the point
24 marveled: have been astonished  // only: simply  24, 26 for that: because
26 marvel: astonishing thing  27 marveled: wondered  // might: could
29 marveled: was astonished
31 was at full point with herself: had her mind completely made up  32 showed: told
34 shadowing: overshadowing  // lo: behold  35 after: according to
appeareth it evidently… that she had then a fully determined purpose of virginity. And that, as it seemeth, such as she thought not lawful to change. For else when the angel did the message… she might have inclined thereto though she had before been in another mind.

Now, when she had then so full and fast a purpose of perpetual virginity, before the birth of her blessed Child—which came, among his other heavenly doctrines, to call and exhort the world from all pleasure of the flesh to the purity and cleanness of the body and soul, and from the desire of carnal generation to a ghostly regeneration in grace—more were it then wonder if she should have then more regard of fleshly delight, or cure of worldly procreation, than ever she had before her celestial conception of her Maker… made man in her blessed womb! Or what man could think it that ever God would suffer any earthly man after… to be conceived in that holy closet taken up and consecrated so specially to God? This reverent article of our Lady’s perpetual virginity… the church of Christ, being taught the truth by Christ, perpetually hath believed since the time of Christ. And yet is there no word thereof in Christ’s Gospel written… but rather, divers texts so sounding to the contrary… that by the wrong understanding of them, the heretic Helvidius’ error Helvidius took the occasion of his heresy by which he would that our Lady after the birth of Christ had other children by Joseph. How can we then say that we could without the learning of the faith before… find out all the points in the Scripture, when there be some that all Christendom believe—and believe themselves bound to believe—whereof the Scripture giveth no plain doctrine, but rather, seemeth to say the contrary?

“But, as I began to say, the holy apostles, being taught by their great master Christ, did teach unto the Church as well the articles of the faith… as the understanding of such texts of Scripture as was meet and convenient for the matter. Whereby it is not unlikely that the Gospel of Saint John and the epistles of Saint Paul were then better understood among the common people… than they be, peradventure, now with some that take themselves for great clerks.
And as the apostles at that time taught the people, so did ever some of them that heard them teach forth… and leave their doctrine and traditions to others that came after. By reason whereof… not only came the rites and sacraments, and the articles of our faith, from

By whom came the understanding of Scripture… from Christ and his apostles unto our days, but also the great part of the right understanding of Holy Scripture by good and godly writers of sundry times. By whose good and wholesome doctrine set forth by their virtue with God’s good inspiration, grace, and help of the Holy Ghost… we have also the knowledge and perceiving what was the faith of Christ’s church in every time since. And thereby perceive we that these heretics be not only barkers against the faith that now is… but also that hath been ever since Christ died.

“And therefore is Holy Scripture, as I said, the highest and the best learning that any man can have… if one take the right way in the learning.

“It is (as a good, holy saint saith) so marvelously tempered… that a mouse may wade therein… and an elephant be drowned therein. For there is no man so low… but if he will seek his way with the staff of his faith in his hand, and hold that fast and search the way therewith… and have the old holy fathers also for his guides… going on with a good purpose and a lowly heart… using reason and refusing no good learning… with calling of God for wisdom, grace, and help that he may well keep his way and follow his good guides—then shall he never fall in peril, but well and surely wade through… and come to such end of his journey as himself would well wish. But surely, if he be as long as Longinus, and have a high heart and trust upon his own wit—as he doth (look he never so lowly) that setteth all the old holy fathers at naught—that fellow shall not fail to sink over the ears and drown. And of all wretches, worst shall he walk… that, forcing little of the faith of Christ’s church, cometh to the Scripture of God to look and try therein whether the Church believe aright or not. For either doubteth he whether Christ teach his church true… or else whether Christ teacheth it at all or not. And then he doubteth whether Christ

9 virtue: skill; capability 18 tempered: composed 19 may: could
23, 31 old holy fathers: early fathers of the Church 27 well and surely: quite safely
29 Longinus: The name traditionally given to the soldier who pierced Jesus’ side with a lance.
30 high: haughty // upon his own wit: in his own intelligence
31 setteth . . . at naught: has for . . . no regard 33 walk: go; proceed
33 forcing little of: attaching little importance to 34 look: see // try: test
in his words did say true… when he said he would be with his church till the end of the world. And surely the thing that made Arius, Pelagius, Faustus, Manichaeus, Donatus, Helvidius, and all the rabble of the old heretics to drown themselves in those damnable heresies… was nothing but high pride of their learning in Scripture—wherein they followed their own wits and left the common faith of the Catholic Church, preferring their own gay glosses before the right, catholic faith of all Christ’s church, which can never err in any substantial point that God would have us bound to believe. And therefore, to end where we began, whoso will not unto the study of Scripture take the points of the Catholic faith as a rule of interpretation, but of diffidence and mistrust study to seek in Scripture whether the faith of the Church be true or not: he cannot fail to fall in worse errors, and far more jeopardous, than any man can do by philosophy—whereof the reasons and arguments in matters of our faith have nothing in like authority.”

The Twenty-sixth Chapter

The messenger saying that him seemed he should not believe the Church if he saw the Church say one thing and the Holy Scripture another thing, because the Scripture is the word of God: the author showeth that the faith of the Church is the word of God as well as the Scripture… and therefore as well to be believed. And that the faith and the Scripture well understood be never contrary. And further showeth that upon all doubts rising upon Holy Scripture concerning any necessary article of the faith, he that cannot upon all that he can hear in the matter on both the sides perceive the better and truer part… hath a sure and undoubtable refuge provided him by the goodness of God to bring him out of all perplexity, in that God hath commanded him in all such doubts to believe his Church.

9 gay: specious 13 diffidence: wariness; misgiving 15 in: into 16 jeopardous: dangerous 17 reasons: reasonings 17–18 nothing in like: nothing like the same 20 him seemed: to him it seemed that 24 as well as: as much as is 25 well: much 26 be never contrary: are never in contradiction to one another 27 doubts: difficulties 28 necessary: essential 30 perceive the better and truer part: tell which is the better and more correct view 33 in: with regard to // doubts: unclear things
“Truly, sir,” quoth he, “methinketh it is well said, that ye have said. And in good faith, to say the truth, I see not what I should answer it with. And yet, when I look back again upon Holy Scripture… and consider… that it is God’s own words (which I wot well ye will grant), I find it hard in my heart to believe all the men in the whole world… if they would say anything whereof I should see that the Holy Scripture saith the contrary, since it is reason that I believe God alone far better than them all.”

“In that,” quoth I, “ye say very truth. But now I put case that God would tell you two things. Whither of them would ye believe best?”

“Neither other,” quoth he, “but I would believe them both firmly, and both alike.”

“What if neither other,” quoth I, “were likely to be true… but seemed, both twain, impossible?”

“That should,” quoth he, “make little force to me. For that once known—that God telleth them—seemed they never so far unlikely, nor never so far impossible, I neither should nor could have any doubt but that they were, both twain, true.”

“That is well said,” quoth I. “But, now, and it so were… that those two things seemed the one to the other clean contrary, what would ye then think, and which would ye then believe?”

“Yet could I not,” quoth he, “doubt anything but that they were very true both; but I would verily think that I did not well understand the one of them.”

“What would ye then do,” quoth I, “if he bade you believe them both?”

“Marry,” quoth he, “then would I pray him tell me first how he understandeth them both. For though I believe that they be both true in that sense and purpose that he taketh his own words, and may, in that manner understood, well stand and agree together: yet can I not believe them both in that sense and understanding… wherein they repugn and be directly contrary each to other.”

“That is,” quoth I, “so well said that, in my mind, no man can amend it.”
“But now would I wit,” quoth I, “whether that the faith of the Church be the word of God, and by God spoken to the Church, or not.”

“Yes,” quoth he, “God speaketh to his church in the Scripture.”

“And is nothing God’s words,” quoth I, “but Scripture? The words that God spoke to Moses—were they not God’s words all… till they were written? And the words of Christ to his apostles—were they not his words till they were written?”

“Yes, then,” quoth he, “But now, since he hath perfected and finished the corpus of Holy Scripture, allthing that he would Christian people should believe—and all that he would the Church should do, and all that he would the Church should eschew—all this hath he left them his mind sufficiently in Holy Scripture.”

“And none otherwise,” quoth I, “besides? I had went we had been at another point… in that ye see the Sabbath day changed into Sunday without any word of Scripture giving any commandment of the change in the New Testament… from the commandment given for the Saturday in the Old. And also for the point that we spoke of touching the perpetual virginity of our Lady, whereof is no word written in Scripture. But since I perceive that the great affection and reverence that ye bear to the Scripture of God… not without great cause, but without any measure… maketh you in the case that ye take all authority and credence from every word of God spoken beside the Scripture, I would ask you, therefore, this question: If God in Holy Scripture tell you two things that seem the one contrary to the other—as, for example, if he tell you in one place that he is less than his Father, and in another place that he and his Father be all one—which of these will you believe?”

“Marry,” quoth he, “both twain! For they may stand together well enough. For he was less as man, and was all one and equal as God.”

“Very truth it is,” quoth I, “that ye say. But, now, if ye had been born in the days of Arius the heretic, he would not have received, nor held himself content with, this answer; but he would have agreed you the first part and put you further to prove...
the second part. And unto that text he would have made you a
gloss that ‘his Father and he were one not in substance, but in will.’
And that gloss he would have fortified and made somewhat
seemly with another word of Christ, in which he prayed his Father
saying, ‘As thou and I be both one, so make thou that they and we
may be made one,’ meaning by his Christian people, which shall never
be one with him in substance. So that for the inequality of Christ by
reason of his manhood… ye must agree with him; but for unity of
Godhead… he will not agree with you, but put you always to prove
it.”

“Well,” quoth he, “and though he so did… yet if I were provided therefor,
there be texts enough that plainly prove it.”

“That is,” quoth I, “very truth. But yet is there none but he shall
always set you another against it… and a gloss as fast for yours as
ye shall have an answer for his, in such wise as he may abuse a
right wise and well-learned man—as he did in his own days, and
many days after, many a thousand. Then if it so were that in
that dispicion ye could not make your audience to discern the
truth… nor, peradventure, persuade them to believe the truth… because
the false part might hap to have, to the minds of many, a
more face of truth, as it had at that time to many that then were
of that sect: what way would ye wind out?”

“Marry,” quoth he, “I would believe well myself the truth, and go to
God, and let them that would believe the false part go to the
devil!”

“Ye should,” quoth I, “have taken therein a good, sure way. But, now, if
ye had been in that time (albeit ye be now fast and sure in the truth),
ye might have happed while the matter was in question… and many
great clerks and well-scriptured men, and some seeming right holy,
set on the wrong side—ye might have happed, I say, so to have been
moved with the reasons on both the sides… that ye should not have
wist on which part to determine your belief. And what would ye
then have done?”

Quoth he, “Ye put me now to a pinch! And I shall answer you as

Doctor Mayo I have heard say that Doctor Mayo, sometime
almoner to King Henry VII,
answered once the King at his table. It happed that there was
fallen in communication the story of Joseph, how his master’s
(Potiphar’s) wife… a great man with the king of Egypt… would have
pulled him to bed, and he fled away.

“‘Now, Master Mayo,’ quoth the King’s Grace, ‘ye be a tall, strong
man, on the one side, and a cunning doctor on the other side—
what would ye have done if ye had been… not Joseph, but in Joseph’s
stead?’

“‘By my troth, sir,’ quoth he, ‘and it like Your Grace, I cannot tell
you what I would have done, but I can tell you well what I should
have done.’

“‘By my troth,’ quoth the King, ‘that was very well answered.’ And
since that answer served him well there, I shall make the same
serve me here. For surely if I had been in Arius’ days, in the point
that ye spoke of… what I would have done, that wot I ne’er. But
what I should have done—that can I well tell you, and surely trust I
would have done so, too.”

“What is that?” quoth I.

“Marry, I would have believed the best!” quoth he.

“The best?” quoth I. “That were best indeed… if ye wist which it
were. But the case is put… that the reasons grounded upon Scripture
seemed unto you in such wise… each to impugn and answer other…
that ye stood in such a doubt… that ye could in no wise discern
whither side said best.”

“By God,” quoth he, “I had forgotten that! Well, then were it best,” quoth
he, “and so would I have done, I think… kneel me down and make
my special prayer to God that it might please his goodness in so
great a peril not to leave me perplexed, but vouchsafe to incline
mine assent unto that side that he knew were true… and would I
should believe to be true. And then would I boldly believe the one
which God should have put in my mind. Had not this been
the best way?”

“If it were not,” quoth I, “the best, it might peradventure serve for a
second.”

1–2 was fallen in communication: came up in conversation
2–4: See Genesis 39:1–12.
3–4 would have pulled: was trying to pull
6 cunning: learned // doctor: professor
8 stead: place 9, 12 troth: word 9 and it like: if it please
15 wot I ne’er: I don’t at all know 19 marry: good heavens
20 were best indeed: would indeed be best // wist: knew 21 reasons: arguments
22 each to impugn and answer other: to oppose and refute each other
23 in no wise: by no means 24 whither: which
29–30 would I should: would have me 30 boldly: confidently
33 peradventure: perhaps
“Two seconds”

“A second?” quoth he. “Then ye take it for naught!”

“Nay!” quoth I. “There be two seconds, after two manner countings. One next unto the worst; another next unto the best. And your way is surely far from the worst. But yet dare I not assent that it were the best till I understand it better. And therefore I pray you tell me this: If after your special prayers made… ye wrote the one part in one paper and the other part in another, and laid them both on the ground, and then set up a staff between them both—would ye be then indifferent to take the one side or the other after… as it should hap your staff to fall?”

“Why not?” quoth he. “Or else put it upon two lots, and then at adventure draw the one and take it. For when I have done as much as mine own wit will serve… and have heard, thereto, all that I can of other men… and yet by neither can perceive the better opinion: what should I do, or what could I do, further than pray for grace to guide my choice… and so, at adventure, boldly take the one and hold it fast, doubting nothing but God assisted my choice… if I have a firm faith in his promise… by which he promiseth that if we ask, we shall have—asking, as Saint James saith, without any doubt. And why should not I, in such perplexed case, after help called for of God, take the one part at adventure by lot, as did the apostles in the choosing of a new… to fulfill the place of the traitor Judas?”

“Lots,” quoth I, “be well lawful in the choice of such two things as be both so good that we be likely to choose well enough whithersoever we take. But, now, if ye were in the case that I have heard my father merrily say every man is at the choice of his wife—that ye should put your hand into a blind bag full of snakes and eels together, seven snakes for one eel—ye would, I ween, reckon it a perilous choice to take up one at adventure though ye had made your special prayer to speed well. Nor ye ought not in such case to adventure it upon your prayer and trust in God without necessity.”

“That is peradventure truth,” quoth he. “But in our case there is

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“That is peradventure truth,” quoth he. “But in our case there is
necessity. For there were none other way to avoid the perplexity… but even take the one by prayer and firm trust in God, which never deceived them that trust in him."

“If there were,” quoth I, “none other way, somewhat were it, then, that ye say. But now consider your case again. And when it so were that ye could not, upon that ye heard the Arians and the Catholic part argue together, perceive whither part were the better; and therefore, of those two tales told you by God in many texts of Holy Scripture—some seeming plainly to say that Christ was not equal with his Father, some seeming as plainly to say the contrary—ye could in no wise find any reason… whereby ye could find yourself moved to take the one part for more probable than the other: I put case, then, that God would himself say to you, ‘I have showed the truth of this matter to such a man, and how my Scripture is to be understood concerning the same. Go thy way, therefore, to him, and that thing that he shall tell thee, that thing believe thou.’ Would ye say, ‘Nay, good Lord, I will ask no man but thyself; and therefore tell me thine own mouth, or else I will take the one part at all adventures… and think that thou would have it so’? Or else would ye think that God were your good Lord, and had done much for you, in that it liked him so graciously for your surety to bring you out of such a great perplexity… whereby ye should for your own mind have remained in an insoluble doubt in a matter of the faith… wherein it is damnable to dwell in doubt— or (which yet much worse were) have declined, peradventure, into an invincible error?”

“Verily,” quoth he, “great cause should I have had highly to thank God.”

“Ye would not, then,” quoth I, “first make your prayer and then with good hope (that grace shall guide your fortune) take the one part at adventure by lot… but ye would in your prayer thank God for that provision. And then would ye get you to that man as fast as ye could.”

“Very truth,” quoth he.

“Then if that man should tell you that Arius and his company were
heretics all... and took texts of Scripture wrong, ye would believe
him?"

"Yea, verily," quoth he, "that would I."

"I put case," quoth I, "that ye had not doubted before... but had been
in yourself at clear point... that the Arians' opinion were the
truth. Yet ye would against Arius and all his, and against your
own mind also, lean unto his word whom God had bidden you
believe."

"What else?" quoth he.

"What if ye asked him," quoth I, "whether God have sufficiently
showed that point in Scripture... so that it may by the words of Holy
Writ well and evidently be proved; and that he told you yea?
And that thereupon he would bring in all the texts that ye had well
in remembrance already; and that ye laid against them all that
you could lay for the contrary; so far forth that when each of you
had laid all your texts and all your glosses that either of you
both could bring forth... till ye both confessed that neither of
ye both could any further thing find therein, he saying still
that his way were the truth, and that he had by Scripture well
proved it unto you, and yourself, on the other side, for all that
ever ye had heard him say, perceiving in your own mind
none other but that ye had by Scripture better proved the other
part—which would ye now believe? That way that, as far as ye see,
God saith himself in Holy Scripture? Or else that man whom God
sent you to and bade you believe?"

"Nay, verily," quoth he, "I would believe him."

"Well said," quoth I. "But whether would ye only believe him that
the truth of the matter were against the Arians... or else would you
believe him further, in that he said he had so proved it unto you
by Scripture?"

"I would," quoth he, "believe him therein also. For since God so had commanded
me, and had showed me that he had himself
instructed that man in what sense the Scripture were to be understood,
I could none otherwise think but that were true—
and though it appeared to mine own reason the contrary."

4–5 had been in yourself at clear point: had yourself become fully convinced
7 lean unto his word: go by the word of him // bidden you: told you to
12 well and evidently: good and conclusively  32 showed: told  35 and though: even if
“Very well said,” quoth I. “Now, if God had said unto you that ye should believe that man concerning the matter itself… and of Scripture had nothing spoken, then would ye have believed him yet in the matter? Would ye not although he should have told you that he understood no Scripture at all?”

“That is true,” quoth he.

“Now, if he should then have told you that the Arians were heretics in that point, and their opinion erroneous and false, ye would have believed him?”

“What else?” quoth he.

“What if he had told you therewith,” quoth I, “that he wist ne’er whether it might be well proved by Scripture or not?”

“Yet would I,” quoth he, “nevertheless believe to be true the matter itself that he had told me.”

“What would you then think,” quoth I, “of those texts that ye did reckon before well and plainly to prove the contrary?”

“I would,” quoth he, "then reckon that they were meant some other ways than I could understand. For I could not doubt but being truly understood, they could never witness against the truth.”

“In good faith,” quoth I, “ye say marvelously well. Do ye not,” quoth I, “take it for all one… whether God bid you do a thing by his own mouth or by Holy Scripture?”

“Yes,” quoth he, “saving that I take the bidding by Scripture for the more sure. For there wot I well God speaketh and I cannot be illuded.”

“Now,” quoth I, “this man that God biddeth you go to and in all thing believe him—will it make any change in the matter whether it be man or woman?”

“No change at all,” quoth he.

“What if it were a certain known company of men and women together?” quoth I. “Would that make any difference?”

“Never a whit,” quoth he.

“Then,” quoth I, “in case it appear unto you (as I suppose it doth to you and to every Christian man else) that in all points of faith, both in things to be believed above nature… and in things also that are of necessity to be known and believed… which may be perceived by
In all doubts believe the reason given us with nature, God giveth us in commandment that we shall believe his church: then are ye fully answered. For then have ye the man that ye must needs resort unto for your final answer and solution of all points and doubts in any wise concerning the salvation of your soul. Of which points no man can deny but one of the most especial points is to take in Holy Scripture always the right sense. Or else, if we cannot attain the right understanding, yet then at the leastwise to be sure that we shall avoid and eschew all such mistaking as might bring us into any damnable error.”

The Twenty-seventh Chapter

The author proveth that God hath commanded us in all thing necessary to salvation to give firm credence and full obedience unto his church. And a cause why God will have us bound to believe.

“That is truth,” quoth he, “if this may appear. But where shall it appear that God commandeth us in all such things to believe the Church? For first, methinketh that were a very strange manner of commanding. For of the Church be all we that should (as ye say) be by God commanded to believe the Church; and all we together make the whole Church. And what reason were it, then, to command us to believe the Church? Which were no more, in effect, but to bid us all believe us all, or each of us to believe other. And then if we fell at diverse opinions, why should the one party more believe the other... than be believed of the other, since both the parties be of the Church and make the Church among them... saving that always that party seemeth to be believed which best and most clearly can allege the Scripture for their opinion? For the words of God must

5 doubts: questions; unclear things // wise: way
13 in allthing: with regard to everything 17 may: can
17, 18 appear: be made evident; be shown 19, 23 were: would be
20 as ye say: according to you 22 what reason were it: what sense would it make
24 each of us to believe other: us to believe each other 26 believed of: believed by
29 allege the Scripture for their opinion: back up its opinion with Scripture
break the strife! *He* is, *only*, to be believed—and his only Son, of whom himself commanded, ‘Ipsum audite’; ‘Hear him,’ said the Father at the time of his baptism. And therefore the man that ye speak of, whom God sendeth me to... and whom he biddeth me hear and believe, is our Savior Christ only, and not any congregation of men. Whose words if we believe before the words of God, and in the stead of the Scripture of God put our trust and confidence in the doctrine and ordinance of the Church, it were haply to be feared lest we fall in the reproof that is touched in the Gospel, where is said, ‘In vain worship they me with the doctrine of men’; and where our Savior also reproveth the scribes and the Pharisees, saying unto them, ‘Wherefore do you break and transgress the commandment of God for your traditions?’”

“I trust,” quoth I, “yet at last we shall agree. But much ado, methinketh, it is to come to it! But since we must, as ye say, and truth it is, hear our Savior Christ and believe him: is it enough to hear him and believe him? Or be we, besides that, also bound to obey him?”

“To obey him also,” quoth he. “For else were he better unheard!”

“Well said,” quoth I. “But whether are we bound to hear him and obey him in some things, or in all things?”

“In all things,” quoth he, “without exception, that he commandeth us to do.”

“Then if Christ,” quoth I, “bid us believe and obey his church... be we not bound so to do?”

“Yes,” quoth he.

Note

“The Church biddeth us believe... than the thing that our Savior himself biddeth us believe... if he bid us hear his church as his Father bade us hear him.”

“That is truth,” quoth he, “if he so do. But methinketh it were a strange bidding, as I said, to bid each of us believe other.”

“It seemeth not,” quoth I, “so strange a thing to Saint Paul. For he... marvelously effectually beseecheth Christian people to ‘agree together all in one mind,’

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1 *break the strife:* end the dispute  3, 5, etc. *hear:* listen to
9 *were haply to be feared lest we:* it is perhaps to be feared that we will
9–10 *fall in:* bring upon ourselves  10 *touched:* spoken of  13 *wherefore:* why
15 *trust:* still trust... that in the end
32 *were:* would be  33 *each of us believe other:* us to believe each other
35 *marvelously effectually:* with striking earnestness
and in the faith to tell one tale, suffering no sects or schisms among them. Which agreement and consent can never be where no man giveth credence to other. But among Christian people it will soon be... if every man give credence to the Church."

"But yet," quoth he, "since all be of the Church, of diverse parties which shall believe which?"

"Ye take that," quoth I, "for a great doubt and a thing very perplex... which seemeth me very plain. For either first the Church hath the truth and believe all one way till some one or some few begin the change—and then, though all be yet of the Church... till some by their obstinacy be gone out or put out, yet is it no doubt but if I will believe the Church, I must believe them that still believe that way which all the whole believed before—"

"Or else, if there were anything that was, peradventure, such that in the Church sometime was doubted, and reputed for unrevealed and unknown; if after that, the whole Church fall in one consent upon the one side, either by common determination at a general council... or by a perfect persuasion and belief so received through Christendom that the Christian people think it a damnable error to believe the contrary: then if any would after that take the contrary way... were it one or more, were it few or many, were they learned or unlearned, were they lay people or of the clergy... yet can I nothing doubt which party to believe if I will believe the Church."

"That is truth," quoth he, "but ye prove me not yet that God hath hidden me believe the Church."

"Ye somewhat interrupted me," quoth I, "with your other subtlety... by which ye would it should seem an absurdity to bid us believe the Church, forasmuch as thereby, ye said, it should seem that we were commanded nothing else but each to believe other... and then in diverse opinions taken, we could not wit which party should believe which. Whereof since I have showed you the contrary, and removed that block out of the way for stumbling, we shall, I think, soon see the other point: that Christ commandeth us to believe his church. For as his Father said of himself 'Hear him,' so said he of his church when he sent it abroad to be spread forth."

"For when he had gathered his church of his apostles and his

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1 suffering no: not allowing there to be any  2 consent: consensus
4, 33 soon: readily  7 doubt: difficulty // perplex: convoluted
15 sometime: at one time // doubted: in question // reputed for: regarded as
16 fall in one consent: comes into a unanimous accord
22–23 nothing doubt: have no doubt as to  26 subtlety: ingenious ploy
27 would it should: would have it  29 in: with regard to  30 diverse: divergent
30 wit: know; tell  32 for stumbling: lest it should be stumbled over
34 hear: listen to  35 abroad: out
disciples, and thereupon sent them forth to preach, said he not unto them, ‘He that heareth you heareth me’? Did he not also command that whoso would not hear the Church should be reputed and taken as paynim(s) and publicans?”

“That was,” quoth he, “where men would not amend their living.”

“Was it not,” quoth I, “general, where a man would not amend any damnable fault?”

“Yes,” quoth he.

“Is misbelief,” quoth I, “none such?”

“Yes, marry,” quoth he.

“Then is,” quoth I, “the Church his judge upon his belief, to show him whether it be true or false?”

“So it seemeth,” quoth he.

“How mean you that?” quoth he.

“Thus,” quoth I: “as if Luther, lately a friar and having now wedded a nun, were commanded to amend his lewd living and put away that harlot whom he abuseth in continual incest and sacrilege under the name of a wife; and he would say that he did well enough… and that their vows could not bind them—were he not bound to believe the Church, and obey, thereto, as well concerning his belief as his living?”

“Yes, verily,” quoth he.

“Then appeareth it,” quoth I, “that we be by Christ commanded to hear, believe, and obey the Church as well in matters of faith as of manners. Which thing well appeareth also by that our Lord would that whoso were disobedient should be taken as ‘a paynim or a publican’—of which two the one offended in misbelief, the other in lewd living. And thus it appeareth that not only Christ is the man that ye be sent unto and commanded by God to believe and obey… but also the Church is the person whom ye be by Christ commanded to hear and believe and obey. And therefore, if ye will in faith or living… or avoiding of all damnable error that ye might fall in by misunderstanding
A sure and infallible way of Scripture... take a sure and infallible way, ye must in all these things hear, believe, and obey the Church—which is, as I say, the person whom Christ sendeth you to for the sure solution of all such doubts, as to the man in whose mouth he speaketh himself... and the Holy Spirit of his Father in heaven.

"And surely this is much to be marked, for it is the perpetual order which our Lord hath continued in the governance of good men from the beginning: that, like as our nature first fell by pride to the disobedience of God with inordinate desire of knowledge like unto God, so hath God ever kept man in humility, straining him with the knowledge and confession of his ignorance and binding him to the obedience of belief of certain things whereof his own wit would verily ween the contrary. And therefore are we bound not only to believe against our own reason... the points that God showeth us in Scripture, but also that God teacheth his church without his sheep to be fed; and against our own mind also... to give diligent hearing, firm credence, and faithful obedience to the church of Christ... concerning the sense and understanding of Holy Scripture. Not doubting but since he hath commanded his sheep to be fed, he hath provided for them wholesome meat and true doctrine; and that he hath, therefore, so far inspired the old holy doctors of his church with the light of his grace for our instruction... that the doctrine wherein they have agreed, and by many ages consented, is the very, true faith and right way to heaven, being put in their minds by the holy hand of him 'qui facit unanimes in domo'—'that maketh the church of Christ all of one mind.'"

The Twenty-eighth Chapter

The messenger eftsoons objected against this—that we should believe the Church in anything where we find the words of Scripture seeming plainly to say the contrary, or believe the old doctors’ interpretations in any necessary solution: clearing up 11 straining: bridling 14 wit: intellect // ween: think 17 without: outside of 22 his sheep to be fed: that his sheep be fed 23 meat: food 24, 34 old: early 24 holy doctors: theologians 26 agreed: concurred 26 by many ages consented: i.e., which through many ages has been the consensus 26 very: authentic 28–29: Psalm 67:7 (Vulgate). 31 eftsoons: for a second time 34 doctors’: exegetes’ // necessary: essential
article… where they seem to us to say contrary to the text—showing that we may perceive the Scripture as well as they might. And the answer of the author, proving the authority of the old interpreters and the infallible authority of the Church in that God teacheth it every truth requisite to the necessity of man’s salvation. Which he proveth by a deduction partly depending upon natural reason.

“It seemeth me,” quoth he, “that all this goeth well, that we should believe the Church as Christ, as long as they say as Christ saith. For so, methinketh, meant our Lord.

“But, now, if they tell me tales of their own, whereof Christ never spoke word, nor mention made thereof in Holy Scripture, I may then say with the prophet Jeremiah, ‘Non mittebam prophetas, et ipsi currebant. Non loquebar ad eos, et ipsi prophetabant’—‘Those prophets,’ quoth our Lord, ‘ran forth of their own head, and I sent them not; and prophesied of their own heads, when I spoke nothing to them.’ And then how much may I more say so if they say me a thing… whereof Christ or Holy Scripture saith the contrary? Shall I believe the Church above Christ? Were that a good humility—to be obedient more to men than to God? More ought I, methinketh, to believe God alone speaking in his Holy Scripture himself… than all the old fathers if they make a gloss against the text. Nor they do not themselves for their opinions say and write that they have them by inspiration, or by revelation, or by miracle… but by wisdom, study, diligence, and collation of one text with another. By all which means men may now perceive the sentence of Scripture as well as they might then! And if ye will, peradventure, say that grace helped them—which I will well agree—then will I say again that God’s grace is not so far worn out yet but that it may as well help us as it helped them… and so may we be for the right understanding of Scripture equal with them… and peradventure one ace above them. Whereby when we perceive that they went wrong and others after them, shall we then call it humility so to captivate and
subdue our understanding, whereby God hath haply given us
light to perceive their errors, that without thanks given him
therefor, we shall so set his gift at naught that we shall believe them
before himself… and tell him that himself bade so? And therefore
methinketh where the old doctors or the whole Church telleth me the
tale that God doth—there he biddeth me believe them. But where God
saith one thing in Scripture and they tell me another, it thinketh
me that I should in no wise believe them.”

“Well,” quoth I, “then in somewhat, ye say, ye will believe the Church,
but not in all. In anything beside Scripture ye will not; nor in the
interpretation of Scripture ye will not. And so, whereas ye said that ye
believe the Church in somewhat, in very deed ye believe the Church in
right naught. For wherein will ye believe it if ye believe it not in the
interpretation of Scripture? For as touching the text, ye believe
the Scripture itself, and not the Church.”

“Methinketh,” quoth he, “the text is good enough and plain enough,
needing no gloss, if it be well considered and every part compared
with other.”

“Hard it were,” quoth I, “to find anything so plain that it should
need no gloss at all.”

“In faith,” quoth he, “they make a gloss to some texts that be as plain
as it is that twice two make four!”

“Why,” quoth I, “needeth that no gloss at all?”

“I trow so,” quoth he. “Or else the devil is on it.”

“Iwis,” quoth I. “And yet, though ye would believe one that would
tell you that twice two ganders made always four geese, yet ye would
be advised ere ye believed him that would tell you that twice two
geese made always four ganders. For therein might ye be deceived.
And him would ye not believe at all… that would tell you that twice
two geese would always make four horses.”

“Tut,” quoth he, “this is a merry matter! They must be, all the twice
twain, always of one kind. But geese and horses be of diverse.”

“Well,” quoth I, “then every man that is neither goose nor horse seeth
well that there is one gloss, yet!”

“But, now,” quoth I, “the geese and the ganders be both of one kind…
and yet twice two geese make not always four ganders.”

“A sweet matter!” quoth he. “Ye wot what I mean well enough!”

3 therefor: for it   // set his gift at naught: disregard his gift
5, 16 methinketh: it seems to me (that)   // old doctors: early exegetes
7–8 it thinketh me: it seems to me   // in no wise: by no means
9, 12 somewhat: something   // beside: apart from   // very deed: actual fact
13 right naught: absolutely nothing   // as touching: as regards
19 hard it were: it would be hard   // in faith: honestly   // why: oh
24 trow: expect   // or: in on   // one: someone
27 be advised: take thought   // ere: before   // be deceived: be mistaken; go wrong
31 tut: pooh   // merry matter: matter of jest   // one kind: the same species
32 diverse: different   // a sweet matter: oh, very cute   // wot: know
“I think I do,” quoth I. “But I think if ye bring it forth, it will make another gloss to your text, as plain as your text is; and ye will in all Holy Scripture have no gloss at all. And yet will ye have collation made of one text with another… and show how they may be agreed together—as though all that were no gloss!”

“Yea,” quoth he, “but would you that we should believe the Church if it set a gloss that will in no wise agree with the text, but that it appeareth plainly that the text well considered saith clean the contrary?”

“To whom doth that appear,” quoth I, “so plainly… when it appeareth one to you… and to the whole Church another?”

“Yet if I see it so,” quoth he, “though holy doctors and all the whole Church would tell me the contrary… methinketh I were no more bound to believe them all, that the Scripture meaneth as they take it, than if they would all tell me that a thing were white which I see myself is black.”

“Of late,” quoth I, “ye would believe the Church in something. And now not only ye would believe it in nothing… but also, whereas God would the Church should be your judge, ye would now be judge over the Church. And ye will by your wit be judge whether the Church in the understanding of Holy Scripture—that God hath written to his Church!—do judge aright or err. As for your white and black, never shall it be that ye shall see the thing black that all others shall see white; but ye may be sure that if all others see it white and ye take it for black, your eyes be sore deceived. For the Church will not, I think, agree to call it other than it seemeth to them. And much marvel were it if ye should in Holy Scripture see better than the old holy doctors and Christ’s whole Church.

“But first,” quoth I, “ye must consider that ye and I do not talk of one doctor or twain, but of the consent and common agreement of the old holy fathers. Nor that we speak not of the doctrine of one man or two in the Church, but of the common consent of the Church. We speak not, also, of any sentence taken in any text of Holy Scripture… whereby riseth no doubt or question of any necessary article of our faith or rule of our living (for in other, by matters… may there be taken of one text ten senses, peradventure, and all good enough, without warranty of the best), but we speak of such two diverse and
contrary senses taken… as if the one be true, the other must needs be false—and that, as I say, concerning some necessary point of our faith or rule of our living… which is also depending upon faith and reducible thereto. As if one would boldly break his vow for that he thought that no man were bound to keep any. Such points… I say let us consider they be that we speak of. And this remembered between us, then will we somewhat see what your saying doth prove.

“I shall not much need,” quoth I, “to stick with you in disputing by what means the Scripture is understood, since ye be agreed with nature and diligence the grace of God must needs go… or else no diligence or help of nature can prevail. Nor I will nothing deny you but that God may and will also give his grace now to us as he gave of old to his holy doctors… if there be as much towardness and no more let or impediment in ourselves than was in them. I will also grant you that we may now by the same means by which they might then… understand the Scripture as well as they did then; and I will not much stick with you for one ace better. And were it not for the sins that we sink in, we might percase understand it better by cater-trey-deuce, having their labors therein and our own therewith. But since I am so genteeel to grant you so many things, I trust ye will grant me this one: that if in any such point of our faith as God would have men bound to believe… they did understand the Scripture one way and we another, being the one to the other so clean contrary that if the one were true, the other must needs be false—ye will then grant, I say, that either they err or we.”

“That must needs be,” quoth he.

“Ye will also grant,” quoth I, “that in such points as we speak of, the error were damnable. For we speak of those points only… to the belief whereof God will have us bound.”

“I grant,” quoth he. “For damnable were it in such case to believe wrong. And wrong should they or we believe if they or we believed a wrong article… because they or we thought that the Scripture affirmed it. And as damnable were it, and yet much more, if we

2 necessary: essential 3 depending upon: based on 4 reducible: referable 5 one: someone 6 for that: because // no man were bound: no one was obliged 7-8 what your saying doth prove: what is proved by what you're saying 9, 18 stick: quibble 12 nothing: not at all 13, 16 may: can 14 holy doctors: biblical exegetes 15 towardness: cooperativeness 17 let: obstruction 18 might: could 19 for one: over that (die with) one notch 20 percase: perchance // cater-trey-deuce: (a throw of dice of) four, three, two 21 genteeel: courteous (as)
believed a thing whereof we believed that the Scripture affirmeth the contrary. For then believed we that the Scripture were false!"

“This is,” quoth I, “very well said. But for the more plainness, let us put one example or twain. And what point rather than the article touching the equality in Godhead of our Savior Christ with his Father? For if the contrary belief were true… then were this always damnable, and plain idolatry.”

“Very truth,” quoth he.

“May not,” quoth I, “the other example be the matter that we have in hand… concerning saints’ relics, images, and pilgrimages? Which things if it be (as ye say many reckon it) idolatry… then is it yet worse to do therein as we do… than if our belief were wrong in the other point. And that as much worse… as the saints, or the images either, be worse than the holy manhood of Christ.”

“That is,” quoth he, “very true.”

“Then,” quoth I, “let the first point alone, because therein we be all agreed, and speak of the second: if the old fathers took the Scriptures one way and we the contrary. Though it might be that we were able to understand the Scriptures as well as they, yet if they so understood them that they thought this kind of worship not forbidden, but commanded, and pleasant to God; and we new men, on the other side, thought it utterly forbidden and held for idolatry: the one party did not in deed understand the Scripture right, but were in a damnable error.”

“That will no man deny,” quoth he.

“I doubt not, now,” quoth I, “but that yourself seeth very well how many things I might here lay for them, to prove you that they

The differences between the old doctors and the new erred not so. First, their wits, as much as our new men’s; their diligence as great; their erudition greater; their study as fervent; their devotion hotter; their number far greater; their time continued longer, by many ages persevering; the contrary opinions in few, and those always soon faded; they taken always for Catholic, the contrary part for heretics. Here might I lay you the holiness of their life, and the plenty of their grace well
appearing thereby. And that our Lord therefore opened their eyes and suffered and caused them to see the truth; and albeit he used therein none open miracle nor sensible revelation (whereof, as ye say, they none allege or pretend for the proof of their opinions in their interpretations of Holy Scripture), yet used he the secret supernatural means by which his grace assistant with good men that labor therefor... by motions insensible to themselves... inclineth their assent unto the true side. And that thus the old holy fathers did, in the point that we speak of and in such others, perceive the right sense of Holy Scripture so far forth, at the leastwise, as they well knew that it was not contrary to their belief. And here might I lay you also that if it had been otherwise, and that they had therein damnable been deceived: then, living and dying in damnable errors, they could not have been saints—as God hath showed them to be, by many a thousand miracles both in their lives and after their deaths. With this might I also lay, and very well conclude, that since those holy doctors and the Church... be (as by their books plainly appeareth) all of one faith in this point and such others—that thereby well appeareth that the Church is in the truth, and is not in the understanding of the Scripture that speaketh of the matter anything deceived; but they clearly deceived that do understand those texts of Holy Scripture to the contrary. These things, as I say, and yet many others more might I lay. But since ye did yourself put the Church and them both in one case... and so they be indeed: I will rather prove you the truth of them by the truth of the Church than the truth of the Church by the truth of them. And so seemeth me good reason. For surely, since they were but members of his church, God had his special care upon them most especially for the profit of his church; by whose whole corps he more setteth than by any member thereof—saint, apostle, evangelist, or other. And therefore must I yet ask you again whether the Church may have any damnable error in the faith, by mistaking of Scripture or otherwise."

“That is,” quoth he, “somewhat hard to tell.”

“Now,” quoth I, “somewhat I marvel that ye remember not that yourself Lk 22:32 hath agreed already that these words of Christ spoken unto Peter, ‘I..."
have prayed that thy faith shall never fail,’ were not only meant by
the faith in Peter’s own person, but also by the faith of the
Peter head of the Church Church. For to him was it spoken as head
of the Church.”

“Yes, I remember,” quoth he, “right well that I agreed it. But I remember
also that, notwithstanding mine agreement, ye were content that
we should ensearch again and again the matter otherwise besides…
wherein mine agreement should not bind me.”

“Lo,” quoth I, “that had I forgotten again! But let it, then, alone for the
while, and tell me this: Did not Christ intend to gather a flock and
congregation of people that should serve God and be his special people?”

“Yes,” quoth he, “that is very truth. For so saith plain Scripture of
Christ, in sundry places. As where the Father of heaven saith unto
Christ in the psalm, ‘Postula a me, et dabo tibi gentes hereditatem
tuam’ (‘Ask of me, and I shall give thee paynim people for thine
inheritance’), and many other places. And else undoubtedly his whole
coming had been, in manner, frustrate and in vain.”

“That people,” quoth I, “which should be an inheritance—did he
intend should endure for his own days only, while he lived here,
or else that it should go forth and continue long after?”

“Nay,” quoth he, “that shall continue while the world lasteth here,
till Doomsday, and after in heaven eternally.”

“Shall this people,” quoth I, “have among them the knowledge and
understanding what he would they should do to please God with?”

“Yea,” quoth he.

“Whether shall they,” quoth I, “have this knowledge for a while, in the
beginning, and then lose it; or shall they have it still as long as
they continue?” Here he began a little to stagger.

“Why,” quoth I, “can ye call them his people any longer if they lose the
knowledge how to serve him and please him? If they forsloth to do
their duty, as slack servants sometimes do, yet may they amend
and do better another time. But if they lose the knowledge of their
duty, then wot they ne’er which way to amend. As he that
knoweth fornication for sin… may fall by frailty to fornication;

1, 2 by: with reference to 6, 8 agreement: granting (of that) 10 while: time being 15 paynim: pagan
2 in: within 7 ensearch: examine 9 lo: oh 12 very truth: certainly true 19, 21 while: as long as 24 would they should: would have them
27 still: continually 28 stagger: waver 29 why: well 30 forsloth: out of laziness neglect 33 wot they ne’er: they have no idea
34 for: to be a
but since he knoweth it for naught, though he sinned more in the
doing than if he had not known the prohibition… yet doth the
knowledge give him warning, and occasion of repentance and
amendment, which must needs lack if he had lost the knowledge.”

Upon this he granted that it must needs be that this people must
needs have always the knowledge how to serve and please our Lord…
or else they ceased to be his people.

“Is not this people,” quoth I, “called the Church?”

“Yes,” quoth he.

“Then the Church,” quoth I, “always hath, and always shall by your
reason have, the knowledge and understanding how God may be
served and pleased.”

“Truth,” quoth he.

“Is,” quoth I, “that knowledge fully had without the knowledge of such
things as God bindeth us to believe?”

“Nay,” quoth he.

“What if we knew them in such wise,” quoth I, “as we could rehearse
them on our fingers’ ends… and yet believed them not to be true?
Would this knowledge serve?”

“In no wise,” quoth he. “For if ye believed them to be false, though ye
so knew them that ye could rehearse them by row… ye could take
no warning by them to please and serve God with them—which is
the cause wherefore the Church should of necessity know them.”

“This is,” quoth I, “very well said. Then, since ye grant that the Church
shall ever endure, and that it could not endure without the knowledge
of such things as please God, nor those things can be
all known if knowledge lacked of those things that God bindeth
us to believe, nor the knowledge of them anything serve to the
knowledge and warning given us of God’s pleasure but if we not
only can tell them, but also believe them, which belief ye
grant is called ‘faith’: of this it consequently followeth that the
Church always hath, and always shall have, the knowledge and belief
of such things as God will have it bound to believe.”

“That is truth,” quoth he, “because God hath left Holy Scripture to the
Church… and therein is all… and the Church believeth that to be
true. And therefore therein and thereby hath the Church all that

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1 for naught: to be immoral       3, 22, 29 warning: notice; notification
7 ceased: would cease       11 reason: thinking
17–18 rehearse them on our fingers’ ends: tick them off on our fingertips
20 in no wise: by no means       21 rehearse them by row: recite them one after the other
29 but if: unless
warning and learning of God’s pleasure that ye speak of… without

"Are ye there yet again?" quoth I. “We have sundry ways proved and agreed between us that this knowledge and faith was before Scripture and writing; and many things of necessity to be believed and done that are not in Holy Scripture. And yet after all this (too long to be repeated!), ye return again to the first point (so often confuted!), that nothing is learned nor known but by Holy Scripture. But, now, go to and suppose it were so. What should ye win thereby? For what if God, “had left the Scripture to the Church locked up in a close chest… and that no man should look therein? Would that have served?”

“Nay, pardie!” quoth he.

“What if he had left it open, and written in such wise that no man could read it?”

“That were all one,” quoth he.

“What if every man,” quoth I, “could read it, and no man understand it?”

“As little would it serve,” quoth he, “as the other.”

“Then,” quoth I, “since it serveth the Church to learn God’s pleasure therein; and that can it not, as ye grant yourself, but if the Church understand it: it followeth of this that the Church understandeth it. And thus, every way, for the faith and knowledge of God’s pleasure—if it be, as ye say, all known by the Scripture, and no part otherwise—yet always to this point ye bring it in the end: that

The Church hath the sure knowledge of Scripture. The Church hath the sure knowledge thereof. And then, if that be so, ye shall not (as ye lately said ye should) in any diverse texts of Scripture seeming to make a doubtous article of our faith and to bring in question what we be bound to believe, after ye have read in Scripture all that can be read… and heard on both sides all that can be said, then take which part seemeth to yourself most probable; nor if ye stand still, for all that, in a doubt, then after your bitter prayers made to God for his grace and guidance in the choice… go take you the one part at adventure and cleave thereto, as though ye were sure by your confidence in God… that his grace had
inclined your assent to the surer side; but, since I have showed you
plainly, by reason, that he hath given his church in all such
things knowledge of the truth, ye shall take the sure way and put
yourself out of all perplexity… if in the point itself and the scriptures
that touch it, ye take for the truth that way that the Church teacheth you
therein, howsoever the matter seem beside unto yourself or to any
man else.”

The Twenty-ninth Chapter

The author proveth by Scripture that God instructeth the
church of Christ in every truth necessarily requisite for
our salvation.

“Truly,” quoth he, “ye wind it well about; but yet ye made as
though ye would have showed that God had in Scripture told me
that he had and ever would tell his church the truth in all such
matters—and now ye bring it to the point… not the Holy Scripture
telleth me the tale, but man’s reason. And surely, as I showed you
before, I dare not well trust reason in matters of faith and of Holy
Scripture.”

“I began,” quoth I, “to prove it you by Scripture… and ye then put me
out, in the beginning. Howbeit, this reason hath Scripture for its
Reason is not to be mistrusted
where faith standeth not
against it.

foundation and ground. And though it
somewhat build further thereon… yet is
not reason always to be mistrusted, where
faith standeth not against it, nor God

saith not the contrary. Except reason be so far out of credence
with you that ye will not now believe it if it tell you that twice
twain make four. I ween ye will fare by reason as one did once by
a false shrew. He swore that he would not for twenty pounds hear him say his
Creed, for he knew him for such a liar that he thought he should
never believe his Creed after… if he heard it once of his mouth.
“Howbeit,” quoth I, “let us yet see whether God himself in Scripture tell you the same tale or no. God telleth you in Scripture that he would be with his church to the end of the world. I think ye doubt not thereof but those words he spoke to the whole church that then was... and ever shall be, from the apostles’ days, continued till the end of the world.”

“That, in good faith,” quoth he, “must needs be so.”

“That, in good faith,” quoth he, “must needs be so.”

“Then were this, in good faith, enough,” quoth I, “for our purpose, since no man doubteth wherefore he will be with his church. Except we should think that he would be therewith for nothing, wherefore should he be with it but to keep it and preserve it, with the assistance of his gracious presence, from spiritual mischief especially—and of all other, especially from infidelity and from idolatry?

Which was the special thing from which he called his church out of the Gentiles—which else, as for moral virtues and political, if they had not lacked the right cause and end of referring their acts to God, were many of them not far under many of us. Let us go further. Doth he not in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of Saint John again and again repeat that after his going he will come again to them? And saith he will not leave them orphans, as fatherless children, but will come again to them himself? Let us add now thereunto the words before rehearsed, that he will be with them till the world’s end, and it appeareth plain that he meant all this by his whole church that should be to the world’s end.

When he said unto them, ‘I call you friends, for all that I have heard of my Father I have made known to you,’ he spoke as to his perpetual church, and not to the apostles alone... but if he said to them alone these words also—‘I command that ye love each other’—so that none should love each other after but only they. Now, lest the things that he taught them should by the Church after be forgotten (which was more to be doubted than of themselves that heard it), he said unto them also—‘These things,’ quoth he, ‘have I spoken to you abiding here with you.
But the Comforter—which is the Holy Ghost, whom my Father shall send in my name—he shall teach you all thing, and he shall put you in mind and remembrance of all thing that I shall have said unto you.’

So that here ye see that he shall again always teach the Church of new... the old lessons of Christ. And he said also to them that this Comforter, the Holy Ghost, the ‘Spirit of truth,’ should be sent to abide with them ‘forever’; which cannot be meant but of the whole Church. For the Holy Ghost was not sent hither, into the earth, here to dwell with the apostles forever... for they dwelled not so long.

The Church cannot err. Here. Now, if the ‘Spirit of truth’ shall dwell in the Church forever, how can the Church err in perceiving of the truth—in such things, I mean, as God will bind them to know, or shall be necessary for them to know? For only of such things meant our Lord... when he said that the Holy Ghost shall teach them ‘all thing.’ For as Saint Paul saith, the manifestation and showing of the Spirit is to the utility and profit. This Holy Spirit also was not promised by our Savior Christ that he should only tell his church again his words, but he said further—‘I have,’ quoth he, ‘besides all this, many things to say to you; but ye be not able to bear them now. But when he shall come that is the Spirit of truth, he shall lead you into all truth.’ Lo, our Lord said not that the Holy Ghost should write unto his church all truth, but that he should lead them, by secret inspiration and inclination of their hearts, into all truth—in which must needs be conceived both information and right belief of every necessary article... and of the right and true sense of Holy Scripture, as far as shall be requisite to conserve the Church from any damnable error.

“Now, when the Holy Ghost shall, by God’s promise, be for this purpose abiding in the Church forever; and Christ himself hath also said that he will not leave his church as orphans, but will come himself... and be with it ‘unto the end of the world,’ and saith also that his Father is in him and he is in his Father, and that his Father and he be both one thing—not both one person, but both one

3, 4, 16 all thing: everything 25 secret: unperceivable 27 necessary: essential 36 thing: entity
substance—and, with the Holy Ghost, both one God: then must it
needs follow that to the world’s end…
there is with the Church resident the whole
Trinity. Whose assistance being to the
Church perpetual, how can it at any time fall from true faith to
false errors and heresies?"

The Thirtieth Chapter

Whereas the messenger had thought before that it were
hard to believe anything certainly save Holy Scripture,
though the Church did agree therein and command it: the
author showeth that saving for the authority of the Church,
men could not know what scripture they should believe.
And here is it showed that God will not suffer the Church to
be deceived in the choice of the very scripture of God from
any counterfeit.

“Now is it, I suppose, well and clearly proved by Scripture, the thing
that I promised: that is to wit, that the Church cannot err in any
such substantial article as God will have us bound to believe.
“But yet, forasmuch as ye regard nothing but Scripture only,
this would I fain wit of you: whether ye believe that Christ was
born of a virgin.”

“What else?” quoth he.

“Why believe you that?” quoth I.

“The Gospel showeth me so,” quoth he.

“What if it did not?” quoth I. “Were then your Creed out of credence…
but if it bring witness with him?”

“The Creed,” quoth he, “is a thing by itself.”

“Yet is it,” quoth I, “no part of the Gospel as the Pater Noster is. And
yet I think if gospel had never been written… ye would have believed
your Creed.”

“So think I too,” quoth he.

“And wherefore,” quoth I, “but for because the Church should have
showed you so? But let our Creed alone a while, and go we to the

4 assistance: active presence  8 were: would be  9 certainly: with certainty
10 though: even if    // agree: concur
11 shouweth that saving: points out that were it not  13 showed: pointed out
13 suffer: allow  14 deceived: mistaken    // choice: distinguishing; picking out
14 very: actual; authentic  16 well and: good and; quite  17 in: with regard to
20 fain wit of: like to know about  24 shouweth: tells
25 were then your Creed out of credence: would your Creed then have no credibility
26 him: it  27 a thing: something  32 wherefore: for what reason
33 showed: told
Gospel itself. Which gospel telleth you that Christ was born of a virgin?"
  "How know you that?" quoth I.
  "For I read it so," quoth he, "in the book."
  "Ye read," quoth I, "such a book. But how know you that Saint Luke made it?"
  "How know I," quoth he, "other books... but by that they bear the names of their authors written upon them?"
  "Know you it well thereby?" quoth I. "Many books be there that have false inscriptions... and are not the books of them that be named by."
  "That is truth," quoth he. "But yet, though men did peradventure err and fail in the name—as if he should repute a book of stories to be
made by Titus Livius which he never made, but some other honest cunning man—yet were the books neither less elegant nor less true therefor. Nor, in like wise, if the Church did mistake the very name of some evangelist and gospel... yet were the gospel nevertheless true."
  "That is," quoth I, "well said. But how be ye sure that the matter of the book is true?"
  "Marry," quoth he, "for I am!"
  "That is," quoth I, "the reason that a maiden layeth for her own knowledge of her maidenhood. But she could tell another how she knoweth she hath it, saving that she is loath to come so near as to be aknown... that she could tell how she might lose it. But here is no such fear. Tell me, therefore—whereby wot ye that the matter of that book is true?"
  "I think," quoth he, "that God showeth me so."
  "That is well thought," quoth I. "But he told it you not mouth to mouth."
  "No," quoth he. "But he hath told it to others in the beginning—or else it was well known in the beginning, when he wrote it. And he was known and believed by his living... and the miracles that God did for him. And after that it was once known, the knowledge went forth from man to man. And God hath so wrought with us that we believe it because the whole Church hath always done so before our days."

7, 15 made: wrote / written 11–12 be named by: are attributed to
14 fail in the name: get the name wrong // book of stories: historical book
16 honest: honorable // cunning: learned // were the books: would the books be
17 therefore: on that account // mistake: get wrong 18 very: actual; real
18–19: were... true: would that gospel nevertheless be true 20, 27 matter: content
22 marry: good heavens // for: because 23 layeth: gives
23, 24 maiden(hood): virgin(ity) 24 another: someone else
25 come so near: become so intimate 26 aknown: i.e., known to still have her virginity
27 whereby: by what means // wot: know 29 showeth: tells
30–31 mouth to mouth: face to face; in a personal conversation (with you)
33 else: otherwise // he: i.e., Luke 34 by his living: on account of the way he lived
36 wrought with: brought things about; worked in
“Now come you,” quoth I, “to the very point. For many things hath been true… that in process after hath left to be believed. And many a thing hath in the beginning been known for false… and yet hath after happed to be believed. But the Gospels and Holy Scripture, God provideth that though perchase some of it may perish and be lost, whereby they might have harm… but not fall in error—for the faith should stand though the Scriptures were all gone—yet shall he never suffer his church to be deceived in that point… that they shall take for Holy Scripture any book that is not. And therefore saith holy Saint Augustine, ‘I should not believe the Gospel but if it were for the Church.’ And he saith good reason. For were it not for the Spirit of God keeping the truth thereof in his church, who could be sure which were the very gospels? There were many that wrote the gospel. And yet hath the Church by secret instinct of God… rejected the remnant and chosen out these four… for the sure, undoubted true.”

“That is,” quoth he, “surely so.”

“This is,” quoth I, “so surely so… that Luther himself is driven of necessity to grant this; or else he perceiveth that there were no hold nor surety in Scripture itself, if the Church might be suffered by God to be deceived in that point… and to take for Holy Scripture that writing that in deed were not. And therefore he confesseth that this must needs be a sure, infallible ground: that God hath given this gift unto his church, that his church can always discern the word of God from the word of men.”

“A singular great gift

“In good faith,” quoth he, “that must needs be so, or else all would fail.”

Quoth I, “Then ye, that would believe the Church in nothing… nor give sure credence to the tradition of the Church but if it were proved by Scripture, now see it proved to you that ye could not believe the Scripture… but if it were proved to be Scripture by the judgment and tradition of the Church.”

“No,” quoth he, “but when I have learned once of the Church… that it is Holy Scripture, and the word of God—then I believe it better than I believe all the Church. I might by a light person sometime know a
much more substantial man. And yet when I know him, I will believe him much better than him by whom I know him... if they varied in a tale and were contrary."

“Good reason,” quoth I. “But the Church biddeth you not believe the contrary of that the Scripture saith; but it telleth you that in such places as ye would ‘better believe the Scripture than the Church,’ there ye understand not the Scripture. For whatsoever words it speaketh, yet it meaneth not the contrary of that the Church teacheth you. And the Church cannot be deceived in any such weighty point.”

“Whereby shall I know?” quoth he.

“Why be we at that point yet?” quoth I. “Have we so soon forgotten the perpetual assistance of the Trinity in his church... and the prayer of Christ to keep the faith of his church from failing... and the Holy Ghost sent of purpose to keep in the Church the remembrance of Christ’s words and to lead them into all truth? What would it have profited to have put you in the remembrance of the assistance of God with the children of Israel—walking with them in the cloud by day, and in the pillar of fire by night, in their earthly voyage—and thereby to have proved you the much more special assistance of God with his Christian church in their spiritual voyage... wherein his especial goodness well declareth his tender diligence... by that he doth vouchsafe to assist and comfort us with the continual presence of his Precious Body in the Holy Sacrament? All this would not help... if manifest reason that I made you... and evident Scripture that I rehearsed you... cannot yet print in your heart a perceiving that the assistance of God in his church must needs preserve his church from all damnable errors in the faith... and give his church so far forth the understanding of Scripture... that they may well perceive that no part thereof, well understood, standeth against any article that the Church believeth as parcel of their Christian faith.”

“Nay,” quoth he, “I perceive it well when I remember it; but it was not ready in remembrance.”

The Thirty-first Chapter

In that the Church cannot err in the choice of the true scripture, the author proveth—by the reason which the

3 varied in a tale: told a different story // were contrary: said opposite things
4 reason: reasoning // biddeth you not: does not tell you to 5, 8 of that: of what
9 deceived: mistaken; wrong 13, 18, etc. assistance: active presence
18 walking: going 22 declareth: shows 23 by: in
26 rehearsed: quoted // print: imprint 29 preserve: keep; safeguard
31 well: rightly 32 standeth: goes 33 parcel: a constituent part
35 ready in remembrance: at the forefront of my memory
37 choice: distinguishing; picking out // in the: regarding the 38 reason: argument
King’s Highness, in his noble and most famous book, objecteth against Luther—that the Church cannot err in the necessary understanding of Scripture. And finally the author in this chapter doth briefly recapitulate certain of the principal points that be before proved; and therewith endeth the First Book.

“Yet would I,” quoth I, “ask you one thing. Wherefore, think you, will not Christ suffer his church to be deceived in the discerning of Holy Scripture from other writing… and suffer them to take a book of Holy Scripture… that were none in deed?”

“Lest men might,” quoth he, “of some false book reputed of Holy Scripture… have great occasion given them to conceive the wrong doctrine, and wrong opinions of the faith, if God would suffer his church to take a false, devised book for Holy Scripture and for his own holy words.”

“Ye say,” quoth I, “very truth. Now, what if in the very scripture he should suffer his church mistake the very sentence, in a matter substantial of our faith? Were they not in like peril to fall by misunderstanding into like errors… as they might by false writings?”

“Yes, that they were,” quoth he.

“Forsooth,” quoth I, “so were they—and in much more. For in a false book mistaken for Scripture, though they had it in never so high reverence for some good things that they found in it… and thereby should have great occasion to believe the false errors written in the same—yet having, as the Church always shall have, the true faith first in heart, they should find many shifts to keep out the errors. But, now, if they falsely should understand the true scripture, there were no way to escape from damnable errors. And therefore may I say to you… as the King’s Highness most prudently laid unto Luther: Since God will not suffer his church to mistake a book of Scripture for peril of damnable
errors that might ensue thereon, and like peril may there ensue

Note by the misconstruing of the sentence as by the mistaking of the book, it must
needs follow that God will in things of our faith no more suffer them
to take a false sentence for true... than to take a false book for
Scripture. And with this reason His Highness concluded him so clearly...
that he durst never since, for shame, touch that point again, nor
any color could lay... but that, upon his own confession, in all
substantial points concerning the faith or knowledge of virtue,
pleasant to God... the Church hath so right understanding of
Scripture... that it well and truly perceiveth... that no text therein
can be rightly understood... against any article that the Church
believeth for thing to be believed of necessity. And this
point durst he never since touch, nor make answer thereto... albeit
that the King's Highness with this one point alone plainly turneth
up and destroyeth the ground and foundation of all the heresies
that Luther would have believed. And therefore of all things had
Luther greatest cause to answer this point earnestly—and would,
undoubtedly, if he had wist how."

"Surely," quoth your friend, "I marvel not though he did not. For
this point is so clear, he could not; and I am herein fully satisfied."

The faith of the Church is a
right rule to the study of Scripture.

"Then be you," quoth I, "satisfied in this
also: that the faith of the Church is a
right rule to carry with you to the study
of Scripture—to shape you the understanding
of the texts by, and so to take them as they may always
agree therewith."

"Be it," quoth he.

"Then are ye," quoth I, "also fully answered in this: that whereas ye said
ye should not believe the Church telling a 'tale of their own,' but
only telling you Scripture, ye now perceive that in such things
as we speak of—that is to wit, necessary points of our faith—if
they tell you a tale which if it were false were damnable, ye must
believe, and may be sure, that since the Church cannot in such

2, 5 sentence: meaning 3 mistaking: wrong taking 5 false: spurious
5 true: the real one 6 reason: argument 6 concluded: confuted
6 clearly: thoroughly 7 touch: bring up
8 any color could lay: any spin could come up with 10 pleasant: (of what is) pleasing
11 well and truly: quite correctly 12 against: i.e., to go against
17 would have believed: would have people believe 18 earnestly: zealously
19 wist: known 20 surely: assuredly 26 marvel not though: am not surprised that
28 be it: right 31 perceive: realize
things er... it is very true, all that the Church in such things telleth you. And that it is not their own word, but the word of God, though it be not in Scripture.”

“That appeareth well,” quoth he.

“Then are ye,” quoth I, “as fully satisfied that, whereas ye lately said that it were a disobedience to God, and preferring of the Church before himself, if ye shall believe the Church in such things as ‘God in his Holy Scripture saith himself the contrary’—ye now perceive it can in no wise be so; but since his church in such things as we speak of cannot err, it is impossible that the Scripture of God can be contrary to the faith of the Church.”

“That is very true,” quoth he.

“Then it is as true,” quoth I, “that ye be, further, fully answered in the principal point—that the scriptures laid against images and pilgrimages and worship of saints… make nothing against them. And also that those things—images, I mean, and pilgrimages, and praying to saints—are things good and to be had in honor in Christ’s church… since the Church believeth so. Which, as ye grant and see cause why ye so should grant, can in such points not be suffered, for the special assistance of God and instruction of the Holy Ghost, to fall in error. And so be we for this matter, at last, with much work, come to an end. And therefore will we now to dinner. And your other objections that ye have laid… by which ye would prove those things reprovable and make them seem idolatry… which we deferred before, those will we talk of after dinner.”

“By my troth,” quoth he, “I have another tale to tell you… that, all this gear granted, turneth us yet into as much uncertainty as we were in before!”

“Yea?” quoth I. “Then have we well walked after the ballad ‘The further I go, the more behind’! I pray you, what thing is that? For that long I to hear yet ere we go.”

“Nay,” quoth he, “it were better ye dine first. My lady will, I ween, be angry with me that I keep you so long therefrom. For I hold it now well toward twelve. And yet more angry would wax with me... if I
should make you sit and muse at your meat—as ye would, I wot well, muse on the matter if ye wist what it were.”

“If I were,” quoth I, “like my wife, I should muse more thereon now, and eat no meat for longing to know! But come on, then, and let us dine first… and ye shall tell us after.”

The end of the First Book

1 meat: meal // wot well: well know 2 wist: knew 4 meat: food
The Second Book

The First Chapter

The messenger, recapitulating certain things before proved, and, for his part, agreeing that “the church of Christ” cannot in any necessary article of the faith fall in any damnable error, doth put in doubt and question which is the very church of Christ… alleging that they, peradventure, whom we call heretics will say that themselves is “the Church,” and we not. Whereof the author showeth the contrary, declaring whereby we may know that they cannot be “the Church.”

After dinner we walked into the garden. And there shortly, sitting in an arbor, began to go forth in our matter… desiring him to show what thing might that be that made our long forenoon process frustrate and left us as uncertain as we began.

“Sir,” quoth he, “that shall I shortly show you. Whereas there was principally in question whether worshipping of images and relics, and praying to saints, and going on pilgrimages, were lawful or not; and that I put you in mind that men laid against them certain texts of Holy Scripture; and also said unto you that it seemed the texts themselves, which be the words of God, were of more authority against them than the glosses of men… that in such wise expound the texts as they may seem to make for them: ye laid on the other side the consent and agreement and common, catholic faith of the Church; which ye said—and indeed, to say the truth, both by reason and by Scripture ye proved—that it could

The Church cannot err in faith.

not be erroneous, and that the Church could not err in the faith that God would have known and believed. Ye proved the matter also by miracles. In which when I laid divers things
moving men to doubt… partly lest they were not true, but especially lest they were not done by God, for corroboration of the faith, but were percase, by God’s sufferance, done by the devil for our delusion… deserving so to be served by our falling from the worship of God himself to the worship of his creatures: ye proved me yet again that the miracles were true… and that they must needs be done by God. And that ye proved me by this: that it should else follow that the Church had a wrong belief and a damnable. Which eftsoons ye proved well and substantially to be impossible. And forasmuch as there fell in the way occasion to speak of the contrariety that seemed sometimes to fall between the texts of Holy Scripture itself and the common persuasion and faith of the Church; whereas I said that it was thought reasonable to believe the Scripture, being God’s own words rather than the words of men: ye therein proved that the common faith of the Church was as well God’s own words as was Holy Scripture itself—and of as great authority—and that no student in Scripture should presume to try, examine, and judge the catholic faith of Christ’s church by the Scripture, but by the catholic faith of Christ’s church should examine and expound the texts of Scripture. And that in the study of Scripture this was the sure way… wherein should give, ye said, great light the writing of the old holy doctors, whereby we be ascertained that the faith that the Church hath now is the same faith, and the same points, that they had then of old, in every age and every time. And in this part ye proved yet again by reason and Holy Scripture… that the Church hath by the teaching of God and the Holy Ghost the right understanding of Scripture… in all points that are of necessity to be known. And thereupon eftsoons ye deduced and proved that no text of the Scripture, well understood, could stand against the worshipping of images and relics and the seeking of pilgrimages, but that all these things be well proved good and pleasant to God… and the miracles done in such places, done by God… since his special assistance so informeth and instructeth his
Church in so great and so substantial an article, so highly touching
the honor or dishonor of God, that it cannot be suffered to
fall to superstition and idolatry instead of faith and honor done
to God.

“And this is,” quoth he, “as far as I remember, the whole sum and
effect of all that hath hitherto been proved between us.”

“Very true,” quoth I. “And this is of you very well remembered, and
well and summarily rehearsed.”

“But, now,” quoth he, “all this gear granted, we be never the nearer!”

“Why so?” quoth I.

“Marry,” quoth he, “for a man that believed the worship of images to
be wrong and unlawful might grant that—that ‘the Church
doth not err,’ and that ‘the Church hath the right faith,’ and
that ‘the Church doth not mistake the Scripture’—and when all
this were agreed, he might say that ‘the Church’ peradventure
doth not believe as ye say it doth. For he might haply deny
the Church to be that people that ye take it for… and say that it is
the people that believeth as he believeth—that is to wit, all these
kinds of worship to be wrong… and that believeth them whom
ye take for ‘the Church’ to believe wrong.”

“If he and his company,” quoth I, “be the Church, he must tell where
his fellows be!”

“Why so?” quoth he. “If men should ask you and me where the Church
is, we could tell no one place, but many diverse countries.”

“Let him,” quoth I, “in like wise assign some companies that be
known for congregations together in diverse countries.”

“Why,” quoth he, “in the beginning and a good while after, the
church of Christ in every place hid itself, that men could not
tell in any country where they were; nor durst not come out and
show themselves.”

“That was in the beginning,” quoth I, “while the persecution lasted.
But when the persecution ceased once, it was soon known in
every country where the Church was.”

“Marry,” quoth he, “if I should take that part, I would haply say
that in that case it is still… and that the Church is that company,
peradventure, that ye which call yourselves the Church do use to
call heretics—which now do know one another well enough…
and call themselves, and their fellows about the world, the very
church; though they dare not profess it openly, because that ye
(that call yourselves ‘the Church’ and them ‘heretics’) do persecute
them as the church of the paynims did in the beginning. And
therefore they do hide themselves as the Church did in the beginning.

But and if ye would cease your persecution once, and let
them live in rest, ye should see them flock together so fast that
they should soon show you the Church with a wet finger!”

“They might,” quoth I, “peradventure show a shrewd sort within
a while, if they were suffered; and the church that the prophet
Ps 26:5 David speaketh of—‘Odi ecclesiam malignantium’
(‘I hate the church of malicious
men’). But they shall never show themselves the church of
Christ.

“The church of Christ, wheresoever it was in all the persecution,
used to come together to the preaching and prayer… though it were
What things the Church used privily, in woods or secret houses. They
used also the sacraments among themselves,
as Baptism, Confirmation, Matrimony, Holy Orders… priests
and bishops among them; fastings, vigils kept, the Sundays
hallowed; the Mass said, Holy Service sung, and their people houseled—
as well appeareth not only by the stories of the Church, but
also of the paynims. And partly well appeareth by an epistle of Pliny
written to the emperor Trajan. And such things must there be
therein… if it be any church or congregation of Christ. Now, these
people that ye speak of use no such things among themselves,
and therefore they cannot be the church of Christ.”

“They preach,” quoth he, “privily, among themselves; and all the
remnant they do in our churches.”

“This,” quoth I, “plainly proveth that they cannot be the church of
Christ. For the church of Christ ever fled and forbore the temples
A plain renaying of Christ in which idols and maumets were. And
it was a plain renaying of Christ’s faith…
to do any observance thereto, though they did it only with their
body, for fear, and thought the contrary with their heart. For our
Lord saith, ‘He that denieth me before the world, I will deny

3, 22 paynims: pagans 5 and if: if  // once: once and for all 6 rest: peace
7 with a wet finger: with the greatest of ease 8 shrewd sort: bad lot; pack of evildoers
9 suffered: tolerated 12 the: i.e., to be the 16 privily: secretly  // secret: secluded
17 used also: also celebrated 20 hallowed: kept holy
20 Holy Service: the Divine Office  // houseled: given Communion
21 stories: historical writings 22 of the: i.e., by those of 25 use: practice
27 privily: in private 28 remnant: rest 31 maumets: graven images
32 renaying: renouncing 33 observance thereto: i.e., venerating of the idols
33 though: even if
Mt 10:33 him before my Father in heaven.” And Holy
Ws 1:5 Scripture saith, ‘Spiritus Sanctus effugiet
ficturn’ (‘The Holy Ghost fleeth from feigning’).

But these men whom you call ‘the Church’ come to the
5 churches where the images be… which they take for idols, and
there they come to Service with us… whom they take for idolaters.
And whereas they teach among themselves that we do naught… they
come to our church, as I say, and in face of the world they do the
same: kneel to images as we do, set up candles as we do, pray to
saints as we do—and haply more loudly with their mouths while
they mock them with their hearts. And over this, many mock also
the sacraments which they receive.

“And this putteth me in mind also that besides all this, ye cannot
say that these be ‘the Church’ whom we call heretics; but ye
15 must tell which kind of them is ‘the Church.’ For all cannot be,
since the church is and must be all of one belief, and have all one
faith. And as it was written in the Acts of the Apostles, ‘Erat multitudo
Acts 4:32; Ps 67:7 (Vulgate) credentium anima una et cor unum’
(‘The multitude of faithful, believing men
20 were all of one mind and of one heart’). And in the church is the
Holy Ghost, ‘qui facit unanimes in domo’ (‘which maketh all of one
mind in the house of God’—that is, in the church). But as for among
heretics, there be as many diverse minds, almost, as there be men.

“The church of Christ also is a thing that always hath stood and
continued. But the sects of heretics and their churches never
continued, but ever shortly decayed and vanished quite away; so
far forth that of all the old heretics the books also be gone
and lost… when there was no law made yet to burn them; so that
it is easy to see that God himself destroyed them… and the world
clean gave them up… at some time, though new heretics now,
long after, take them up again. For if their opinions had anywhere
continually endured, there would their books have been
continually reserved… which be now quite gone many years ago.

And thus may ye well see that there can no such folk be ‘the
Church’… that in so many years have no church nor come to none…

7 naught: wrong 8 face: (the) sight 27 decayed: disintegrated
but to theirs in which they say themselves that they worship idols."

“Well,” quoth he, “peradventure they will not stick much to assign you a place and show you a company and congregation... which they will say is the very church. For what if they will show you Bohemia, and now in Saxony, where Luther is, and peradventure in a good part of Germany?"

“Marry,” quoth I, “if they say so... then leap they like a flounder out of a frying pan into the fire. For in Saxony, first, and among all there not only as many sects, almost, as men, but also the masters themselves change their minds and their opinions every day, and wot ne’er where to hold them. Bohemia is also in the same case. One faith in the town, another in the field. One in Prague, another in the next town. And yet in Prague itself, one faith in one street, another in the next. So that if ye assign it in Bohemia, ye must tell in what town. And if ye name a town, yet must ye tell in what street. And yet all they acknowledge that they cannot have the sacraments administered... but by such priests as be made by The pope, head of the Church authority derived and conveyed from the pope, which is, under Christ, vicar and the head of our church.”

The Second Chapter

The author showeth that no sect of such as the Church taketh for heretics can be “the Church,” forasmuch as the Church was before all them—as the tree from which all those withered branches be fallen.

“That none of all these can be ‘the Church’ shall well appear also by another means. Whether will ye say that the very church and congregation of Christ was before all the churches and congregations

3 stick much: find it too difficult // assign: name 4 show: point out to
5 show: tell 8 marry: goodness // so: that
10–11 as many heads, as many wits: i.e., as many ways of believing as there are individuals
11 wise: sensible 12 lately: recently 15 wot ne’er: never know
15 hold: settle; fix // case: situation 17 yet: even 18 assign: locate
23 which: who 28, 32 was: existed 31 very: true
of heretics, or some church of heretics before the church of Christ?"

"Marry," quoth he, "there might be some church of heretics before the church of Christ. For there might be some among the Jews, before the birth of Christ. And such, I suppose, were the Sadducees, that believed not the resurrection, nor the immortality of the soul."

"If we should go," quoth I, "to that reckoning, we might fetch the church of Christ far above... and begin it at Adam. For from the first good man to the last... all shall in conclusion be his Church Triumphant in heaven. But I speak of Christ’s church now as of that congregation that, bearing his name, and having his right faith, and being begun to be gathered by himself and spread abroad by his apostles, hath and doth, and shall till his coming to the dreadful Doom, continue still in this world. Whether was this church before all the churches and congregations of heretics, or some one of them before it?"

"Nay," quoth he, "I think it was before them all."

"Whereby may we," quoth I, "be sure of that?"

"Marry," quoth he, "for always the heretics came out of it!"

"That is," quoth I, "true. For they could be no heretics but by being first therein... and after coming out. And it appeareth by the Gospel in which the good husbandman ‘went forth to sow his seed, and when he had sowed good seed, then the enemy sowed his evil after, and they grew up together.’ It appeareth also by the words of the apostle and holy evangelist Saint John, where he said of heretics, ‘Ex nobis profecti sunt, sed non erant ex nobis’; ‘They be gone,’ he said, ‘out of us, but they were none of us’; meaning that ere ever they professed themselves openly for heretics—yet being such indeed, since the church of Christ is a people of one faith—these folk that have another, special faith by themselves... varying and gainsaying the other... be not perfectly of the Church though they be for the while in it. So it is now that any member of that body till it be cut off for fear of corruption of the remnant... hangeth on it, in a manner, and

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3 marry: actually
6 that believed not the resurrection: i.e., who did not believe in the resurrection of the body
10 in conclusion: in the end    14–15 dreadful Doom: fearful Last Judgment
15 was this church: did this church exist    20 marry: goodness
22 after: afterward; later    23 husbandman: farmer    25 evil: bad (seed)
28 out of: out from among    32 varying: differing from
32 gainsaying: going against    35 remnant: rest
some little light or life hath by the Spirit of God, that upholdeth
the body of his Church; being ever in case to take occasion of
amendment by some vein of that wholesome moisture of God’s
grace… that specially spreadeth throughout that holy body. But those
that by the profession of heresies and infidelity fall off from that
body, or, for fear of corrupting the remnant, be by curse cast out of
the body, they plainly dry up and wither away. Our Savior saith

Jn 15:1–6

himself—‘I am,’ saith he, ‘a very vine…
and my Father is a gardener. I am the vine,
and ye be the branches. And every branch that beareth in me no
fruit, my Father taketh it away. And every branch that beareth
fruit, he purgeth it to make it bring the more fruit. And as the
branch can do no good being taken from the tree, right so can
ye do no good, nor serve for naught but for the fire, except ye abide

We must work with faith.  in me.’ By these words of our Savior (and
many more there spoken at length) though
it appeareth that whoso keep the faith, yet except he work well therewith,
God will pluck him out; and whoso by faith abiding in the
stock doth work good works, the more he doth the more

grace and help shall have of God to grow the better and to do the
more—yet appeareth it also… that all the good works that may be
done… will not serve if we be out of the stock. And out of the
stock of the vine all… that be not grafted in by faith; or fallen
off by open profession of heresy; or cut off and cast out for infidelity.

For faith is the gate into God’s church… as misbelief is the

Without faith we cannot come to God.

Apostle saith, ‘Accedentem ad Deum oportet credere’—‘A man cannot come to God
without faith.’ And therefore whoso
professeth a false belief, let him be sure that he is gone out of the
gate of God’s church before actual excommunication, and
fallen off the body of the vineyard. And if they be secret, neither
professing their heresies nor actually being accursed and cast
out, they be in the Church, but not perfectly of it. But in such wise,
in manner, be they… as a dead hand is rather a burden in the

2 case: a position  6 corrupting: i.e., their corrupting
5, 24 infidelity: disbelief  7 plainly: completely
6 curse: excommunication  8 very: real
14, 17 except: unless  13 tree: stem; stock
14 abide: remain  17 appeareth: is made evident
30 be sure: know for a fact  32 actual(ly): official(ly); formal(ly)
31, 33 actual(ly): official(ly)  32 secret: covert
33 accursed: excommunicated  35 dead: benumbed
body than verily any member, organ, or instrument thereof. And 1 Jn 2:19 therefore saith Saint John, as I said before, that ‘the heretics be gone out of us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have tarried with us.’ Meaning thereby not, as some would have it seem, that a good man is not of the Church, nor in God’s favor, while he is good… because he happeneth to wax worse afterward; but he meaneth that in that they went their way from us, they showed that they were naught in deed while they were with us. And so though they were with us, yet were they not of us. For though heretics and infidels be among faithful and well-believing people, yet be they, pardie, none of them. And so it appeareth, as ye said before, that the church of Christ is before all the churches of heretics… and that all congregations of heretics have come out of the church of Christ.”

“That is very true,” quoth he.

“Well,” quoth I, “if that be true, as it is indeed, then can no sect in Bohemia be the right church. For the church which we call ‘the Church,’ that believeth as we believe, was there before them all. And never a church had any church of heretics yet… but it was built by our church to their hands. So that it is evident that none of all them can be Christ’s church, but Christ’s church must needs be that church that was before all them… and out of which all they have sprung… and since severed themselves; which is the church that all they deny not… to believe against them… the points which we believe and they reprove.”

The Third Chapter

The messenger moveth that the very church peradventure is not the people that we take for it, but a secret, unknown sort of such only… as be by God predestined to be saved. Whereunto the author answereth, and declareth that it cannot be so.

3–4 out of: out from among 5 tarried: stayed
7 wax worse: change for the worse 9 naught in deed: in reality wicked
10 though: even if 11 infidels: unbelievers // well-believing: right-believing
12 pardie: by George // appeareth: is evident 13 is before: preexists
21 to their hands: with no effort on their part 26 reprove: reject
28 moveth: submits // very: true // peradventure: perhaps 30 sort: set
31 declareth that: explains why
“Peradventure,” quoth he, “there might be said that it needeth not to assign any place where the very church and true Christian congregation is; but since every place is indifferent thereunto... it may be that all the good men, and chosen people of God, that be predestined to be saved—in what part soever they be, and howsoever they be scattered, here one and there one, here two and there two—that these be the very church of Christ. And be in this world unknown as yet, while the church doth but wander in the pilgrimage of this short life.”

“Marry,” quoth I, “this gear groweth from worse to worse! And in very The Church cannot mistake deed... yet is this point their sheet anchor. Holy Scripture. For first, they see plainly that they must needs grant that the very church can neither be deceived in the right faith... nor mistake Holy Scripture, or misunderstand it, to the introduction of infidelity and false belief. And this ground find all the heretics themselves so sure and fast... that they perceive well except they would openly and utterly deny Christ altogether... it cannot be undermined. And since they manifestly see that, and as evidently see therewith that the church which is the very church indeed... damneth all their ways—whereof, since ‘the Church’ cannot err in discerning the truth, it must needs follow that they mistake, themselves, all the whole matter, and be quite in a wrong way—therefore be they driven to deny for ‘the Church’ the people that be known for ‘the Church,’ and go seek another, they neither know what nor where; build up in the air a church all so spiritual... that they leave therein at length neither God nor good man. And, first, where they say that there be none therein but they that be predestined to be saved—if the question were of the Church triumphant in heaven, then said they well. But we speak of the church of Christ militant here in earth; and therefore goeth their frame as far wide from the place they should set it on... as heaven and earth stand asunder. For first would I wit, if ‘the Church’ be none but those that be predestined, whether all that be predestined be members thereof.”

“Why not?” quoth he.
“Then,” quoth I, “he that is predestined to be saved… whether may he, or
not, be divers times a sinner in his days?”

“May he not,” quoth I, “be also divers times in his days in a wrong
belief and a false heresy… and after turn, repent, and amend… and so
be saved at last, as God hath predestined him to be?”

“Marry,” quoth I, “for then shall it follow that he shall be a member of
the very church, and so still continue, and never can be cast out…
being a stark heretic!”

“Yet,” quoth he, “is he all that while a quick member of ‘the Church’…
by reason of God’s predestination, since though he be not sure…
yet it is in deed sure that he is and ever shall be one of the very
church!”

“It is,” quoth I, “sure in deed, and well known to God, that he so shall
be. But as sure is it that for the while, he is not—except that allthing
that ever shall be… is already present in deed… as it is present
to God’s knowledge. And then were Saint Paul as good while he
was a persecutor… as when he was apostle. And as verily a
member of Christ’s church ere he was born… as he is now in
heaven.”

“Well,” quoth he, “though that peradventure all those that be living
and predestined to be saved be not in it, yet may it be that there be
none others in it than predestinates.”

“But it may be,” quoth I, “that, as men be changeable, he that is
predestined may be many times in his life naught; and he that
will at last fall to sin and wretchedness, and so, finally, cast himself
away, shall in some time of his life be good… and therefore, for
the time, in God’s favor. For God blameth nor hateth no man for
that he shall will; but for that malicious will that he hath, or hath
had, already. And thus shall there by this reason be good men out
of Christ’s church and naughty men therein, faithful men out of it
and heretics in it, and both the one and the other without reason
or good cause why.”

2, 4 divers times: at various times 5 false: loathsome 7 what then: so what
8 marry: good heavens 9, 13 very: true 9 still: always 11 quick: living
12 sure: constant; steadfast 13, 15, 17 in deed: in actuality
13, 15, 16 sure: certain 13 one: a member 16 while: time being
16 except that allthing: unless everything
18 and then were Saint Paul: in which case Saint Paul was 22 though that: even if
26, 32 naught(y): bad 27 at last: ultimately // finally: in the end
30 that he: that which he 31 this reason: this reasoning (of yours)
32 faithful: right-believing
The Fourth Chapter

The messenger moveth that though “the Church” be not the number of folk, only, predestined to bliss, yet may it peradventure be the number of good and well-believing folk, here and there, unknown—which may be, peradventure, those whom we condemn for heretics for holding opinion against images. Whereof the author proveth the contrary.

“Well,” quoth he, “yet may it be that the very church of Christ is all such as believe aright and live well wheresoever they be—though the world know them not, and though few of them know each other. For God, as Saint Paul saith, ‘knoweth who be his.’ And Christ saith that against his church ‘the gates of hell shall not prevail’; but the gates of hell do prevail against sinners. And therefore it appeareth well that there can be no sinners in his church, nor that there be none of his church but good folk. And unto them our Lord is present, and keepeth them from errors, and giveth them right understanding of his holy scriptures. And where they be forceth not; how few they be together maketh no matter. For our Savior saith, ‘Wheresoever be two or three gathered together in my name, there am I also, among them.’ And so is his very church here and there, of only good men… to the world unknown, and to himself well known. And though they be few in comparison… yet make they about in all the world a good many among them. As God said when the children of Israel were fallen in idolatry and worshipped the idol Baal so far forth that it seemed all were in the case, and men knew not who were otherwise—yet said our Lord (as appeareth in the nineteenth chapter, the Third Book of the Kings), ‘I shall reserve for myself seven thousand that have not bended their knee before Baal.’ So that where
the synagogue and church was then... it was unknown to man, but it was well known to God. And they were not his church that seemed to be, but a company ungathered, that no man was aware of... nor would have went. And so may it be, peradventure, now... that the very church of Christ is not, nor many days hath not been, the people that semeth to be ‘the Church,’ but some good men scattered here and there, unknown... till God gather them together and make them known; and haply those that believe against images, and whom we now call heretics.”

“This is,” quoth I, “a reason that Luther maketh himself. By which he would bring the very church of Christ out of knowledge, and would put it in doubt whether the saints that the Church honoreth... were good men or not. And would that it might seem peradventure nay, but that they were haply not good, but the good men and saints indeed... were some others whom the world for their open lewd living reputed for naught. But where he saith that the church or synagogue of the right belief was then unknown—that is not true. For it was well known in Jerusalem and Judaea, though it had been unknown who were faithful in Samaria. And the scripture also saith not that these seven thousand whom he would leave yet in Israel, that had not bowed their knees before Baal, were secret and unknown; but he saith only that such a number of such folk he would leave. But, now, for our purpose, since ye will have the very church a secret, unknown... not company and congregation, but a dissparkled number of only good men: will you that those good men which after your reckoning make the very church... shall have the same faith and none other than we have which be now reputed for ‘the Church,’ or else a faith and belief different?”

“What if they have the same?” quoth he. “Marry,” quoth I, “then will your new-built church nothing help your purpose; but they shall as fast confirm the worship of images, praying to saints, and seeking to pilgrimages as we. And as deeply condemn for heresy your opinion to the contrary.”

“That is very truth,” quoth he. “But it may be that of that very church... the faith and belief shall be that all this gear is erroneous and as plain idolatry as was the worshipping of Baal.”
“If it were so,” quoth I, “then had Christ not kept him seven thousand from the worship of Baal in all the regions that bear the name of Christendom… except these new folk of Saxony and Bohemia which yourself grant to be the heretics, as sects come out of the Church.

And more than wonder were it if all the church of Christ should be clean among infidels and heretics, and no part at all thereof among the great unchangeable Christian countries… which have kept their faith in one constant fashion derived from the beginning. For this am I sure: that in all those regions, as I say, if any have any such opinion against images and saints, yet cometh he to the church among his neighbors… and there boweth his knees to Baal (if the images be Baal) as his neighbors do. But go to, let us forth on a little further. And supposing that there were some such secret ‘good’ folk as ye speak of… that had the ‘right’ belief, and were the ‘right’ church; and that they were so dispersed asunder that they were to the world unknown: hath not God set an order in his church that some shall preach to the remnant for exhortation of good living, and information… wherein good living standeth—as in faith and good works?”

“Yes,” quoth he.

“Bade not Christ,” quoth I, “sacraments also to be administered in his church, by the priests of the same?”

“Yes,” quoth he.

“Now,” quoth I, “if some infidels as Turks or Saracens, having heard of Christ’s name… did long to know his scripture and his faith; and hearing that there were many people that professed themselves for Christian men—whole nations—but they were all open idolaters and in a misbelief, and clearly deceived and beguiled, and that especially by the clergy that teacheth them; howbeit, there were yet a few good folk, and right-believing, which were not deceived, which among them be the very, true church; but who they be, or where they be, or how to ask for them, or if he happen on them… yet whereby to know them, that can no man tell him: how should these infidels come to the faith, and of whom should they hear it? For they—being warned before that there were many sects...

3 new: modern 4 come: i.e., that have come 5 all: i.e., all of
6 clean: completely // infidels: unbelievers 7 unchangeable: undeflectable
8 derived from: going back to 9 this: i.e., of this 12–13 go to: come
17 remnant: test
18–19 wherein good living standeth: as to what good living consists in
24 as: such as 27 open: blatant 28 clearly: completely
28, 30 deceived: in error 30, 31 which: who 31 very: real 34 of: from
35 warned: informed
of heretics, and but one true church—would never be so
mad to learn of them that they might ween were wrong. And
how should they now come to the right... when the true church
is unknown?"

“They might,” quothe, “take the Scripture.”

“They should,” quothe I, “be therein like to Eunuchus, that could not
Acts 8:30–31 understand without a reader. And then
if they took a wrong reader of a wrong
close these infidels and speak of ourselves... which are (if this way
were true) as false as they. Where be, then, preachers of this very
church that should preach and teach us better? For it is no church if
it have no preachers.”

“It hath,” quothe he, “some that preach sometimes—but ye will not
suffer them! Ye punish them and burn them!”

“Nay,” quothe I, “they be wiser than so. They will not be burned for
us; for they will rather swear on a Book that they never said so—or
else that they will no more say so. And in this appeareth that there is
no such secret, unknown church of Christ... that having such
opinions is the very church. For the very church hath ever had
some that hath abided by their faith and their preaching... and
would never go back with God’s word, to die therefor. And this
church that we be of that take your church for heretics... have
had many such martys therein... that believed as we do against
your opinions—as appeareth by the histories and by many of their
books—whereas of your ‘secret’ church I never yet found, or heard
of, anyone in all my life but he would forswear your faith to save
his life. Wherebe, also, your priests and your bishops? For such
must they have if they be the church of Christ. Now, such can your
church have none; ye be each to other unknown. And though
some of such churches have a false opinion that every man is a priest, and

2 to: i.e., as to 2, 11 of: from 2 ween: think 5 might: could
5 take: come upon 6 that: (the unnamed man) who 7, 8 reader: an interpreter
8 took: came upon 9 all were marred: everything would be distorted
12, 22, 29 appeareth: is made clear (that) 12 had: would have
13 ordinary: established; normative 14 which: who 19 suffer: tolerate
20 wiser than so: smarter than that 20–21 for us: on our account 21 Book: Bible
21 so: such and such 22 so: that 24, 29 opinions: tenets 24 very: true
25 abided: stood; stuck 26 go back with: retract; take back
26 to die therefor: i.e., even if the refusal meant their death
28 against: regarding 29 histories: historical accounts
31 forswear: renounce under oath
every woman, too—yet this heresy, false as it is, will not serve this
unknown church. For the holders of that opinion do put that no
man may, for all that, take upon him to preach or meddle as priest… till
he be chosen by the congregation. And where can that be in this
imaginary church… of which no man knoweth other? And whereas
our Lord saith, ‘Wheresoever be two or three gathered together
Mt 18:20
in my name, there am I with them,’ he
spoke not as though every two or three whatsoever-they-were
should make his church; but that wheresoever
there came together two or three in his name that be of his church,
there is he with them. And so doth the one text of the Scripture in
the Gospel plainly declare—as it is well set out and opened by the
holy doctor and glorious martyr Saint Cyprian, in his epistle
against Novatian.

“When our Savior saith also that he which would not amend by
Mt 18:15–17
his fault showed him before two or three
witnesses… should be complained upon unto
‘the church,’ did he mean a secret church… which no man wist
where to find? Now, when the Apostle
1 Cor 6:4
writeth unto the Corinthians that,
rather than they should plead and strive in the law before the
infidels, they should set such as were in ‘the church’ little set by
to be judges in their temporal suits, of what church did he speak?
Of such one as no man wist where to seek it? This ‘unknown’
church which they be driven to seek that be loath to know the
church… will never serve. But the church of Christ is a church well
‘The church” cannot be
hidden: Mt 5:14. known. And his pleasure was to have it
known, and not hidden. And it is built upon
so high a hill of that holy stone—I mean
upon Christ himself—that it cannot be hidden. ‘Non potest abscondi
civitas supra montem posita’—‘The city cannot be hidden that is set on
a hill.’ And he would have his faith divulged and spread abroad
openly—not always whispered in hugger-mugger. And therefore he
bound his preachers to stand thereby, and not to revoke his word for

Lk 11:33; 12:49
no pain. For he said that he did not light
that candle to put it and hide it under a

2 put: claim  3 meddle: officiate  11 the . . . Scripture: that same scriptural text
12 opened: explicated  13 doctor: exegete  15 which: who  // by: upon having
16 his fault showed him: having his fault pointed out to him
17 be complained upon: have a complaint lodged against him
18, 24 wist: knew  19 the Apostle: Saint Paul  21 plead: enter pleas
21 strive: wrangle // law: i.e., law courts
22 were in “the church” little set by: had little standing in “the church”
23 temporal: civil  24, 25 seek: look for  33 in hugger-mugger: furtively
34 revoke: retract
bushel; for so would no man do; but he had kindled a fire which
he would not should lie and smolder as coals doth in quench, but he
would it should burn and give light. And therefore folly were it to say that
Christ, which would have his church spread through the world… and
everywhere gathered in company, would have it turned to a
secret, unknown, single sort… severed asunder and scattered about in
corners, unknown to all the world and to themselves too. Now, where
they say that there is none of ‘the church’ but only those that be good
tolk—this would make ‘the church’ clearly unknown, were the people
never so many and the place never so large. For who can know of the
multitud… who be good indeed, and who be naught, since the bad may
suddenly be amended, unawares to the world, and the good as suddenly
waxed worse? Now lay they for the proof of that opinion the words
of Christ… which Luther allegeth also, for the same intent, in his book that

Mt 16:18
he made against Ambrosius Catharinus;
that is to wit, the words wherein our Lord
said unto Saint Peter that against his church the gates of hell should
not prevail; by which words Luther doth (as he thinketh, and saith
himself) marvelously gaily prove that there can be no man of ‘the
church’ but he that sinneth not. For this argument he maketh: Christ
saith that the ‘gates of hell’ shall not ‘prevail’ against ‘the church’; but
the ‘gates of hell’ is nothing but the devil, and he prevaleth against
all folk that sin; ergo, no folk that sin be ‘the church.’ And by this worshipful
Luther’s foolish argument argument it is a world to see what
boast the madman maketh… that he hath
clearly proved that ‘the church’ is not these people whom we take for ‘the
church’… because they be sinners. Which argument hath so many
follies and faults therein, and so much inconvenience and absurdity
following thereupon, that it is more than marvel that a child of one
week’s study in sophistry could for shame find in his heart to bring
it in place for any earnest argument. For first, if men deny him that the
‘gates of hell’ do in that place signify the devil… then he can never
The gates of hell prove it… and then is all his reason wiped
quite away. Now do there indeed divers
old commenters and doctors of the Church take in that place for the ‘gates
of hell’… the great tyrants and heretics by whose persecutions and

1 bushel: bushel basket     2 would not should: would not have
3 would it should: would have it // folly were it: it would be foolish     4 which: who
5 company: community // to: into     6 single: individualistic; unconnected // sort: set
7 corners: out-of-the-way places     8 none: no one (who is)     9 clearly: completely
11 naught: bad     13 waxen worse: changed for the worse // opinion: contention
14 allegeth: quotes     15 made: wrote     19 marvelously gaily: in a wondrously brilliant way
23 by: about // worshipful: impressive     28 follies and faults: fallacies and flaws
28 inconvenience: incongruity     29 more than marvel: more than amazing
31 earnest: serious     33 all his reason: his whole line of reasoning     34 divers: several
35 old commenters and doctors: early biblical commentators and exegetes
heresies—as it were, by two gates—many a man hath gone into hell; and our Savior promiseth in that place that neither of those two gates (that is to wit, neither paynim tyrant nor christened heretic) should prevail against ‘the church’; for though they have destroyed, and shall destroy, many of ‘the church,’ yet shall they not be able to destroy ‘the church,’ but ‘the church’ shall stand and be by God preserved in despite of all their teeth. And thus ye see how soon Luther’s special arguments were overthrown with truth. But if a man would grant him that the ‘gates of hell’ did here signify the devil, yet should we not need to grant him that the devil, as he is called of God by the name of the ‘gates’ (which is not done for naught), doth prevail against every man that sinneth. For he that sinneth and riseth again out of sin (and so cometh within the gates… as yet the gates cannot hold him, but that he breaketh out of the gates), the gates do not prevail against him, but he prevaieth against the gates. And thus is Luther’s wise argument which he groundeth upon the text… avoided again. It appeareth also that it is a very frantic argument. For where he saith that against the ‘church of Christ’ the gates of hell prevail not, but they prevail against our church—that is to wit, all the Christian people whom we call ‘the church’… under obedience of the pope, ergo they be not ‘the church’—this argument proveth that there is in earth no church at all. For what church can he find or imagine in earth that doth not sin? And especially if that were true that himself saith among his other heresies… where he holdeth stiffly that all the good works of good men be sins, and that men sin in that they do good! And thus he would both have ‘the church’ to be only a secret, unknown sort of folk that do not sin… and yet he confesseth that there be none such! And so, as he goeth about to take away the very church, that is well known, making as though he would find out a better—he leaveth in conclusion no church at all. And to such a fond and false end must they needs bring it all… that will make it a number of only such as be good men and do not sin. For if he should be in it always when he is out of sin, and out of it when he is in sin, then should a man peradventure be in it in the morning and out of it at noon… and in
again at night. So that who were in it… or where it were… who could tell? And of that uncertainty must needs grow all such inconveniences, and contradiction unto Scripture, as is before rehearsed. ‘The church’ therefore must needs be the common-known multitude of Christian men, good and bad together, while ‘the church’ is here in earth. For this net of Christ hath for the while good fishes and bad. And this field of Christ beareth for the while good corn and cockle… till it shall at the Day of Doom be purified, and all the bad cast out, and the only good remain.

And therefore when the Apostle wrote unto the Corinthians of him that had lain with his mother-in-law, he commanded that he should be separated out of the church. Which he never was after the deed done… till the excommunication denounced; but was still, for all his sin, one of ‘the church’… though be you clean, but not all’—and yet were they all of his church, albeit that one of them was, as our Savior said himself, a devil. ‘Did I not,’ said he, ‘choose twelve of you, and one of you is a devil?’ And if there were none of ‘the church’ but good men as long as they were good… then had Saint Peter been once no part of ‘the church’ after that Christ had appointed him for chief!

“But our Lord in this his mystical body of his church… carrieth his members… some sick, some whole, and all sickly. Nor they be not for every sin clean cast off from the body, but if they be, for fear of infection, cut off… or else willingly do depart and separate themselves, as do these heretics… that either refuse the Church willfully themselves… or else for their obstinacy be put out. For till their stubborn hearts do show them incurable, the body beareth them yet about, sick and naughty and key-cold as they be, to prove whether the warmness of grace going through this whole mystical body of Christ’s church might get yet, and keep, some life in them. But when the time shall come that this church shall wholly change her place and have heaven for

2 grow: come 3 inconveniences: incongruities 6 while: for as long as // in: on 7, 8 while: duration 8 corn: grain 9 at the Day of Doom: on Judgment Day 11 the Apostle: Saint Paul 14 denounced: (was) pronounced 15 one: a member 16, 32 naught(y): wicked 22 of: i.e., who were of 23 after that: after 26 whole: well // sickly: susceptible to illness; apt to get sick 28 infection: i.e., their infecting the rest of the body 28 willingly: of their own volition 32 key-cold: i.e., stone-cold // prove: see
her dwelling instead of earth; after the final judgment pronounced
and given, when God shall with his Spouse, this church of Christ, enter into
the pleasant wedding chamber, to the bed of eternal rest: then shall
all these scaly and scabbed pieces scale clean off, and the whole body of
Christ’s holy Church remain pure, clean, and glorious… without wem,
wrinkle, or spot; which is—and for the while, I ween, will be, as long as
she is here—as scabbed as ever was Job… and yet her loving Spouse
leaveth her not, but continually goeth about by many manner
medicines (some bitter, some sweet; some easy, some grievous; some
pleasant, some painful) to cure her.”

The Fifth Chapter

The author showeth and concludeth that this common-known
multitude of Christian nations not cut off nor fallen off by
heresies… be the very church of Christ—good men and bad
together.

“...And finally, to put out of question which is Christ’s very church:
By the Church we know the Scriptures.
since it is agreed between us (and granted
through Christendom, and a conclusion very
true) that by ‘the church’ we know the Scripture—
which church is that by which ye know the Scripture? Is it not this
company and congregation of all these nations… that without factions
taken, and precision from the remnant, profess the name and faith
of Christ? By this church know we the Scripture; and this is the very
church; and this hath begun at Christ… and hath had him for their head,
Peter, Christ’s vicar and Saint Peter, his vicar after him, the head
under him… and always since, the successors
of him continually… and have had his holy faith and his blessed sacraments
and his holy scriptures delivered, kept, and conserved therein by
God and his Holy Spirit. And albeit some nations fall away, yet
likewise as how many boughs soever fall from the tree, though they
fall more than be left thereon… yet they make no doubt which is the
very tree… although each of them were planted again in another
place and grew to a greater than the stock it came first of: right so,
while we see and well know that all the companies and sects of heretics
and schismatics, how great soever they grow, came out of this church
that I spoke of, we know evermore that the heretics be they that be
severed, and the church, the stock that all they came out of. And since that only the
church of Christ is the ‘vine’ that Christ spoke of in the Gospel… which he
taketh for his Body Mystical; and that every branch severed from that
tree loseth its lively nourishing: we must needs well know that all these
branches of heretics fallen from the Church (the vine of Christ’s
Mystical Body), seem they never so fresh and green, be yet indeed
but witherlings, that wither and shall dry up, able to serve
for nothing… but for the fire.”

The Sixth Chapter

The messenger moveth that since the church is this
known multitude of good men and bad together… of whom
no man knoweth which be the one sort and which be the
other: that it may be, peradventure, that the good sort of the
Church be they that believe the worship of images to be
idolatry, and the bad sort they that believe the contrary.
Which objection the author doth answer and confute.

When I had said…

“Sir,” quoth he, “ye have, in good faith, fully satisfied me concerning
the sure and undoubted knowledge of the very church here in earth.
But yet thinketh me that one little doubt remaineth for our principal
matter.”

“What is that?” quoth I.

“Marry, sir,” quoth he, “it is this: that though the very faith be in ‘the
church’… and ‘the church’ cannot err therein; nor ‘the church’ cannot
be deceived, against the faith, in any text of Scripture, nor
no scripture is there that (being well understood) doth, or can do,
What “the church” is stand against the faith of ‘the church’;
and that also ‘the church’ is none other
but, as ye say, and as I see it is indeed, but this whole common congregation
of Christian people good and bad… not separating themselves
for frowardness, nor being put out for their obstinate faults; yet—
since it appeareth well that, though the right faith be in the Church,
it is not in every man of the Church… and though the Church cannot
err in such things, yet some of the Church may—now seemeth
it to some men that it may well, peradventure, happen that the good
men well-believing and undeceived… be those that believe the
worship of images and praying to saints to be idolatry; and on the
other side, that those which believe the contrary be that part of
the Church that be the naughty men… misbelievers and foully
deceived.”

“That were a very strange work,” quoth I. “Ye would right now,” quoth
I, “that in ‘the church’ we should think that there were none other
but good men. Will ye now agree that there be therein some good men?”
“Yea,” quoth he, “that must needs be.”
“Well,” quoth I, “whether be they good men that do naught?”
“Nay,” quoth he.
“Do they well,” quoth I, “that do idolatry in deed… though it be against
their hearts?”
“Nay,” quoth he.
“But all,” quoth I, “come to church and worship images; and all pray
to saints. Wherefore, if that be idolatry, then the church of Christ
is all naught! For thus do they that be of the contrary side, for fear of
being perceived. Also, if one do well or preach well, is he a good man
if he deny it for fear?”
“Nay,” quoth he.
“But, now,” quoth I, “all that are of that sort, if they happen to adventure
somewhat and be spied… they will first perjure themselves, and after
abjure their opinion; so that if their opinion were good—yet were
themselves naught.”
“But yet,” quoth he, “if their opinions be good—then be not they so
evil in hiding their intents for fear… as they that against their
true opinions do and preach openly, and pursue them for saying truth. As some that fainted and fled from martyrdom… were not so evil as they that pursued them.”

“Very truth,” quoth I, “if these men’s opinions were true. But yet, though they were true, yet were these men naught!”

“And the others worse!” quoth he.

“That is well said,” quoth I. “But they and the others be the whole Church. And if yours be naught (as ye grant, and must needs grant, they be), if the others were naught too… then were in the Church none good. But yourself deny not but in the Church it must needs be… that there be some good. And there can be none… but either your party or the other. Ergo, since yours be naught: those that be good must needs be the other. But none of those that be of the other could be good men… if they were idolaters and pursued your party for saying the truth, and compelled them to deny the truth; ergo, the other party be not idolaters… nor the opinion of your party, for which they pursue your party, be not true. And thus it appeareth, as me seemeth, that good men of the Church be against you, and the naughty with you.”

The Seventh Chapter

The author somewhat doth corroborate the truth against the heresies holding against images; and recapitulating somewhat briefly what hath been proved, so finisheth and endeth the proof of his part.

“And yet speak I nothing of all the good men… and well known for good men, and holy men, and now saints in heaven… that have condemned your party and written against you. And your party therefore be so sore against saints again… because they see their heresies impugned and condemned by their holy writings. Nor, besides this, have I nothing spoken of the general councils condemning your party by good and substantial authority comprobated and corroborated by the whole body of Christendom—led thereunto, both

1, 4, etc. true: correct 1, 4, 16 opinion(s): contention(s) 1 do: act
1, 3, etc. pursue(d): persecute(d) 1, 14 saying: telling (the)
2 fainted: chickened out // so evil: as bad 5 though: even if
5, 8, etc. naught(y): bad 9 were in: there would be in // none: no one
17 appeareth: is evident // as me seemeth: it seems to me
20 somewhat doth corroborate: does some defending of 23 part: side of the argument
27 be so sore against saints again: is in turn so strongly against saints
30 comprobated: confirmed
long before and ever since, through the secret operation of the Holy
Ghost, who could never suffer (as yourself agreeeth) the church
of Christ to continue so wholly and so long in so damnable idolatry…
as this were if it were superstition, and not a part of very faith and
devout religion. Wherefore, since I have proved you that the
Church cannot err in so great a point, nor against the right faith
mistake the sentence of Holy Scripture; and also that these people that
believe images to be worshipped be the very church of Christ; and that of
his church the good and bad both doth use it, and the good men doth
it truly, and the bad falsely; and that all the good men of old hath
allowed and used this way, and condemned the contrary… which hath
also been declared for false heresy by the whole general council of
Christendom… approved by the faith and custom of all the people, besides
growing into such consent by God’s Holy Spirit, that governeth his
church: I never need to go further or touch your texts or arguments
to the contrary. For this side thus proved good, it must needs
follow that the other side is naught—except ye have against
this any further thing to say. Which if ye have, never let to bring
it forth. For I will for no haste leave any corner of the matter unransacked,
as far as we can any doubt find therein.”

“In good faith, sir,” quoth he, “I am in this matter even at the hard wall,
and see not how to go further.”

“Now, I assure you,” quoth I, “if I could myself find any further
objection, I would not fail to bring it in. But in good faith, I
suppose we be waded in this matter as far… as we can both find.
And, I am sure, as far as ever Luther found, or any that ever I have
seen that anything have said or written on that side.”

The Eighth Chapter

The author entereth the answer to the objections that had
been before laid by the messenger against the worship of
images, and praying to saints, and going on pilgrimages.
And first he answereth, in this chapter, the objections made
against praying to saints.

1 secret: mysterious; unperceivable  2 suffer: allow  4 as this were: as this would be
4, 8 very: authentic; true  5 devout: commendably pious  6, 17 against: with regard to
7 sentence: meaning  8 images to be worshipped: in the licitness of image veneration
8–9 and . . . it: and that both the good and the bad members of his church do practice it
10 truly: sincerely  11 allowed: approved of
false: insincerely  11 allowed: approved of
12 false: loathsome  13 approved: confirmed
14 growing: coming  15 touch: comment on
16 and . . . it: and that both the good and the bad members of his church do practice it
17 naught: bad  18 let: hesitate  19 forth: up
19 haste: being in a hurry  20 doubt: questionable thing
21, 24 in good faith: in all honesty  21 even at the hard wall: with my back against the wall
23 find: think of  24 in: up  25 find: get  26 found: got  27 any: anyone
29 entereth: commences  30 worship: veneration
“Now, therefore, as I say, further need I not to go. But yet will I somewhat touch the things which, as ye say, do move many men to take the worship of images for idolatry. And it so taken and their opinion so reputed, they reckon it a ground to think the miracles done at the images, or by invocations of saints, to be illusions of the devil. And first will we begin at the saints themselves; and by the way shall we speak of their relics, images, and pilgrimages, as there shall occasion rise in our matter. And for the first: in good faith, saving that the books and writings of holy doctors condemn these men’s heresies, the displeasure and anger whereof setteth them on a fire to study for the diminishing of their estimation that so stand in their light—else would I much wonder what these heretics mean, to impugn the worship of saints and forbid us to pray to them. And albeit I now see the cause of their malice, yet can I not much the less marvel of their madness… that show their evil will so openly… that they neither have reason nor good color to cloak or cover it with. First they put in doubt whether saints can hear us. And if they do… yet whether they can help us. And, finally, if they could… yet would they we think it folly to desire them, because God can do it better and will do it sooner himself than they all. Now, where they doubt whether saints hear us, I marvel whereof that doubt ariseth… but if they think them dead as well in soul as body. For if their holy souls live… there will no wise man ween them worse, and of less love and charity to men that need their help, when they be now in heaven… than they had when they were here in earth. For all that while, were they never so good, yet the best was worse than the

Mt 11:11 worst is now. As our Savior said by Saint John the Baptist… that there was no woman’s

son greater than he, yet the least that was already in heaven was his better. We see that the nearer that folk draw thitherward, the more good mind beare they to men here. And therefore Saint Stephen when he saw heaven open for him… he began to pray for them that maliciously killed him. And think we, then, that being in heaven, he will not vouchsafe to pray for them that devoutly honor him, but hath less love and charity being there than he
had going thitherward? If the rich man that lay in hell… had, yet, not only for fear of increase of his own punishment… by his brothers’ damnation growing of his evil example in sin, but also of carnal love and fleshly favor towards his kin (which fleshly affection being without grace or virtue may, peradventure, stand with the state of damnation) had a cure and care of his five brethren: were it likely that saints, then, being so full of blessed charity in heaven, will nothing care for their brethren in Christ… whom they see here in this wretched world? Now, if there be no doubt (as I trow none there is) but their holy souls be alive, they would we did well; and as little doubt but that they be alive if God be their God… as he is indeed—and he not the God of dead men but of living, as our Savior saith in the Gospel, for all men live still, and ever shall, that he hath taken to him and once given life unto—there resteth, then, no further to see but whether they can do us any good or no… either for that they cannot hear us… or for that they cannot help us. And first, I marvel much if they think they cannot help us. For while they were here, they could; as appeareth in the Acts of the Apostles. And since imbecility and lack of power is here part of our misery, and strength and plenty of power… is one great part of wealth—they were well furthered in that point if they were now less able to do good to them whom they fain would were helped than they were before! For whether they be able there… to do it themselves… or only by their intercession, made unto God—this maketh no force for our matter, so that by their means, the one way or the other, we take help by our devotion toward them, and prayer made unto them.”

“I think,” quoth he, “they may do indeed much more than they might, both by power and prayer. But it is hard, somewhat, to think that they should hear us and see us—and especially in so many places at once. For though they be not circumscribed in place (for lack of bodily dimension and measuring), yet are they, and angels also, definitively so placed where they be for the time… that they be not at one time in divers places at once—as saints

1 thitherward: to there 3 growing: coming // evil: bad 6 stand: coexist 6 care and care of: care and concern for 8 nothing care for: not at all care about 10 trow: believe 11 would we did well: would have us do well 16 resteth: remains 16 no: nothing 17, 18 for that: because 18 I marvel much: to me it’s really weird 20 imbecility: incapacity 21 plenty: abundance 22 great: big // wealth: well-being 22–23 they were well furthered in that point: a lot they would have gained on that score 24 fain would were helped: very much wanted helped 26 maketh no force for our matter: does not affect our case 26–27 so that by their means: so long as by means of them 27 take: receive 27 by: as a result of 29 may: can (now) 30 might: could (before) 35 divers: several
be in sundry countries, and very far asunder, called upon at once.”

“Ye marvel,” quoth I, “and think it hard to be believed, that saints hear us. And I… while we see that the things we pray for, we obtain… marvel much more how men can doubt whether the prayers be heard or not. When saints were in this world at liberty and might walk the world about, ween we that in heaven they stand tied to a post? But the wonder is how they may see and hear in sundry places at once. If we could no more but feel, and neither see nor hear, we would as well wonder—or if we could not wonder thereof… because we could not hear thereof, yet should we be far from any conceiving in our mind—that it were possible for man to see or hear further than he can feel. For we that prove it, and do see and hear indeed, cannot, yet, see the cause, nor in no wise cease to wonder by what reason and means it may be, that I should see two churches, or two towns, each of them two miles asunder—and both twain as far from me as each of them from other—and measure so great quantities with so small a measure… as is the little apple of mine eye. And of hearing many men’s voices… or any man’s words coming at once into many men’s ears… standing far asunder, hath like difficulty to conceive. And when all the reasons be made—either of beams sent out from our eyes to the things that we behold, or the figure of the things seen… multiplied in the air from the thing to our eye, or of the air struck with the breath of the speaker… and equally rolling forth in roundels to the ears of the hearers—when all the reasons be heard, yet shall we rather delight to search than be able to find anything in these matters that were able to make us perceive it. Now, when we may with our fleshly eye and ear, in this gross body, see and hear things far distant from us, and from sundry places far distant asunder: marvel we so much that blessed angels and holy souls, being merely spiritual substances, uncharged of all burdensome flesh and bones, may in doing the same… so far pass and exceed us and our powers natural… as the lively soul itself excedeth our deadly body? Nor cannot believe they hear...
us, though we find they help us, but if we perceived by what

The means how saints
do hear us
means they do it (as whether they see and
hear us coming hither to us... or our
voice coming hence to them; or whether

God hear and see all, and show it them; or whether they behold it
in him... as one doth in a book the thing that he readeth; or whether
God by some other way doth utter it unto them as one doth in
speaking)—except we may know the means, we will not else believe
the matter? As wise as were he that would not believe he can see... because
he cannot perceive by what means he may see!"

“Yet see I,” quoth he, “no cause or need why we should pray to them,
since God can as well, and will as gladly, both hear us and help us...
as any saint in heaven.”

“What need you,” quoth I, “to pray any physician to help your fever,
or pray and pay any surgeon to heal your sore leg, since God can
hear you and help you, both, as well as the best, and loveth you
better and can do it sooner, and may afford his plasters better
cheap... and give you more for your words than they for your
money?”

“But this is his pleasure,” quoth he: “that I shall be helped by the
means of them as his instruments; though indeed all this he
doeth himself, since he giveth the nature to the things that they
do it with.”

“So hath it,” quoth I, “pleased God in like wise... that we shall ask
help of his holy saints, and pray for help to them. Nor that is
not a making of them equal unto God himself, though they do
it by his will and power... or he at their intercession. Though God
will (as reason is) be chief and have no match, yet forbiddeth he

Jn 5:22; Mt 19:28 not one man to pray for help of another.

And though the Father hath given all the
judgment to his Son, yet doth he delight to have his holy saints
partners of that honor... and at the Day of Judgment to have
them sit with him. Was Elisha made equal to God because the

2 Kgs 4:8–37; Mt 10:1 widow prayed him to revive her dead
son? Were the apostles equal to Christ
because that they were prayed unto for help after his death—and in his
life also? And many things did they at
folks’ prayer. And sometimes they were
prayed unto and assayed it, also... and yet could not do it, but the
parties were fain to go from them to their Master therefor. And
yet was he content that they were prayed unto. And for proof
thereof, suffered them at men’s devout instance and prayer... to do
many miracles. And sometimes were they prayed to be intercessors
to their Master. As where they came to Christ and said, ‘Dimitte
Acts 5:12–16; Mk 9:14–29
Mt 15:23
illam, quia clamat post nos’ (‘Dispatch this
woman, for she crieth upon us’). And think
you, then, that he being content and giving men occasion to pray
to them while they were with him in earth, he will be angry if
we do them as much worship when they be with him in heaven?

Nay, but I think, on the other side, since his pleasure is to have his
saints had in honor, and prayed unto, that they may be for us
intercessors to his high Majesty... whereunto ere we presume to
approach, it becometh us, and well behooveth us, to make friends of
such as he hath in favor: he will disdain once to look on us if
we be so presumptuous and malapert fellows... that upon boldness of
familiarity with himself, we disdain to make our intercessors
his especially beloved friends. And whereas Saint Paul exhorteth us
each to pray for other... and we be glad to think it well done to
pray every poor man to pray for us... should we think it evil done
to pray holy saints in heaven to the same?"

"Why," quoth he, “by that reason I might pray not only to saints,
but also to every other dead man!”

“So may ye,” quoth I, “with good reason, if ye see none other likelihood
but that he died a good man. And so find we, as I remember, in the
Dialogues of Saint Gregory, that one had help by prayer made unto
a holy man late deceased which was himself yet in purgatory.
So liked it our Lord... to let the world know that he was in his
special favor... though he were yet in pain of his purgation.

Note
For our Lord loved him nevertheless... though he left not for him the order of

1, 4, etc. prayed: petitioned; appealed 3, 7 prayer: beseeching
4 assayed it: tried to do what was asked of them 5 were fain: had // therefor: for it
6 was he content: it was all right with him 7 suffered: allowed // instance: urging
10–11 dispatch this woman: get this woman taken care of
11 crieth upon us: keeps calling out after us 12 content: all right with this 13 in: on
14 worship: honor 16 had: held 19 hath: holds // once: ever 20 so: such
20 malapert fellows: impudent boors
21–22 make... friends: make his especially beloved friends our intercessors
23 each to pray for other... to pray for one another // well done: a good thing to do
24 evil done: a bad thing to do 26 reason: reasoning 28 likelihood: indication
30 one had: someone received 31 late: recently // which: who
32 so liked it: it thus pleased 35 left not: did not dispense with
his merciful justice. And therefore let no man take his trouble or

*How sickness is a token of God’s hatred* … but if he feel himself grudge and be impatient and evil-content with it. For then is it a token of wrath and vengeance… and is to the sufferer as fruitless as painful. And in effect nothing else but the beginning of his hell, even here. But, on the other side, if he take it patiently, it purgeth; if gladly, it greatly meriteth; and glad may he be that is with meekness… glad of God’s punishment. Saint Augustine (as is written by Possidius), lying sore sick himself of an access, cured another with his prayer… and yet he died of his sickness himself. Wherein there was to him more mercy and favor showed than if himself had been cured too; for now, instead of health, he had heaven, where he should nevermore be sick again.”

“Marry,” quoth he, “but I have ever heard it said that we should not pray to any dead man but with this condition: ‘If thou be a saint, then pray for me.’”

“Why so,” quoth I, “more than praying to a quick man, where I am not bound to say, ‘If thou be a good man, pray for me’? But since I may reasonably think him good while I know him not the contrary… so may I think him that is dead.”

“Why,” quoth he, “whereof serveth canonizing, then? If this be true, I am never advised to be canonized while I live!”

“Ye do the better,” quoth I—“nor seven years after, neither. For it would be but a business for you.”

“But why be they canonized, then?” quoth he.

“Those,” quoth I, “that be not canonized, ye may, for the more part, both pray for them and pray to them. As ye may for and to them that be

Pray to those that be canonized.

yet alive. But one that is canonized—ye may pray to him to pray for you, but ye may not pray for him. For… as I remember, Saint Augustine… saith that he that prayeth for a martyr doth the martyr injury. And of every man ye may trust well and be seldom certain; but of the canonized ye may reckon you sure.”

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2, 5 token: sign; indication  2–3 but if: unless  3 grudge: be disgruntled
4 evil-content: ill-content  7 even: right  // side: hand
10 sore: terribly  // another: someone else  11 sickness: illness  15 marry: sure; right
18 quick: living  19 bound: obliged  20, 23 while: as long as
22 whereof serveth: of what use is
22–23 I am never advised to be: I’ll never think of being
24 ye do the better: i.e., you’d better not  25 business: nuisance
27 for the more part: in the majority of cases
32–33 doth the martyr injury: is insulting the martyr  33, 34 may: can
33 trust well: hope for the best  34 reckon you: consider yourself
The messenger yet again objecteth against relics; and putteth great doubt in canonizing. Whereunto the author maketh answer.

“How can I,” quoth he, “be sure thereof? May the taking up of a man’s bones… and setting his carcass in a gay shrine… and then kissing his bare scalp… make a man a saint? And yet are there some unenshrined—for no man wotteth where they lie. And some that men doubt whether ever they had any body at all or not. But, marry, to recompense that with, there be some again that have two bodies, to lend one to some good fellow that lacketh. For as I said before, some one body lieth whole in two places far asunder… or else the monks of the one be beguiled. For both the places plainly affirm that it lieth there; and at either place they show the shrine; and in the shrine they show a body… which they say is the body, and boldly abide thereby, that it is it, alleging old writing, and miracles also, for the proof. Now must we confess that either the miracles at the one place be false, or done by the devil, or else that the same saint had two bodies indeed. And then were that, in my mind, as great a miracle as the greatest of them all. And therefore is it likely somewhere a bone worshipped for a relic of some holy saint… that was, peradventure, a bone, as Chaucer saith, of some holy Jew’s sheep. Our Savior also seemeth in the Gospel to blame and reprove the Pharisees… for making fresh the sepulchres of holy prophets… and making shrines of their graves. Whereby it appeareth that he would not have the dead bodies worshipped and set in gay golden shrines. And yet besides this, ye shall find many more worshipped, I ween, than enshrined; many enshrined that ye find not canonized, though ye seek up all the registries in Rome. And when they be enshrined and canonized too, yet since the Church in the canonization useth a means that may beguile them—for they stand to the record of men both of their lives and of their miracles… which men may, peradventure, lie—why may it not, then, be that the Church be
deceived in the canonization? And that they may, for lack of true knowledge, believing untrue men, canonize for saints

*A saying of Saint Augustine* such folk, sometimes, as be full far therefrom? I dare not say so much as saith Saint Augustine. For he letteth not to say plainly that many bodies be worshipped for saints here in earth... whose souls be buried in hell!"

"Ye have," quoth I, "said many things very stoutly. But yet let us first consider whereunto altogether weigheth. For it stretcheth no further—if it were all true—but that we *might* be deceived in *some* that we should take for saints; and it neither proveth that there be *no* saints (which I wot well no wise man will say) nor that if any be, they should not be worshipped nor prayed unto. Except ye would say that if we might by possibility mistake some, therefore we should worship none. And then should you, by that reason, never take any physician... since ye might happen upon a dog leech, for lack of knowledge of the cunning. For in records of men ye might be as well deceived there as here. Now suppose, then, first... that of saints and of relics, some were true and some were false. Yet the worship that ye would we should do to them *all*... should be because (that standing, as they do, unknown and undiscerned) ye reckoned them all true, and all for God's well-beloved servants. For if ye knew of them which were true and which false, then would ye worship the true... and tread the false underfoot."

"That is no doubt," quoth he.

"Then," quoth I, "if we were beguiled in some, I see no great peril grow toward us thereby. For if there came a great many of the King's friends into your country, and ye for his sake made them all great cheer; if there came among them, unawares to you, some spies that were his mortal enemies—wearing his badge... and seeming to you, and so reported, as his familiar friends—whether would he blame you for the good cheer ye made his enemies... or thank you for the good cheer ye made his friends?"

"He would, I think," quoth he, "thank me for the good treating of them both, since both seemed good to me and both had of me their cheer but for they seemed his friends, and for his sake."

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1 deceived: mistaken  
2 untrue: untruthful  
3 full: very  
5 letteth not: does not forbear // plainly: straight-out  
6, 12 worshipped: venerated  
6 for: as // in earth: on earth  
8 whereunto. . . weigheth: what all of them put together amount to  
9, 13, 17 might: could 9 deceived in: wrong about  
11 wor: know  
11 no wise man: no one with any sense 13 except: unless  
14, 23 worship: venerate  
15 reason: reasoning // take: have recourse to  
16 the cunning: i.e., who the skilled doctors are  
16, 26 in: with regard to  
16 records: testimonies  
17 be as well deceived: go as far wrong 19 worship: reverence  
19 would we should: would have us 27 grow: come  
28 country: neck of the woods  
28–29 made . . . cheer: gave them a very warm reception; showed them great hospitality  
30 his mortal enemies: mortal enemies of his  
31 as . . . friends: to be close friends of his  
32, 33 good cheer ye made: warm reception you gave  
35 had of: received from  
36 cheer: hospitality // but for: only because
“Ye say,” quoth I, “good reason. But I put case now that ye had an
inking—or else a plain warning—that some of them were his
enemies… that seemed his best friends; but which they were, no man
can tell you. What would you now do? Make them all cheer, and
honorably treat them all? Or else, showing them that ye hear say
plainly that some of them be naught, therefore bid them be
walking all with sorrow?”

“Nay,” quoth he, “no doubt were it but that I should look for thank
if I cherished his enemies for his friends… rather than despitefully
to handle his friends for his enemies.”

“Very well,” quoth I. “And this were true although ye had warning
that some of them were his enemies. But what thank would ye then
derserve if ye should shake off both… where ye had no such warning
at all, but would say that ye durst not make any of them cheer…
because ye thought that peradventure it might be that some
were worse than they were taken for? For in such case be you here!
Ye know not that any man worshipped for a saint is none, but only
ye think that ye be not sure whether all be or some not.”

“Yes,” quoth he, “Saint Augustine, as I told you, giveth me warning
that many be none!”

“Ye be,” quoth I, “deceived therein, as I shall tell you after. But in the
meanwhile, mark me well this, and let it stand for a sure
ground: that all your objection, if it were true, serveth not against
worshipping of saints or saints’ relics, but against the worshipping
of such as were no saints… nor no saints’ relics—and
that after it were proved. And now, this thing that is in question
being first confessed and agreed between us for a thing nothing
able to hurt our principal matter, let us go further therein, and
search whether we find any such cause of doubt in any… or have
good cause to reckon ourselves sure that all be saints indeed… whom
the church of Christ hath in honor and veneration for saints.
First, as for the authority that ye allege of Saint Augustine, I have
heard it often alleged in like wise for the same purpose. But
surely they that so take Saint Augustine be fouly deceived. I durst
be bold to say that Saint Augustine did never write such words,
but it is a word run in many men’s mouths… begun by
mistaking… and believed without examination. For surely the
words whereof they took the occasion, which he writeth in the First Book de Civitate Dei… and repeateth again in his book of that cure and care that men should have for them that be dead—those words, I say, go far wide from all such purpose. For there he speaketh only of costly burying, and making of sumptuous sepulchres, and doing the dead corpses of rich men worldly worship in the carrying forth and interring of the body; as it plainly and evidently appeareth by the matter that he writeth of.

“And surely, since our Lord never would among his Chosen People give the glory of his name to another, nor never so suffer idolatry among the Jews… but that either he forthwith punished and purged it… or so severed the flock of idolaters that it might well appear where his faithful flock remained (as it did when that, Samaria falling to idolatry, the right synagogue of the Jews remained in Jerusalem and in Judaea), this were full unlikely: that this Holy Spirit being sent unto his church here to remain and instruct it… and himself also therewith being and giving his special assistance unto the end of the world… should either suffer his church to be unknown or in such wise to err and be deceived… as to give honor to the devil instead of himself, or to his enemies instead of his friends. And therefore when the Church by diligent search… findeth the life of a man holy; and that thereto it is well witnessed that God by his miracles testifieth the man’s blessedness and the favor in which he standeth with him in heaven, declaring by the boot and profit which he doth to many men for his sake… that he will have him honored and had for hallowed in his church here in earth; and this thing (either by them that hath the cure of his church, after such diligence used, being by the canonization declared unto the people… or, peradventure, without canonization growing thereof, by the holiness well known… and miracles many seen) so sure a common persuasion through the whole people of Christendom that the person is accepted and reputed for an undoubted saint… be the bones translated or not, his body found or not: albeit, by possibility of nature, it might be that men were in such things deceived, as ye have said—yet we boldly may, and well we ought, in this case to trust that the grace and aid of

1–2 in . . . Dei: i.e., in City of God, Book I  2 of: about  3 cure: concern 2–3: De cura gerenda pro mortuis (On Care to Be Had for the Dead). 4 from all such purpose: of any such mark  6 worship: honor 7–8 as it plainly and evidently appeareth: as is clearly and conclusively shown 10 suffer: tolerate; put up with  11 forthwith: right away  15 were: would be 15 full: highly  19 be deceived: go wrong 22 search: investigation 23 testifieth: testifies to  25 declaring: showing 25 boot and profit: relieving and benefiting 26 had for hallowed: held as sainted  27 in: on  28 cure: charge 28 after such diligence used: after the exercise of such diligence 30 growing thereof: coming of it 31 so sure a common persuasion: (becomes) such a firm and universal conviction 33 translated: transported; relocated  35 in: about // deceived: mistaken
God and his Holy Spirit assisting his church hath governed the judgment of his ministers and inclined the minds of his people to such consent. And that he hath not suffered them to err in a thing so nearly touching his honor and worship... either truly to be applied, where his will were it should—upon himself, or his holy saints for his sake—or to be withdrawn thence, and, by erroneous mistaking of truth... necessary, meet, and convenient to be perceived of the Church for God's honor (which kind of truth God sent the Holy Ghost to teach his church), the same worship to be bestowed upon them whom he would in no wise should have it... but whom he reserveth for eternal shame. For the body enshrined or not maketh no doubt of the saint. No man doubteth of our Lady, no man doubteth of Saint John the Evangelist, though their bodies be not found. And yet if they were, then were there, I think, no good Christian man but he would be contented they were enshrined and had in honor.

“For whereas ye would take the reverence from all relics because that some be doubtful... in that some saint's head is, as ye say, and of some the whole body, showed at two sundry places—it may fortune, for all this, that of one head there may be sundry parts... and either part, in the common speech of people, called 'the head.' For at Amiens "Saint John's head" is 'Saint John's head' (the Baptist), as men call it in talking—even they that have been there and seen it. But then if they be asked further question thereof, they tell that the nether jaw lacketh. This may well happen also, and so doth it hap indeed, by some saint of whom in two diverse countries be diverse shrines; and there be reckoned and reported that in either of them be laid the whole body... and the pilgrims at neither place do look into the coffin of that shrine to see whether it be all or part. In some place, peradventure, lay the body, and by some occasion the body translated thence, of old... and yet the shrine showed still with some of the relics remaining therein. It may well hap also that there were two good, holy men in diverse countries, both of one name. And percase in some place may there

3 consent: a consensus 4 nearly touching: vitally affecting  // truly: correctly
4, 9 worship: veneration 5 were it should: would have it be 6 thence: from there
7 meet: fitting  // convenient: proper 8 of the: by the 11 body: i.e., body's being
12 maketh no doubt of the saint: does not bring the saint into question
12, 13 doubteth of: has any doubt about
15 contented they were: fine with their being 16 had: held 17 take: take away
18 doubtful: dubious 19 showed at: on display in 19, 20 sundry: different
19 fortune: happen 20, 28 either: each 25 nether jaw lacketh: lower jaw is missing
26 by: with 27, 33 diverse: different
31 translated thence: (was) removed from there  // of old: long ago
34 both of one name: i.e., who both had the same name  // percase: perchance
be some very relics unknown and misnamed. For in old time, when men at the incursion of infidels did hide holy saints’ relics—at the finding again, the names haply decayed, some relics might rest unknown; or some, peradventure, lost or mistaken.

As myself saw at the Abbey of Barking (beside London)—to my remembrance, about thirty years past—in the setting an old image in a new tabernacle. The back of the image, being all painted over and of long time before inlaid with beaten gold, happened to crease in one place, and out there fell a pretty little door… at which fell out also many relics that had lain, unknown, in that image, God wot how long. And as long had been likely to lie again… if God by that chance had not brought them to light. The bishop of London came then thither, to see there were no deceit therein. And I, among others, was present there while he looked thereon and examined the matter. And in good faith, it was to me a marvel to behold the manner of it. I have forgotten much thereof, but I remember a little piece of wood there was, rudely shaped in cross, with thread wrapped about it. Writing had it none; and what it was we could not tell; but it seemed as new-cut as if it had been done within one day before. And divers relics had old writings on them, and some had none; but among others were there certain small kerchiefs which were named there our Lady’s… and of her own working. Coarse were they not… nor they were not large…but served, as it seemed, to cast in a plain and simple manner upon her head. But surely they were as clean seams, to my seeming, as ever I saw in my life… and were, therewith, as white, for all the long lying, as if they had been washed and laid up within one hour. And how long that image had stood in that old tabernacle, that could no man tell; but there had in all the church none, as they thought, stood longer untouched. And they guessed that four or five hundred years ago… that image was hidden when the abbey was burned by infidels… and those relics hidden therein; and after, the image found and set up—many years after, when they were gone that had hidden it. And so the relics remained, unknown, therein till now that God gave that chance that opened it. And thus, as I say, may it peradventure happen… some names to be forgotten, or haply to be
mistaken… and yet God well content that the relics be had in reverence, since he specially favoreth their persons… and needeth nothing their names to know them by. As he shall once so fully restore again many a glorious body… that they shall not lose the least hair of their head that may serve to their beauty… of whom the names, haply, the whole world hath long ago forgotten. And the name is not so very requisite but that we may mistake it without peril… so that we nevertheless have the relics of holy men in reverence. But as for pigs’ bones for holy relics, or damned wretches to be worshipped for saints: albeit that if it happened, yet it nothing hurt the souls of them that mistake it… no more than if we worship a host in the Mass which percase the negligence or malice of some lewd priest hath left unconsecrated—yet is it never to be thought, though such a thing might happen suddenly, that ever God will suffer such a thing to last and endure in his Church.

“For albeit that his Church useth one means that might, as ye say, beguile them—which is the record and witness of men—yet hath it in such things, as Saint Thomas and other holy doctors write, another means besides… which never can beguile them. And that is the assistance of God and the Holy Ghost. For else might the Church be most easily beguiled in the receiving of the very Scripture—wherein they take outwardly but the testimonies of men, from mouth to mouth and hand to hand, without other examination. But that secret means that inclineth their credulity to consent in the believing all in one point, which is the secret instinct of God—this is the sure means that never can in any necessary point fail here in Christ’s church. For if it might—all were quite at large. And that point once taken away—Scripture and all walketh with it. And in this mind, as it seemeth, was very sure and fastly confirmed the holy

1 Cor 1:10

apostle Saint Paul, which in his First Epistle to the Corinthians writeth in this wise: ‘Obsecro vos, fratres, per nomen Domini nostri Iesu Christi, ut idipsum dicatis omnes, et non sint in vobis schismata, sed sitis integrum corpus, eadem mente et eadem sententia’; ‘I beseech you, my brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you say all one thing’.
one thing, and let there be no schisms’—or ‘several sects’—
‘among you, but be ye one whole, entire body, of one mind and one
sentence.’ Truth is it that he taught them
and others the right way—so far forth that
he boldly forbade an angel of heaven to be believed… if any would
come and preach another gospel. But yet in this place I note much
that he called upon them only for agreement, bidding them only
to agree all upon ‘one thing,’ and maketh no mention of agreement
upon ‘the best,’ and upon ‘the truth,’ but only to avoid all discord and
division, and by common consent exhorteth them to agree all in one;
The agreement upon “one thing” meaning thereby, as me thinketh, that if
the church of Christ, intending well, do
all agree upon any one thing concerning God’s honor or man’s
soul, it cannot be but that thing must needs be true. For God’s
Holy Spirit, that animateth his church and giveth it life, will
never suffer it all consent and agree together upon any damnable
error. And therefore would he never suffer the Church so fully to
consent in the worship of saints and reverence of relics… if it
were a thing such as some men would have it seem; that is to wit,
a thing damnable, false, and feigned.

“Wherein as much as ye lay to diminish their credence… that it
might seem, as ye say well enough, that some of them were feigned,
yet wist I never proved that any such so taken, and by the Church
approved, was ever yet hitherto reproved… either here in Christ’s
church or among the Jews in their synagogue before Christ’s
days; and yet saints they had in honor, as patriarchs and prophets, and
their bodies and relics in reverence. Now, if of such as seemed
good men we never had found any for hypocrites—albeit it
might be that some were such, yet would we not, I think, suppose
that there were any so in deed… if we never had known it tried and
proved so. And why shall we, then, of saints or relics have doubt
and mistrust? Of whom being received by the Church for true…
we never, that I could wit, since God wrought the world tried and
proved any of both sorts untrue—neither, as I say, in the church of
Christ nor synagogue of the Jews; which two sorts only were
God’s chosen people. And yet had as well the Jews as we both

1 several: separate 3 sentence: judgment 6 place: text; passage
6 note much: am struck by the fact 8 one: the same
10 common consent: unanimous accord // agree all in one: all agree on the same thing
11 as me thinketh: as it seems to me 12 intending: meaning 16 suffer: let
16 consent: be in accord 18 consent in: give its assent to
18 worship: venerating // reverence: reverencing 20 false: fallacious
20 feigned: involving deceit 22 well: rightly // feigned: sham; fake
23 wist I never: I never knew it to be // such so taken: i.e., of those taken to be saints
23–34 tried . . . untrue: examined any of either group and proved them inauthentic
35 sorts: sets (of people) // only: alone
saints, as I said, in honor and their relics in great reverence, as appeareth as well by the Gospel as by the Old Testament.

Jacob, that holy patriarch, commanded his children in his deathbed to carry his body to the burial out of that country of Egypt; and so they did. And Joseph also required his brethren that when they should after depart out of Egypt, they should carry his bones with them. The dead bones of the prophet Elisha, as the Bible mentioneth, raised a dead body to life. And think you then that those bones were not there honored for holy relics?

"Nor our Savior Christ blameth not the Jews in the Gospel for that they garnished the sepulchres of the old prophets—with whose honor he was well content!— but for that they condemned themselves in following the condition of them that slew them, intending to kill Christ as their forefathers did his holy prophets. For as for the dead bodies of the holy prophets, that God would have them had in honor and reverence he declared well by that he raised a dead body by the touch of the dead bones of the prophet Elisha, as I said to you before.

"Did not our Lord, in the finding of that holy relic his Holy Cross, declare by miracle and make his own cross known from the crosses of the two thieves by the raising of a dead man with the touch thereof? Wherein is to be noted, by the way, that there was between his and theirs no notable difference, but they nailed, as he was; or else had it been no doubt upon the first sight which of them was his. Was not the body of Saint Stephen found out by miracle, and the head of Saint John the Baptist also? Yes, of surety, and many another holy martyr more… that else had lain unknown. Whereby well appeared that God would have not their souls only, but also their bodies—and, in a manner, the very soles of their shoes—set by for their sakes, and themselves for his. Was not the woman healed by the touch of our Lord's garments? Hath there not, both among the Jews and Christian people also, many men marvelously been helped by the only touch of holy saints' vestures? And doubt we then whether God would we should worship them, when he so well and above nature rewardeth us for the worship we do them?"
The messenger objecteth many things against pilgrimages and relics and worshipping of saints… because of much superstitious manner used therein, and unlawful petitions asked of them, and harm growing thereupon.

“Sir,” quoth he, “ye have in my mind very well touched the matter concerning that it is not in vain to pray to saints, nor to worship them and to have their relics in some reverence. But, sir, all this is far from the great sore. For though saints may hear us, and help us, too, and are glad and willing so to do, and God also contented that they, and their relics and images also, be had in honor—yet can neither he nor they be content with the manner of the worship. First, taking away his own worship in that we do them the same worship, in every point, that we do to God. And secondly, taking their worship from them then, also, in that we do to their images the same that we do to themselves—taking their images for themselves—and so make not themselves only, but also their images, fellows and matches to God; wherewith, as I have said before, neither God nor good saint can, nor good man ought to be, content and pleased.”

“In faith,” quoth I, “therein if it so be… ye say very true.”

“What say we then,” quoth he, “of the harm that goeth by going of pilgrimages—rolling about in idleness, with the riot, reveling, and ribaldry, gluttony, wantonness, waste, and lechery? Trow ye that God and his holy saints had not liefer they sit still at home than thus to come seek them, with such worshipful service?”

“Yes, surely,” quoth I.

“What say we then,” quoth he, “to that I spoke not of yet… in which we do them little worship, while we set every saint to his office and assign him a craft such as pleaseth us? Saint Eligius we make a horse leech… and must let our horse rather run unshod and mar his hooves than to shoe him on his day—which we must, for that point, more religiously keep high and holy than Easter Day! And because

2 objecteth many things: makes many objections 3 worshipping: venerating
4 much superstitious manner used: a lot of superstitious behavior exhibited 5 growing thereupon: ensuing therefrom 6 mind: opinion
7 in vain: irreverent; blasphemous 8 have: hold 9 from the great sore: from being the main sore point
10 God also contented: it is also all right with God 11 content: happy 12 respect 13, 15 worship: veneration 14, 29 worship: reverence
17 fellows: peers 18 matches: equals 19 content: all right; acquiescent 22 goeth by going of: comes of the going on
23 rolling: (the) gadding 24 ribaldry: debauchery 25 had not liefer: would not rather
26 seek: approach 28 that which 29 while: when 30 craft: profession
31 leech: doctor 32 day: feast day
one smith is too few at a forge, we set Saint Hippolytus to help him.  
And on Saint Stephen’s Day we must let all our horses’ blood with a knife… because Saint Stephen was killed with stones. Saint Apollonia we make a tooth-drawer, and may speak to her of nothing but of sore teeth. Saint Zita women set to seek their keys. Saint Roch we set to see to the great sickness, because he had a sore. And with him they join Saint Sebastian… because he was martyred with arrows. Some serve for the eye only. And some for a sore breast. Saint Germanus only for children. And yet will he not once look at them but if the mothers bring with them a white loaf and a pot of good ale. And yet is he wiser than Saint Wilgefortis; for she, good soul, is, Why women seek upon Saint Unencumber as they say, served and content with oats. Whereof I cannot perceive the reason… but if it be because she should provide a horse for an evil husband to ride to the devil upon. For that is the thing that she is so sought for, as they say. Insomuch that women hath therefore changed her name, and instead of ‘Saint Wilgefortis’ call her ‘Saint Unencumber’—because they reckon that for a peck of oats she will not fail to unencumber them of their husbands. Long work were it to rehearse you the divers manners of many pretty pilgrimages; but one or two will I tell you. The one, Pontano speaketh of in his Dialogues: how Saint Martin is worshipped. I have forgotten the town, but the manner I cannot forget, it is so strange. His image is, on his day, borne in procession about all the streets. And if it be a fair day, then use they as he cometh by… to cast rose water and all things of pleasant savor upon his image. But and it happen to rain—out pour they piss-pots upon his head, at every door and every window. Is not this a sweet service and a worshipful worship? And this, as I say, Pontano writeth, and telleth where it is. But this that I shall now tell you, I dare as boldly make you sure of as if I had seen it myself. At St. Valery’s, here in Picardy, there is a fair abbey, where Saint Valery was monk. And upon a furlong off, or two… up in a wood… is there a chapel… in which the saint is especially sought unto for the stone—not only in those parts, but also out of England. Now was there a young gentleman which had married a merchant’s wife. And having a little wanton

4 tooth-drawer: tooth-puller; i.e., dentist 6 great sickness: plague
6 a sore: i.e., a sore caused by the plague 10, 14 but if: unless
11 wiser: more sensible 14 should: is supposed to 15 evil: bad
19–20 long… you: a long production it would be to relate to you
20 divers: different 20, 23 manner(s): mode(s) 20 pretty: nice
22 worshipped: venerated 23 strange: bizarre 24, 26 image: statue
24 day: feast day 25 fair: sunny // use they: it’s their practice
26 all… savor: all kinds of good-smelling things // and: if
28 service: ritual // worshipful worship: devout devotion
30 boldly make you sure of: confidently assure you of
32 fair: beautiful // upon: about
34 sought unto for the stone: gone to for relief from kidney stones
36 which: who // wife: i.e., widow // wanton: surplus; spending
money… which him thought burned out the bottom of his purse, in the first year of his wedding took his wife with him and went over the sea for none other errand but to see Flanders and France and ride out one summer in those countries. And having one in his company that told by the way many strange things of that pilgrimage, he thought he would go somewhat out of his way, either to see it if it were true… or laugh at his man if he found it false—as he verily thought he should have done indeed. But when they came into the chapel, they found it all true. And to behold, they found it fonder than he had told. For, like as in other pilgrimages ye see hung up legs of wax, or arms, or such other parts, so was in that chapel all their offerings that hung about the walls… none other thing but men’s gear, and women’s gear, made in wax. Then was there, besides these, two round rings of silver, the one much larger than the other, through which every man did put his privy members!… at the altar’s end. Not every man through both, but some through the one and some through the other; for they were not both of a bigness… but the one larger than the other. Then was there yet a monk, standing at the altar, that hallowed certain threads of Venice gold. And them he delivered to the pilgrims, teaching them in what wise themselves, or their friends, should use those threads against the stone. That they should knit it about their gear… and say I cannot tell you what prayers. And when the monk had declared the manner… the gentleman had a servant that was a married man and yet a merry fellow, and he, thanking the monk for the thread, desired him to teach him how he should knit it about his wife’s gear. Which, except the monk had some special craft in knitting, he thought would be cumbersome, because her gear was somewhat short. It need not to tell you that every man laughed then—save the monk, that cast up his rings and threads in a great anger and went his way. Was not this—abide! By God, I had almost forgotten one thing… that would not be left, for a groat. As this gentleman and his wife were kneeling in the chapel, there came a good, sad woman to him, showing him that ‘one special point’ used in that pilgrimage—and the
‘surest against the stone’—she wist ne’er whether he were ‘yet advertised of’; which if it were done, she durst lay her life he should never have the stone in his life. And that was, she would have the length of his gear… and that she should make in a wax candle, which should ‘burn up’ in the chapel, and certain prayers should there be said the while. And this was against the stone the ‘very sheet anchor.’ When he had heard her (and he was one that in earnest feared the stone), he went and asked his wife counsel. But she, like a good, faithful Christian woman, loved no such superstitious. She could abide the remnant well enough; but when she heard once of ‘burning up’ the candle, she knit the brows and, earnestly blessing her, ‘Beware, in the virtue of God, what ye do!’ quoth she. “Burn up,” quoth she? Marry, God forbid! It would waste up your gear, upon pain of my life! I pray you beware of such witchcraft!’ Is this kind of service and worship acceptable and pleasant unto God and his saints? Now, when people worship saints in such wise that they make them fellows to God, and images in such wise that they take them for the saints themselves; and then again, on the other side, honor them with such superstitious ways that the paynim gods were worshipped with no worse; finally, that worst is of all, pray to them for unlawful things, as thieves pray to the thief that hung on the right side of Christ to speed them well in their robbery—and have found him a name also, calling him ‘Dismas,’ I ween, and his fellow ‘Gismas,’ to rhyme withal—think you not that this gear is such among the people as rather were likely so to provoke God and his saints to displeasure… that the devil should have license and liberty therefore to work his wonders in delusion of our superstitious idolatry… than so to like and content our Lord that he should show miracles for the comprobation of that manner of worshipping which we may well perceive all reason, religion, and virtue reproveth?"

The Eleventh Chapter

The author answereth all the objections proposed by the messenger in the tenth chapter. And some of them touched by the messenger more at large in other parts before.
“Y our whole tale, in effect,” quoth I, “containeth three things. One, that the people worship the saints, and their images also, with like honor as they do God himself; another, that they take the images for the things themselves—which points do sound to idolatry. The third is the superstitious fashion of worship, with desire of unlawful things. And since the worship that the people do to the saints and the images be such… ye conclude the thing displeasant to God and to all hallows, and that it may thereby well appear that the miracles, also, be not the works of God, but the delusion of the devil. The first point, which ye have now twice touched, is at once, soon, and shortly answered; for it is not true. For though men kneel to saints and images, and incense them, also, yet it is not true that therefore they worship them in every point like unto God.”

“What point lack they?” quoth he.

“Marry, the chief of all!” quoth I. “That is, that they worship God with the mind that he is God; which mind in worship is the only thing that maketh it latria—and no certain gesture nor bodily observance. Not and we would wallow upon the ground unto Christ… having therewith a mind that he were the best man that we could devise and thinking him not God. For if the lowly manner of bodily observance were the thing that would make latria, then were we much in peril of idolatry in our courtesy used to princes, prelates, and popes, to whom we kneel as low as to God Almighty… and kiss, some their hands—and some our own, ere ever we presume to touch them—and in the pope, his feet! And as for incensing, the poor priests in every choir be as well incensed as the Sacrament. So that if latria—that is, the special honor due to God—stood in such things, then were we great idolaters… not in our worship done to saints only, and their images, but also to men… one to another, among ourselves. But albeit that God ought of duty to have with our body the most humble and lowly reverence that we can possibly devise—but if we so do it that in our worship done to saints only, and their images, but also to men… one to another, among ourselves. But albeit that God ought of duty to have with our body the most humble and lowly reverence that we can possibly devise—yet is not that bodily worship latria but if we do it that in our mind we consider and acknowledge him for God… and with that consideration and intent do him that worship. And so doth, as I think, no Christian man to image or saint either. And so is avoided the peril of idolatry, for the first point ye spoke of.
“Now, as touching the second—that the people take the images for the saints themselves—I trust there be no man so mad, nor woman neither, but that they know quick men from dead stones, and tree from flesh and bone. And when they prefer, as ye spoke of, ‘our Lady’ at one pilgrimage before ‘our Lady’ at another, or one rood before another, or make their invocations and vows some to the one and some to the other… I ween it easy to perceive that they mean none other but that our Lord and our Lady, or our Lord for our Lady, showeth more miracles at the one than at the other. And that they intend in their pilgrimage to visit some of them one place and some another, as their devotion leadeth them; or partly, sometimes, as the place lieth for them—and yet not for the place, but for that it liketh our Lord by manifest miracles to provoke men to seek upon him or his Blessed Mother… or some other holy saint of his… in those places more specially than in some others.

“The thing itself also showeth that they take not the images for our Lady herself. For if they so did, how could they possibly in any manner wise have more mind to the one than to the other? For they can have no more mind to our Lady than to our Lady. Moreover, if they thought that the image at Walsingham were our Lady herself, then must they needs think that our Lady herself were that image. Then if in like wise they thought that the image at Ipswich were our Lady herself, and (as they must therewith needs think) that our Lady herself were that image at Ipswich, then must they needs think therewith… that all those three were one thing. And then every two of them were one thing. And so must they by that reason suppose that the image of Ipswich were the selfsame image that is at Walsingham. Which if ye ask any of them whom ye take for the simplest, except a natural fool: I dare hold you a wager she will tell you nay. Besides this, take the simplest fool that ye can choose, and she will tell you that our Lady herself is in heaven. She will also call an image an image; and she

1 as touching: as regards  1, 16, etc. image(s): statue(s)  3 quick: living
3 dead: inanimate // tree: wood  5 pilgrimage: shrine // rood: cross
7 ween: think  8 showeth: performs
11 as the place lieth: according to how convenient the location is
12 that: the reason that // liketh: pleases
13 seek upon: call upon; appeal to  18 manner wise: kind of way
18 have . . . other: think any more of the one than of the other  25, 26 one: the same
26 were: would be  27 reason: reasoning  29, 31 simplest: least intelligent
29 a natural fool: i.e., someone who is literally a born fool
will tell you a difference between an image of a horse and a horse in deed. And then appeareth it well, whatsoever her words be of her pilgrimage, by a common manner of speech to call the image of our Lady ‘our Lady’... as men say, ‘Go to the King’s Head for wine,’ not meaning his head in deed, but the sign—so meaneth she none other in that image but our Lady’s image, howsoever she call it. And if ye will well prove that she neither taketh our Lady for that image nor that image for our Lady (as both must she take if she take the one), talk with her of our Lady, and she will tell you that ‘our Lady’ was saluted with Gabriel... and that ‘our Lady’ fled unto Egypt with Joseph... and yet will she not in the telling say that Our Lady of Walsingham, or of Ipswich, was saluted of Gabriel or fled into Egypt. Nor if ye would ask her whether it were Our Lady of Ipswich or Our Lady of Walsingham that stood by the cross at Christ’s Passion, she will, I warrant you, make answer that neither of both. And if ye demand her further, ‘Which Lady, then?’ she will name you none image, but our Lady that is in heaven. And this have I proved often, and ye may when ye will, and shall find it true... except it be in one so very a fool... that God will give her leave to believe what she list. And surely, for this point, I think in my mind that all those heretics that make as though they found so much peril of idolatry among the people for mistaking of images... do but devise that fear... to have some cloak to cover their heresy... wherein they bark against the saints themselves. And when they be marked, then say they mean but the misbelief that women have in images. Now, as touching the third point, of superstitious manner of worshipping... or unlawful petitions desired of saints: as one example may serve both—if women offer oats to Saint Wilgefortis to have her unencumber them of their husbands—somewhat is it, indeed, that ye say... and yet not althing to be blamed that ye seem to blame. For as to pray to Saint Apollonia for the help of our teeth, is no witchcraft, considering that she had her teeth pulled out for Christ’s sake. Nor there is no superstition in such other things like. And peradventure since Saint Eligius was a farrier, it is no great fault to pray to him for the help of our horse.”
“Well, then,” quoth he, “since Saint Crispin and Saint Crispinian were shoemakers, it were well done in like wise to pray them sit down and mend our shoes! And pray to Saint Dorothy for some flowers, because she beareth always a basketful!”

“Nay,” quoth I, “the things be nothing like. For the one thing pertaineth nothing to our necessity; the other we may do ourselves, or soon find who shall. But as for your horse, is a thing wherein as well as in our own bodies... a right good leech may fail of his craft; and is to many a man a greater loss than he may well recover. And albeit that God commanded that we should chiefly seek for heaven; and promiseth that if we so do, all other things that we need shall be cast unto us; and would that we should in no wise live in anxiety and trouble of mind for any fear of lack, considering that our Father in heaven provideth meat for the very birds of the air, by whom he setteth nothing so much as he doth by us: yet willed not he the contrary but we should with our bodies labor therefor, having our hearts all the while in heaven. And willed also that we should ask it of him... without whose help our labor will not serve. And therefore is our daily food one of the petitions of the Pater Noster, the prayer that himself taught his disciples. And the horse he set not so little by... but that, rather than it should perish, he reckoned it no breach of the Sabbath day to pull it out of a pit. And therefore indeed meseemeth the devotion to run somewhat too far... if the smiths will not for any necessity set on a shoe upon Saint Eligius' Day... and yet lawful enough to pray for the help of a poor man’s horse. But as for your teeth, I ween if they ached well, ye would yourself think it a thing worthy, and not too simple, to ask help of Saint Apollonia, and of God too.”

“A merry tale, ye think?” quoth he, “and of the devil too, rather than fail—as the Lombard did for the gout. That when he had long called upon God and our Lady and all the holy company of heaven, and yet felt himself never the better, he began at last to call as fast for help unto the devil. And when his wife and his friends,
sore abashed and astonied, rebuked him for calling on the
devil—which he wist well was naught... and if that he helped him it
should be for no good—he cried out as loud as he could again,
‘Ogni aiuto é bono!’ (‘All is good that helpeth!’).

“And so, I ween, would I,” quoth he, “call on the devil and all, rather
than abide in pain.”

“And so, I ween, would I,” quoth he, “call on the devil and all, rather
than abide in pain.”

“Nay,” quoth I, “whatsoever ye say, I cannot think ye would believe
in the devil as that Lombard did. Ye would, rather, fare like
another, that when the friar apposed him in confession whether
he meddled anything with witchcraft or necromancy... or had

_A merry tale_ ‘any belief in the devil,’ he answered
him, ‘Credere en le diable, my sir? No;
Io grand fatigue a credere in Dio!’ (‘Believe in the devil?’ quoth he. ‘Nay,
nay, sir, I have work enough to believe in God, I!’) And so would

I ween that ye were far from all believing in the devil; ye have so
much work to believe in God himself... that ye be loath, me think,
to meddle much with his saints.”

When we had laughed a while at our merry tales, “In good faith,”
quoth I, “as I was about to tell you, somewhat indeed it is, that ye say.

For evil it is... and evil it is suffered, that superstitious manner of
worship. And as for that ye told of Saint Martin: if it be true...
it hath none excuse... but that it nothing toucheth our matter. For it
is not worshipping, but despiting and disworshipping, of
saints. Touching the offering of bread and ale to Saint
Germanus—I see nothing much amiss therein. Where ye have seen
it used, I cannot tell; but I have myself seen it oftentimes... and
yet am I not remembered that ever I saw priest or clerk fare the
better therefor, or once drink thereof, but it is given to children or
poor folk to pray for the sick child. And I would ween it were
none offense in such fashion... to offer up a whole ox and distribute
it among poor people. But, now, as for our merry matters of St.
Valery, because the place is in France we shall leave the matter to
the University of Paris to defend. And we will come home here to

1 sore abashed and astonied: (who were) terribly dismayed and shocked
2 wist well: well knew   // naught: wicked 3 again: in reply 4 all: everything
5, 15, 29 ween: think 6 abide: stay 8 Lombard: Italian // fare: act
9 that: who // apposed: interrogated // whether: as to whether
10 meddled anything: had any involvement
14, 16 work: trouble // to believe: believing 17 meddle much: have much to do
18 merry tales: funny stories // in good faith: in all honesty
19 somewhat... say: you do indeed have something there, in what you say
20 evil: bad // it is suffered: that it is tolerated // manner: fashion
21 worship: veneration // that ye told of: what you related about
22 nothing toucheth: has no relevance to // matter: case
23 worshipping: venerating // despitting: insulting 24 touching: regarding
26 it used: i.e., this custom observed
27 am... saw: I do not recall ever seeing // clerk: lay church worker
28 therefore: for it 29 were: would be 30 offense: impropriety
Paul’s and put one example of both (that is to say, the superstitious
manner and unlawful petitions): if women there offer oats unto
Saint Wilgefortis… in trust that she shall unencumber them of their husbands—
yet can neither the priests perceive till they find it there
that the foolish women bring oats thither… nor it is not, I think, so
often done, nor so much brought at once, that the church may make
much money of it above the finding of the canons’ horses.”
“Nay,” quoth he, “all the oats of a whole year’s offering will not find
tree geese and a gander a week together!”
“Well,” quoth I, “then the priests maintain not the matter for any
great covetousness; and also, what the peevish women pray they cannot
be more ways than one. They may be unencumbered if their husbands
change their cumbersome conditions. Or if themselves, peradventure,
change their cumbersome tongues… which is haply the cause of all
their encumbrance. And, finally, if they cannot be unencumbered but
by death… yet it may be by their own, and so their husbands
safe enough.”

“Nay, nay,” quoth he, “ye find them not such fools, I warrant you! They
make their covenants in their bitter prayers as surely as they
were penned—and will not cast away their oats for naught.”

“Well,” quoth I, “to all these matters is one evident easy answer—that
they nothing touch the effect of our matter, which standeth in this:
whether the thing that we speak of (as praying to saints, going in pilgrimage,
and worshipping relics and images) may be done well. Not
Put not away the good use
for the bad.
misuse, it yet doth all that nothing
diminish the goodness of the thing itself. For if we should for the
misuse of a good thing, and for the evils that grow sometimes in
the abuse thereof, not amend the misuse… but utterly put the whole
use away, we should then make marvelous changes in the world.
In some countries they go on hunting, commonly, on Good Friday, in
the morning, for a common custom. Will ye break that evil custom, or
cast away Good Friday? There be cathedral churches into which the
country cometh with procession at Whitsuntide... and the women following the cross with many an unwomanly song—and that, such honest wives as out of the procession ye could not hire to speak one such foul, ribaldrous word as they there sing for God’s sake whole ribaldrous songs as loud as their throat can cry. Will you amend that lewd manner, or put away Whitsuntide? Ye speak of lewdness used at pilgrimages. Is there, trow ye, none used on holy days? And why do you not then advise us to put them clean away—Sundays and all? Some wax drunk in Lent of wigs and cracknels; and yet ye would not, I trust, that Lent were fordone. Christmas—if we consider how commonly men abuse it, we may think that they take it for a time of liberty for all manner of lewdness. And yet is not Christmas to be cast away among Christian men; but men, rather, admonished to amend their manners... and use themselves in Christmas more Christianly.

Go me to Christ’s own coming and giving us our faith and his holy Gospel and sacraments. Be there not ten the worse therefor, against one the better? Be not all the paynims, all the Jews, all the Turks, all the Saracens, all the heretics, all the evil-living people in Christendom, the worse (by their own fault) for the coming of Christ?

I trow they be. And yet would no wise man wish that Christ had not come here. Nor it had been no right that God should have left the occasion of merit and reward that good folk would with his help deserve by his coming... for the harm that wretches would take thereof by their own sloth and malice. Nor, in like wise, right were it none that Men do merit by worshipping all worship of saints and reverence of holy of saints and relics. relics and honor of saints’ images—by which good, devout folk do much merit—we should abolish and put away because some folk do abuse it. Now, touching the evil petitions: though they that ask them were, as I trust they be not, a great people—they be not, yet, so many that ask evil petitions of saints... as there be that ask the same of God himself. For whatsoever they will ask of any good saint, they will ask of God also. And commonly in the wild Irish—and some in Wales too, as men say—when they go forth in robbing, they bless them and pray God send them good speed, that they may meet with a good purse and do harm and take none. Shall we therefore
find a fault with every man’s prayer, because thieves pray for speed in robbery? This hath, as I say, no reason although they were a great people that abused a good thing. And whereas the worst that ye assign in our matter is that… as ye say, ‘the people’… do ‘idolatry’ in that, ye say, they take the images for the saints themselves, or the rood for Christ himself—which, as I said, I think none doth (for some rood hath no Crucifix thereon; and they believe not that the cross which they see was ever at Jerusalem… nor that it was the Holy Cross itself; and much less think they, then, that the image that hangeth thereon is the body of Christ himself)—and although some were so mad so to think… yet were it not, as ye call it, ‘the people.’ For a few doting dames make not the people. And over this, if it were, as ye would have it seem, a whole people indeed—yet were not a good thing to be put away for the misuse of bad folk.”

The Twelfth Chapter

The author confirmeth the truth of our faith and usage in the worship of images… by the consent of the old holy doctors of the Church approving the same (as appeareth well in their writings) whom God hath by many miracles testified to be saints. The messenger eftsoons doubteth whether we can be sure that the miracles told by them were true or not… or themselves saints or not. Whereupon the author proveth that of any miracles told by any saints, we may be most sure of theirs… and, consequently, by their miracles most sure of them that they be surely saints. And in this chapter also proveth that the miracles and consent of those holy doctors do prove… that this must needs be the very, true church… in which they have written and miracles have been done. Whereupon is finally concluded, eftsoons, the truth of the principal question; and therewith finisheth the Second Book.

“And we be very sure that the thing is good, and our way good therein, and our belief therein right, not only by reasons and authority (by which

2 speed: success // this hath… no reason although: this would make… no sense even if
2–3 they… thing: those abusing a good thing were a great many people
3 worst: worst thing 4 assign: allege // say: put it // matter: dispute 5 images: statues
5, 6 rood: cross 7 Crucifix: figure of the crucified Christ 9 image: figure
10 although: even if // mad so to: crazy as so to 11 were it not: it would not be
11 doting: dotty 12 over this: furthermore 13 people: population
13–14 put… of: done away with on account of its being misused by 16 truth: rightness
16 usage: practice // in: regarding 17 worship: veneration
17; 26 consent: consensus; agreement // (old) holy doctors: (early) theologians
20, 29 eftsoons: once again 21, 23 by: about 25 surely: definitely
33 reasons: reasonings
I have proved it you more than once already), but also by that all the old holy saints-and-doctors of Christ’s church—as Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine, Saint Basil, Saint Chrysostom, Saint Gregory… with all such others, as plainly we read in their books—did as we do therein, and believed thereof as we believe. And since we see what they believed, we need not to doubt what is best that we believe. For if any sect believed better than other, we be sure of the best were they… that so well believed, and lived therewith, that God hath accepted them for saints… and by miracles openly declared that their faith and living liked him. Whereas, on the other side, of such as believed otherwise—as were these manifold sects of obstinate heretics—we see not one a saint among them, nor one miracle showed for them.”

“I wot ne’er,” quoth he, “whether this reason that ye make would surely satisfy the other side or no. For men may peradventure answer you that there is many a glorious saint in heaven… of whom we see no miracles in earth, nor haply never heard of their name.”

“That may well be,” quoth I, “and I suppose it very true.”

“May it not also be,” quoth he, “that though it were hard to think but that of miracles some among so many must needs be true—yet, since some also may be feigned, may it not be that those be feigned which be told to have been done by them whom ye rehearsed? Them, I mean, of old have written for your part; I mean those whom ye call the old doctors of the Church, and whom the Church taketh for saints.”

“This,” quoth I, “were worse than anything that we spoke of yet tofore. The worst was before… that we should pray to no saints. And now ye would either that we should have none… or, at the least, that we should know none.”

“Yes,” quoth he, “ye may have saints, and know for saints, and many one since the apostles’ time… though those be none whose writing ye would authorize by their sanctifying.”

“Then fall you,” quoth I, “to that point again that ye think it may be that the Church may take for saints, and worship as saints, them that be none.”

“Surely,” quoth he, “the proof that ye have laid unto me contrary, though it be somewhat probable, yet seemeth me not very strong, nor able

1 that: the fact that 2 old: early // as: such as 6 doubt: have any doubt as to
7 sect: religious sector 8 well: rightly // accepted: approved 9 living: way of living
10 liked: were to his liking 12 showed: performed 13 wot ne’er: don’t really know
13 reason: argument 14 surely: firmly // satisfy: convince
16 in earth: in the world; i.e., at all 20 feigned: made up 21 by: on behalf of
21 rehearsed: mentioned 22 for your part: on your side 23 old doctors: early theologians
24 were: would be // yet tofore: heretofore
29–30 though… sanctifying: even if those whose writing you would take as authoritative because of their being canonized are not saints 32 worship: venerate 34 proof: evidence
34 laid: presented // contrary: to the contrary 35 probable: plausible
and sufficient to strain a man to consent thereto. For though the assistance of God and his Holy Spirit will not suffer his whole Church to agree and consent together in any damnable error, yet may he suffer them well to err in the knowledge and worship of a saint, and mistake for a saint one that were a damnable wretch. For therein were no more danger to man’s soul, nor no more honor taken from God, than when the people do worship a host unconsecrated, mistaking it, through the default of an evil priest, for the Sacred Body of our Lord himself. And this ye doubt not but it is sometimes done.”

God will not suffer his Church to agree in any damnable error.

“Forget not now, by the way,” quoth I, “that ye still agree that God will not suffer his whole Church to agree in any damnable error and fall in a false faith. And therewith remember that though it were no damnable error to take one for a saint that were none, or a bone for a relic that were none, yet were it a damnable error to worship any if we should worship none at all. And therefore, since the Church believeth that we should worship them, that kind of belief can be none error, but must needs be true. Nor that kind of worship can be none idolatry, but must needs be good and acceptable to God. And so, our principal matter standing still sure and fast, we shall see somewhat further whereto your words will weigh and amount. Ye deny not,” quoth I, “but there be some saints and some miracles.”

“No,” quoth he.

Wherefore miracles were wrought specially wrought by God? Was it not to the intent to make his messengers known, and the truth of his message? As when he sent Moses to Pharaoh, were not the miracles done by God to make Pharaoh to perceive thereby the truth of his word?”

“Yes,” quoth he.

“When Christ,” quoth I, “sent his disciples to preach, the power that he gave them to do miracles—was it not for the proof of the doctrine that they taught, as is well witnessed in the Gospel?”

“Yes,” quoth he.
"If this be thus," quoth I, "as indeed it is, ye have most cause to believe, of all miracles, those that are told and reported as done for the doctors of Christ’s church, since miracles were specially devised by God for a knowledge of his true messengers… and a proof of their message. So that whereas ye would we should not utterly be deceived in saints and miracles, but yet we might be deceived in doctors whom we take for saints, and in their miracles: now it seemeth on the other side—that of all others, we be of them and of theirs most sure."

"This is well said," quoth he. "But yet always it runneth in men’s minds that miracles may be feigned."

"Be it so," quoth I, "so that it run again in men’s minds that all be not feigned. And then if ye think any true… this reason abideth still: that since miracles were specially given by God for the knowledge of his doctors and declaration of his doctrine, those miracles be specially to be taken for true that be reported to be done by his doctors. For they serve for the comprobation of his holy doctrine. And for because ye say that miracles ‘may be feigned’—that we spoke of Moses and Christ’s disciples putteth me now in mind: there were of old time also false doctors and miracles falsely feigned, were there not?"

"Yes, marry," quoth he.

"By whom were those miracles feigned?" quoth I.

"Marry," quoth he, "some by men, as there be now, and some by the devil—and haply so there be now too."

"Well, be it," quoth I, "both twain, and ye will. But were there not in the old time both twain found out and vanquished by the true doctors sent by God and true miracles for them wrought by God? As when the serpent of Moses devoured all the serpents made by the witchcraft of the Egyptian jugglers. And when the prophet Daniel did by the steps of the false priests’ feet find out the means whereby the meat was eaten that they feigned to be eaten by the idol Bel. And

5–6 would . . . saints: would have it that we won’t be completely in error about saints
6 might . . . doctors: could be in error about theologians
11, 13, 18, 21, 23 feigned: fabricated
13–14 this reason abideth still: this argument still stands
15 knowledge: recognition
15, 17, etc. doctors: theologians
15 declaration: elucidation
19 that we spoke of: what we said about
19–20 putteth me now in mind: now reminds me
21 falsely: deceitfully
22 marry: of course
24 marry: goodness
25 haply: perhaps
26 be it: so be it; let’s grant that
31 jugglers: magicians
33 steps . . . feet: footprints made by the deceitful priests
34 meat: food
34 feigned: made appear
when the prophet Elijah vanquished by miracle the false
prophets of Baal. And the holy apostles and disciples of Christ
did at their word... allto break in pieces the false idols, in sight
of the paynim people. So that always God hath prepared his true
doctors... to destroy by plain miracle the false 'miracles'
whereby men were and might be deceived. Is not this thus?" quoth I.

"Yes," quoth he.

"Well, then," quoth I, "if our old holy doctors were false, and their
doctrine untrue, and their miracles feigned... it is not enough now to
say so; but if any of them that so say be sent by God to reprove it, then
must they prove that they be sent so. And that not in words only,
but let some of them come forth and at their word break our
images... as Christ’s doctors did the paynims’. And to prove our
miracles feigned... let them do some very miracles themselves."

"As for miracles," quoth he, "be none article in any man’s creed. And
there is not so simple a sect of heretics but they might, if they
were set thereon, soon match you with miracles—whereof they might
feign fifteen in a forenoon. And then, as we said now, it would be
thought that though some were untrue, yet all were not lies."

"It were easy indeed," quoth I, "if men were mad... among whom they
should report them, and would nothing do for the trial."

"Iwis; yet if they did," quoth he, "yet might a few mean-witted
men devise and feign a thing of such a fashion that it would be
believed, and hard to try the truth out."

"Let it be so," quoth I. "But yet would it not long hold among good
Christian people; but God would either bring the falsehood to
light... or soon cast it out of credence. What labor took Philostratus
to make a book full of lies... whereby he would have had Apollonius
Tianus in miracles match unto Christ? And when he had all done...
he never found one old wife so fond to believe him. But I pray
you tell me," quoth I, "be there not of heresies many sects?"

"Yes," quoth he.

"Is there," quoth I, "any more very churches of Christ than one?"

"No more," quoth he.

2–4: This comes from legend; no such instance is found in Scripture.
9, 14, etc. feign(ed): fabricate(d) 10 reprove it: do this denouncing
12 atheir: i.e., just with their 3 allto: completely 3, 12 break (in): smash (into)
13 insight of: right in front of 4, 13 paynim(s): pagan(s) 6, 16, etc. might: could
20 it were easy indeed: that would indeed be easy 21 for the trial: by way of investigation
22 iwis: certainly 22–23 mean-witted men: people of average intelligence
24 to try the truth out: to pry out the truth about 25 let it be so: all right, let’s grant that
28 make: write 29 match: (appear to be) an equal 30 fond: foolish (as)
33 very: authentic
“Is not that it,” quoth I, “that is true?”
“Yes,” quoth he.
“Be not,” quoth I, “then all the sects of heresies false?”
“Yes,” quoth he.
“Who is likely,” quoth I, “to feign and lie: that company that is the true party, or some of them that be false?”
“It is,” quoth he, “more likely that they should all lie that be false… than that company that is the true party.”
“Then false and feigned miracles,” quoth I, “be they lies, or not?”
“What else?” quoth he.
“Then,” quoth I, “by your argument it seemeth that they were much more likely to be among every sect of heretics than in the Church.”
“So seemeth it,” quoth he.
“How happeth it, then,” quoth I, “if miracles be feigned ware, that among all the false sects of heretics—where such false stuff should be, by all reason, most rife—is none at all spoken of; but miracles told only in the church of Christ… which is only, as ye agree, the true party?”
“There be,” quoth he, “peradventure some done—either miracles or marvels—but they dare not speak of them, for fear of persecution.”
“If they were,” quoth I, “false marvels only done by the devil, it would not help your matter. For then must you grant very miracles of God only done in Christ’s church. And if there had been very miracles of God done for any sect whom we call heretics, that sect had been no sect of heretics, but the very church. (Or else had God by miracles testified the truth of a false faith; and that is impossible.) And thereof should have followed that except there were of Christ two churches of two contrary faiths… and both true, which were impossible—else not some, but all the miracles done, told, and wrought in one church had been either feigned or done by the devil. Whereby should it follow that our church were not the very church, but a false sect of heretics—which were, as I have already proved you divers ways, as far impossible. But, now, for the more clearness of our part therein; and for the further proof that ours is the sure church, and only the doctors and the doctrine of our church approved by miracles: Never hath there been any done for the doctors of any sects of heretics. For if there hath any true miracles been done by
God, and then that sect not a false sect but the true church, all the persecution that could have been—could never have quenched the fame thereof—as well appeareth by the miracles done in our church... in all such time as both the Jews and the paynims pursued it. Now, since there be so many false sects and but one church true, and miracles not spoken of in any but in one, it is a good token that the matter and substance of them is true. For else they were as likely to be spoken of in more... since of false and lying sects be so many. And then also, miracles being true, and being done, but in one of all those many companies each calling itself 'the church,' it is a good proof that the same one in which only they be done... is only the very, true church of Christ, to which his Holy Spirit and marvelous Majesty giveth his special assistance. And surely of all miracles that ever God hath wrought for his church, I see not in my mind lightly a more marvelous... than that as many sects of heretics as hath sprung and parted out of Christ’s church, and each of them laboring to be taken for the very church, yet hath our Lord hitherto never suffered neither the devil to do any wonder for them that might have the color and face of a miracle... nor, as false as they be themselves, yet hath he not suffered them hitherto not so much to do as feign a miracle for their party. Which is to my mind not only great wonder, but also, their confessed falsehood considered, a very clear proof that they could never have been kept from it but by the especial providence of God and his tender cure upon his chosen church... by which it hath liked him hitherto... that miracles, among other things, have been one good and sure mark between his church and all those erroneous sects that be sprung out thereof and be not his church but would seem to be. For as for paynims—Turks and Saracens, which by open profession are of another flock, and bear not the name of Christ, nor look for him, he suffereth the devil sometimes to delude with wonders and marvels. But the Jews, that still gape after him—their miracles, as far as I can hear, be gone, to the intent they may know that he hath left them and given them up... which was wont to work all those wonders for them. Now, as for heretics, which falsely feign themselves to be his own flock, and presume to bear and profess his name—
he keepeth them from the honor of any miracles doing, to the end
that the lack thereof among all their sects... and the doing thereof in his

One good mark to know

heretics

only church... may be, among many

other things, one good mark and sure
token whereby all these false sects of them

may be discerned and known from his very, true church; that is to
say, from the whole congregation of true Christian people in this world...
which without intermixture of obstinate heresies... profess the right,
catholic faith.

“Now is it not only true that miracles be wrought only in the
Church, and thereby do show which is the very church; but also
do they do show that those holy doctors for whom God hath showed them...
were good men and of the right belief. For if it were as ye would of
late have had it seem—that it might, peradventure, be so that the holy
doctors of our faith whom we take for saints were in deed no
saints, nor saved souls... but haply those were saved souls and
saints in heaven (though it were unknown here in earth) which did
teach the doctrines here that we now call heresies—then were it a
wondrous change, that whereas God among the Jews provided that
in every age there were some good men by their good living
and his high miracles so notable and well known to the people that
men had them always like bright, lively stars, whose doctrine
they might boldly believe, and whose living they might surely
follow, he would now in his special church of Christ... not only
do nothing like, but also do clean the contrary. For if he should
take that way that ye say—to leave, ever since the apostles’ days, all
the true interpreters of his-and-their holy writing, and doctors
of the very, true faith, lie to the world unknown... and then, on the other
side, set forth with miracles, or suffer so to be set forth with marvels
that his church should take and accept for saints, such evil persons
or hypocrites as construed the Scripture wrong, and ever since his
apostles’ days have taught false errors, and led his flock out of the
right way in a bypath to-hell-ward with wicked heresies and
idolatry—then hath not God sent the Holy Ghost, and himself also
tarried still therein, to teach his church the truth, as he said he would;
but he then had helped to beguile them himself!... which were

3 only church: church alone
5 token: sign
6 discerned: distinguished
6, 28 very: real
8, 17 which: who
11 very: true
12, 14–15, 27 (holy) doctors: theologians
12 showed: performed
13–14 of late: a little while ago
14 peradventure: perhaps
15 be so: be the case
15 deed: fact; actuality
16 haply: maybe
19 wondrous: amazing
20, 23 living: way of living
21 notable: conspicuous
22 lively: living
23 might: could
25 might: could

24 follow: imitate
25 clean the contrary: the complete opposite
26 leave: let
27 true: accurate
29 side: hand
32 false: despicable
33 in: onto
35 tarried still: continually remained
36 had: would have
36 were: would be
impossible for God to do, and more than blasphemy for any man
to think. For this were not like the sufferance of an unconsecrated
host, whereof ye put the example; wherein the people’s invincible
ignorance, with their devout affection, may without harm to
their souls be suffered, in the thing that seldom happeth… and endureth
for so short a while. But if God would leave all good doctors
unknown, and suffer his church to be deceived with miracles and
marvels done by them that taught heresies and set forth idolatry—
then should himself, as I say, not only suffer his honor and
right faith and religion to be perpetually lost… but help also himself
to destroy it. Which whoso could think possible… were worse
than Judas, and more mad than any man in Bedlam. And therefore
can it not in no wise be that the Church can be deceived in that
they take for saints these holy doctors of the Church. Nor, they
so being, can it in any wise be that the doctrines wherein they
consent and agree can be false or untrue! Among which doctrines
since the things whereof we speak—I mean the praying to saints,
the worship of images, reverencing of relics, and going in
pilgrimages—is a part, as by their books plainly doth appear, we
may well and surely conclude that none of these things be damnable
or displeasant to God, but things highly to his contentation and
pleasure. And since we further perceive that their books be written
in diverse regions and sundry ages, we thereby well perceive that these
things be parcel of the rites, usages, and belief of Christ’s church…
not only now and of late, but continually from the beginning
hitherto. And since it is plainly proved you that the Church can in
no wise be suffered of God to fall into any damnable error thereby,
it is yet most surely concluded that these things be none such. And
consequently proved that no text of Scripture seeming to sound
to the contrary… can be so taken or understood. Nor that the
Church cannot in prejudice of the faith misunderstand the

A most sure rule

Scripture. And that the substantial
points of the faith therefore learned of the
Church… is one of the surest rules that can be found for the
right interpretation of Holy Scripture. And that no sect of heretics
can be the church of Christ; but that our church is the very

2 were not like the sufferance of: would not be like his letting there be 5 endureth: lasts
6, 14 (holy) doctors: theologians 7, 13 deceived: misled 11 were: would be
16 consent: concur 18 worship: veneration // in: on
28 yet: furthermore 30 of: by
31 in prejudice: to the detriment 33 learned of: learned from
34 surest: safest; most reliable 36 very: true
church. And it is also clearly proved that the matter of miracles therein
daily done… is neither feigned by men nor done by the devil… but
only by the mighty hand of God. And such objections as ye laid
unto the contrary of any point aforesaid… be, as far as I can see,
sufficiently answered… except that ye have any further objection to
lay therein. Which if ye have, ye get no thank to spare.”

Whereunto he said—and swore, therewith—that he so fully felt himself
answered and contented therein… that he thought himself
able therewith to content and satisfy any man that he should happen
to meet with that would hold the contrary. Whereupon for that
day we departed till another time… in which we appointed to
peruse the remnant of the things that he had in the beginning
purposed.

The end of the Second Book
The Third Book

The First Chapter

The messenger, having in the meanwhile been at the university, showeth unto the author an objection which he learned there against one point proved in the First Book—that is to wit, that in the necessary points of the faith, equal credence is to be given to the Church and to the Scripture. Which objection the author answereth and dissolveth.

About fortnight after, your friend came again in a morning, newly come from the university, where he was, as ye wot, at learning ere he came at you. And there had he now, as he said, visited some of his old acquaintances; and, upon occasion arising in communication, had again repeated with some of them very fresh-learned men good part of our former disceptation and reasoning had between us before his departing. Which, as he said, they took great pleasure in, and much wished to have been present thereat. But, surely, he said that some of them seemed to take very sore to heart the hard handling of the man that ye write of—and the burning of the New Testament, and the forbidding of Luther’s book to be read; which were, as some of them thought, not allthing so bad as they were made for. And, finally, touching the burning of heretics… there were some that thought the clergy therein far out of right order, of charity.

“I am,” quoth I, “very glad that it hath been your hap to be there. Not so much for anything that ye have showed them of our communication had already, concerning the praying of saints, worshipping of images and relics, and going in pilgrimage (wherein I think ye told them no novelty, for I doubt not but they could have told you more of the matters themselves than ye have showneth: relates in: with regard to // necessary: essential (to salvation)
dissolveth: disposes of // fortnight after: two weeks later
came again in a morning: came back one morning // wot: know
communication: conversation // disceptation: disputation
reasoning: discussion // had: held
surely: to be sure // sore: badly
hard handling: harsh treatment
allthing: altogether
made for: made out to be // touching: regarding
out of right order: i.e., out of line with right procedure
hap: fortune
showed: told // praying of: appealing to; petitioning of
worshipping: venerating // images: statues
no novelty: nothing new
they . . . themselves: they themselves could have told you more on those subjects
heard, or could hear, of me), as for that I think that among them… being, as ye say, so well learned… ye have either heard somewhat whereby ye be in some part of these matters that we shall speak of already satisfied—whereby our business therein may be the shorter— or else ye be the more strongly instructed for the other part; whereby our disputation shall be the fuller, and the matters the more plainly touched, for the more ample satisfaction of such as yourself or your master shall hereafter happen to find in any doubt of these things that we shall now touch and treat of.”

“Indeed,” quoth he, “somewhat have they showed me their minds therein, as in some part of the matters ye shall hear when we hap to come to them.”

“That shall I gladly hear,” quoth I, “and shape you such answer as my poor wit will serve me. But yet I pray you be plain with me in one thing: Were they satisfied, and held themselves content, in those things that were at last, with much work, agreed between us?”

“In good faith,” quoth he, “to say the truth, all were save one; and he in all things save one. And to your great praise and high commendation, they said that in these matters—”

“Nay,” quoth I, “let their praise pass, lest ye make me too proud. But I pray you tell me… not which one disliked one thing, but what one thing it was, and why he disliked it.”

“Surely,” quoth he. “For aught that I could bend upon him, he could never agree that the faith of the Church out of Scripture… should be as sure and bind us to the belief thereof… as the words of Holy Scripture.”

“Why,” quoth I, “if ye remembered well what we said, ye had enough to prove him that.”

“Truth is it,” quoth he, “so had I, and so did I—and in such wise that divers ways I brought him to the bay… that he wist not how to void. But then said he to me that he would not do with me as I had done with you. Nor it was, he said, ‘no wisdom for a man against his adversary to use always the buckler hand. For so must all the peril be his, and his adversary stand in surety. But, on the other side, if he
use the sword therewith, and strike among, and drive the other to
his defense, so may he hap to put him in half the peril.' And likewise
he said that if I proved my part so clearly to him that he
could not say nay: yet if I would again answer him another
while, he might peradventure bring me to the same point on the
other side; and then should the matter stand yet at large. Of two
contraries if both the parts be proved... then stand they both
unproved. ‘And therefore,’ quoth he, ‘I pray you answer me this a
little: When you believe the Church, wherefore do you believe the
Church? Do you not believe it because it saith truth?’

‘Yes, marry,’ quoth I. ‘What else?’
‘And how know you,’ quoth he, ‘that the Church saith truth? Know
ye that any other wise than by Scripture?’
‘Nay, marry,’ quoth I. ‘But then by plain Scripture I know it very
well. For the Scripture telleth me that God hath fully taught and
teacheth his church and biddeth me believe his church.’

‘Lo,’ quoth he, ‘for all your long process, see whereto ye be brought
now. Ye would in any wise before—and ye seemed to prove it, too, all
the while that ye argued and I answered—that the Church was, in all
necessary points of our faith, as much to be believed as the
Scripture... and that we should not have believed the Scripture but
for the authority of the Church, as ye say Saint Augustine saith. And
now, when I argue and ye answer, I have driven you to the wall in
three words, and proved unto you that the Church is not to be
believed, nor that yourself believeth it not, but for the authority of
the Scripture!’ And after that he had thus said, the remnant that
were present allowed it much; and I was therewith astonied, and
said I would advise me further thereon. But he laughed and said he
would lend me this, and not to be hasty on me, for he would give
me respite of payment till I had spoken with you again.”

When your friend had told, “Forsooth,” quoth I, “he dealt with you
like a courteous creditor. And since he hath given you so long
day, you shall not need, I trust, to die in his debt. And, to say the
truth, ye owe him not much. For ye may bear him his own

1 among: now and then  3, 7 part(s): side(s)  4 again: in turn
4–5 another while: for a change  5 peradventure: perhaps
6 yet at large: still unsettled  8 pray: ask that  9 wherefore: why
10, 12 saith: speaks the  11 marry: of course  13 wise: way
14 marry: indeed  17 process: drawn-out argument
18 in any wise: by all means (have had it)
19 ye... answered: you did the making of the arguments, and I the answering of them
20 necessary: i.e., necessary for salvation  21 should: would
23 argue: make the arguments  23–24 in three words: with a few words; in short order
26–27 remnant that were: rest of those
27 allowed it much: expressed great approval // astonied: stumped
28 advise me: reflect  29 this: i.e., this one // to be hasty: put pressure
31 told: finished speaking  32–33 so long day: such a long time before due date
249/34—250/1 may bear him his own again: i.e., can bring him back what he lent you
again and tell him his money is naught. But I have espied it is, as
he saith, a great advantage for him to oppose. For he hath such
craft in arguing... that he will soon bring the answerer to a
perilous point... if he happen on one that will answer him handsomely,
as he would have him. But on the other side, if he had
happened on one that had answered him as frowardly as the boy
answered one Caius, a poet at Cambridge, then had he by his

A merry disputation opposing part won nothing at all.
For Caius, for his pleasure playing with
the boy... being a young sophister, said that he would prove the
boy an ass. Which when the boy denied, 'Well,' quoth Caius,
'thou wilt grant me this first: that everything that hath two
ears is an ass.'

"'Nay, marry, Master, will I not!' quoth the boy.

"'No wilt thou?' quoth Caius. 'Ah, wily boy, there thou wentest beyond
me. For and thou wouldst have granted me that, I would have
proved thee an ass anon.'

"'Marry, Master,' quoth the boy, 'ye might well; and so might every
fool do.'

"'Well,' quoth Caius, 'I will go now another way to work with thee.
Thou wilt grant me that every ass hath two ears.'

"'Nay, marry, will I not, Master!' quoth the boy.

"'Why so, boy?' quoth he.

"'Marry, Master,' quoth he, 'for some ass may hap to have never one;
for they may be cut off, both!'

"'Nay,' quoth Caius, 'I give thee over; for thou art too froward a boy
for me.' And so, if ye had not granted what he would... he had
nothing won at your hand.'

"'Why,' quoth your friend, "what thing did I grant him that I
should not?'"

"Forsooth," quoth I, "no more but all that ever ye granted! For first,
when he asked you whether the cause why we believe the Church be
not because it is true that the Church telleth you, though your

1 naught: no good    //   espied: noted that    2 oppose: be (the one) on the offensive
3 craft: skill        4 handsomely: in an accommodating way    5 side: hand
6 frowardly: contrarily
7–8 had he by his opposing part: he would by his being on the offensive have
10 being a young sophister: who was a little smart aleck    14, 18, etc. marry: indeed
16 and: if    17 anon: forthwith    24 never: not a; not even
26 give thee over: give up on thee    //   froward: contrary
27 would: wanted (you to grant)    33 it... you: what the Church is telling you is true
answer which ye made therein was not the cause of your redargution… nor the thing whereby ye were concluded… yet answered ye not well thereto when ye granted it.”

“Why,” quoth he, “wherefore should I believe the Church—or any man else—but because they tell me true?”

“Sometimes,” quoth I, “it happeth so; but sometimes it happeth otherwise. For if a known liar tell you a known-true tale, ye will believe him because he telleth you truth. But, now, if a known-true man tell you an unknown truth, ye believe not him because the thing is truth, but ye believe the thing to be truth because ye believe the man to be true. And so believe you the Church… not because it is truth that the Church telleth you, but ye believe the truth of the thing because the Church telleth it. But yet was not that answer of his, as I say, the thing that confounded you. For, now, if ye so should have answered him as I have showed you, though ye should have somewhat blenched him therewith… yet he might, and would of likelihood, have gone further with you and have asked you whereby ye know that ye should believe the Church. And what answer would ye then have made thereunto?”

“Marry,” quoth he, “then might I have said that I believe the Church because that in such necessary points of faith the Church cannot err.”

“That had been very well said,” quoth I. “But he would have asked how ye know that.”

“Then must I,” quoth he, “have said the same that I did: that I know it by plain and evident Scripture… that the Church in such things cannot say but true. And then would I have laid him the texts that ye alleged unto me for the same purpose before.”

“If ye so had said,” quoth I, “ye had answered him truly, but yet not with your most advantage.”

“Why so?” quoth he.

“For,” quoth I, “your next answer were to say, as truth is, that ye believe that the Church in such things cannot err… because ye believe that God hath taught and told the same things to his Church.”

“Then would he have asked me further,” quoth your friend, “what thing maketh me believe that God hath taught and told the Church those things.”

“So would he have asked you,” quoth I, “and so might he well.”
“Then were we come,” quoth your friend, “unto the same point again—that he should have concluded me as he did before.”

“Nay,” quoth I, “not if ye answered thereto well.”

“Why,” quoth he, “what could I answer else… but clearly grant him that I believe that thing for none other cause but only because the Scripture so showeth me?”

“No could ye?” quoth I. “What if never Scripture had been written in this world? Should there never have been any church or congregation of faithful and right-believing people?”

“That wot I ne’er,” quoth he.

“No do ye?” quoth I. “Were there never any folk that believed in God… and had a true faith, between Adam and Noah—of such as never heard God speak themselves?”

“Yes,” quoth he, “I suppose there were some; but it should seem there were very few. For there were few saved in Noah’s ship.”

“The world was at that time,” quoth I, “waxen worse and worse, as it waxeth now. But it is not unlikely that there were many right-believing people in the meantime.”

“That is,” quoth he, “likely enough.”

“Now, as for the days,” quoth I, “of Noah himself: though there were few saved alive, yet proveth not that the people to be all miscreants and without faith. For it fared by them as it fareth now by us: that there were many that believed the truth and had a faith, but they followed the flesh and sank for their sin. For there appeareth no further upon the story in Genesis but that the world was washed with the water of the great flood for the filth of their fleshly living. And albeit that in the First Epistle of Saint Peter it might seem some incredulity in them, yet may it be that it stretched no further than to the lack of fear in the credence of God’s commination… and overmuch hope and boldness of God’s further favor and sufferance… whereof they repented after, too late for this present life… and yet many, through God’s mercy, not too late for the final salvation of their souls (as appeareth by the good and great clerk Nicholas de Lyra, upon the same place); which could in no wise have been so if they had lacked faith.
Which faith what Scripture had they to teach them? Or all the men, in effect, that any faith had from Adam hitherto? Was there also no faithful folk at all from Noah to Moses—not himself, neither, till he had the Law delivered him in writing? Did Abraham never believe more but those things that we find in Scripture specially to have been told him by God? Was his father and all his friends infidels? Were there no people besides, in all that long time, that had a right faith?"

“Yes,” quoth your friend, “that I think verily there was.”

The Church “That may ye,” quoth I, “be sure there was. And why did any man then believe the church—that is to wit, the number and congregation of good and right-believing folk, of whose mouth and tradition he heard the true belief—against the wrong and misbelief that was in all the world, among infidels and idolaters, beside? Why did any man this…but because they believed that God hath taught those things to good men before, and that it was and would be still the good lesson of God? And then what thing made them to believe that God had taught them so? It was not the Scripture that made them believe that…as ye would that nothing can tell us that belief but the Scripture. I pray you tell me what scripture hath taught the Church to know which books be the very scripture…and to reject many others that were written of the same matters—and that in such wise written, and in the names of such men, as, saving for the Spirit of God given to his church, a natural-wise man had been likely enough either to have taken both for Holy Scripture…or to have rejected both as no Holy Scripture. And surely in the receipt of the one, and rejection of the other, there would have been at the least way such diverse opinions that the whole Church had never taken all the one sort and rejected all the other…had not that Holy

Ps 67:7 (Vulgate) Spirit inspired that consent…‘qui facit unaines in domo’ (‘which maketh the Church all of one mind and accord’). And therefore, albeit that against them that nothing will believe but Scripture…we prove the authority of the Church by Scripture—and in such wise prove it them by Scripture that they shall be fain either further to grant that they be bound to believe the Church in things not specified
in Scripture, and as fully as they believe the Scripture itself, or

Belief was before Scripture. else they shall deny the Scripture and all—
yet should we have believed the Church if

never Scripture had been written; as those good-faithful folk did

that believed well before the Scripture was written. And, now, the
Scripture itself maketh us not believe the Scripture… but the Church
maketh us to know the Scripture. And God without Scripture hath
taught his Church the knowledge of his very scripture from all
counterfeit scripture. For it is not, as I say, the Scripture that

maketh us to believe the word of God written in the Scripture—for a

The Spirit of God worketh in man might (as haply many doth) read

man belief without Scripture. it altogether and believe thereof never a

whit—but it is the Spirit of God that,

with our own towardness and good endeavor, worketh in his

Church, and in every good member thereof, the credulity and belief
whereby we believe as well the Church concerning God’s words
taught us by the Church, and by God engraved in men’s hearts, without
Scripture… as his holy words written in his Holy Scripture. And
thus ye perceive that where ye granted him that so did oppose you…

that we believe the Church by none other way but by the Scripture—

there did ye not answer him well. For we beside the Scripture do
believe the Church… because that God himself, by secret inspiration
of his Holy Spirit, doth (if we be willing to learn) teach us to
believe his Church. And also, if we will walk with him, leadeth us

into the belief thereof, by the selfsame means by which he teacheth

us and leadeth us into the belief of his Holy Scripture. For likewise
as when we hear the Scripture or read it, if we be not rebellious
but endeavor ourselves to believe, and captivate and subdue our understanding
to serve and follow faith, praying for his gracious aid

and help, he then worketh with us… and inwardly doth incline our

heart into the assent of that we read… and after a little spark of our

faith, increaseth the credence in our incredulity: so doth his
goodness in like wise incline and move the mind of every like
toward and like well-willing body… to the giving of fast and firm

credence to the faith that the Church teacheth him in such things

as be not in the Scripture, and to believe that God hath taught his

Church those points by his holy word without writing. And, now,
if ye had answered him thus, I believe surely that ye had clearly
disarmed him and broken his gay sword in twain. Which in my
mind, I promise you, how gaily soever it glitter in one’s eye for a flourish, yet who fight therewith shall find it neither sharp nor sure… if it fall on a good buckler, and not on a naked man.”

“By my troth,” quoth your friend, “so seemeth me, now, too. And though the brightness bleared mine eye at that time, yet I trust he shall win no worship thereof when we meet again.”

The Second Chapter

Incidentally somewhat is there touched the superstitious fear and scrupulosity that the person abjured did, as it is said, begin with. The weariness whereof drove him to the delight of such liberty as brought him to the contempt of the good devout things used commonly in Christ’s church. And in this chapter is somewhat touched the good mean manner… between scrupulous superstition and reckless negligence… that would be used in the singing or saying of Divine Service.

“But surely, sir, concerning the man’s abjuration that we spoke of, they be marvelously persuaded that he had much wrong. Not in that the opinions were Catholic which were laid to his charge (for therein have ye said enough), but in that he was wrongly borne in hand that he had preached them, where he did not so. And thus be they very credibly informed, both by word and writing of such as were present thereat. And therefore long I sorely, and would be very glad, to hear how those matters were proved.”

“Now—and I am,” quoth I, “for my part, very sorry, so help me God, to lose time therein, as a thing in effect fruitless… saving that it may be, peradventure, a fruitful example, that no man be light to believe such things hereafter as he shall hap to hear spoken against the Church in the favor of any man condemned of heresy… while he seeth as much said against the judgment of this man… wherein, so to say, they can have no more hold than if they would say the crow were white. And in good faith, to say the truth, there cannot in my

1 gaily: brightly 1–2 for a flourish: when being flourished  2 who fight: whoever fights
3 buckler: shield // naked: unarmed  4 by my troth: by my word; really and truly
4 seemeth me: it seems to me  5 bleared mine eye: blurred my vision
6 worship thereof: honor by it  8, 13 touched: discussed
9 abjured: made to renounce his heresies under oath  10 begin: start out
10 the weariness whereof: his being sick and tired  12 devout: devotional  13 mean: middle
15 would: ought to  16 Divine Service: the Divine Office
18 be marvelously persuaded: are extremely convinced // had much wrong: was done very wrong
19 the . . . charge: the opinions he was charged with having espoused were Catholic ones
20–21 wrongly . . . had: unjustly accused of having  22 word: spoken word
24 matters: charges  26 in effect: virtually  27 light: quick  29 condemned: convicted
29 while: when  30 judgment of: verdict pronounced on
mind be a more meet example to match their words with.

For likewise as he that would say the crow were white… must, if he
will be believed, go tell the tale to a blind man… and may, perchase,
with him be as well believed as one that will say the contrary,
till that he be either by more men or men of more honesty put after out
of credence: so must these folk that thus talk and write of him… seek,
as they do indeed, such hearers as be blind in the matter and know
nothing thereof, whom they persuade, with false suggestions, to
conceive an evil opinion of the judges… to incline their hearts first,
for pity, to the favor of the man… and after, to the favor of the
matters that he was abjured for. I have myself seen a letter written out
of London by a priest reputed honest—howbeit indeed, as I saw it
proved after, a plain pestilent heretic—in which letter he wrote
that the man we now talk of ‘did no more abjure any heresy’ than
he had done himself, or the man that he wrote unto. And yet was
his writing as false as God is true. Wherewith he labored covertly
to make the man believe that the opinions were no heresies, and
that he which was pretended to have abjured them had not so done
in deed, but had well avowed them and stiffly abided by them. Lo,
thus do such as are of that sect set forth their matters with
lies. And reason is it that they so do. For since their sects be false,
lies be for them most meet. And yet is it a mad thing of them to
boast of him. For he forthwith forsook them… and ever before his
judges he confessed from the beginning that the matters were plain,
false heresies—and the holders, therewith, heretics—saying for himself
that he never preached them. And so had they no cause to be proud
of him… which in open audience, at the first word, refused and condemned
them. But they, haply thinking that for all his denying
with his mouth, he favored still in deed them and their
heresies in his mind, pardoned, therefore, those words, which they
thought spoken but of infirmity, for fear and faint heart. And therefore
would they be glad yet among men that knew not the matter…
to maintain and uphold his authority against a better time.
And surely, this that I shall tell you… have I heard reported; howbeit,
I will not warrant it for truth. But yet have I, as I say, heard
it reported right credibly… that the man we speak of, which was

1 meet . . . with: apt metaphor to apply to their statements  3 will: wants to
3 perchase: perchance  5 honesty: respectability  // after: later
8 suggestions: representations  9 evil: bad
11–12 written out of: i.e., written in and sent from  12 honest: i.e., to be an upstanding one
17 opinions: views (in question)  18 pretended: alleged  19 deed: fact
19 stiffly: firmly; adamantly  // abided: stuck  20 set forth: promote
20, 24 matters: contentions; theses  21 reason is it: it stands to reason
22 meet: fitting  23 forthwith: right away  24 confessed: admitted
27, 36 which: who  27 refused: repudiated  28 haply: maybe
29 deed: fact; actuality  31 infirmity: weakness
32 knew not the matter: didn’t know about all this  33 against: in anticipation of
34 surely: assuredly  35 warrant: guarantee
abjured, used among some of that sect to say, ‘Let us preach and set forth our way. And if we be accused, let us say we said not so; and yet some of them shall we win always the while.’ And albeit I will not, as I say, warrant you that he thus said, yet I assure you, to my mind his manner in his matter, before his judges, was as consonant as could be to that intent and purpose. For surely the effect of his defense was nothing else... but against a well and plainly proved matter... an obstinate shameless nay.”

“By my troth,” quoth your friend, “I marvel me much thereof. For he was called a good man and a very devout.”

“I will not,” quoth I, “as I told you in the beginning, go about to reprove his living, since the question standeth not but in his teaching; and yet may I be bold with you to tell you what I have heard. He was (as it was said), after that he fell from the study of the law (wherein he was a proctor, and partly well learned) unto the study of Scripture—he was, as I say, very fearful and scrupulous, and began at the first to fall into such a scrupulous holiness that he reckoned himself bound so straitly to keep and observe the words of Christ after the very letter... that because our Lord biddeth us when we will pray, enter into our chamber and shut the door to us, he thought it therefore sin to say his Service abroad, and always would be sure to have his chamber door shut unto him while he said his Matins. Which thing I, indeed, heard him once deny in an honorable presence...

“But I heard, again, another man, more credible than twain of him (and if I had said than such ten, I think I lied not), and one of his best-proved friends, avow it in his face for truth. Howbeit, I tell you not this thing for any great hurt in the man. For it was more peevish and painful than evil and sinful. But surely men say that in conclusion, with the weariness of that superstitious fear and servile dread, he fell as far to the contrary. And under pretext of love and liberty waxed so drunk of the new must of lewd lightness of mind and vain gladness of heart, which he took for spiritual consolation, that whatsoever himself listed to take for good, that thought he forthwith approved by God. And so framed himself a faith, framed himself a conscience, framed himself

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1 *abjured*: made to renounce his heresies under oath // some: i.e., some members
2 *set forth*: promote // *said not so*: did not say such and such // *the while*: in the meantime
3 *manner*: demeanor // *matter*: trial // *surely*: certainly // *effect*: gist
4 *well and*: quite // *truth*: word // *marvel... thereof*: find that very surprising
5 *go about*: undertake // *reprove*: impugn // *living*: way of living
6 *be... to*: go so far with you as to // *after that*: after // *fell*: turned
7 *proctor*: advocate // *straitly*: strictly; rigorously // *after*: to
8 *chamber*: bedroom // *Service*: Divine Office
9 *abroad*: i.e., anywhere else // *honorable presence*: august company
10 *lied not*: would not have been lying // *hurt*: bad quality // *peeves*: silly
11 *weariness*: being sick and tired // *waxed*: got // *must*: wine / mandate
12 *lewd*: base // *listed*: chose
a devotion, wherein him list; and wherein him liked, he set himself at liberty.”

“And if it so were,” quoth your friend, “then ye see, lo, what cometh of this saying of Service!”

“Of saying Service?” quoth I. “This is much like as at Beverley lately, when, much of the people being at a bear-baiting, the church fell suddenly down at Evensong time and overwhelmed some that then were in it; a good fellow that after heard the tale told—‘Lo,’ quoth he, ‘now may you see what it is to be at Evensong when ye should be at the bear-baiting!’ Howbeit, the hurt was not therein—being at Evensong—but in that the church was falsely wrought. So was in him or any man else no harm, but good, in saying of Divine Service; but the occasion of harm is in the superstitious fashion that their own folly joineth thereunto—
as some think they say it not... but if they say every psalm twice.”

“In faith,” quoth your friend, “then if I were as he, I would mumble it up apace or else say none at all.”

“That were as evil,” quoth I, “on the other side. There is a mean may serve between both.”

“Yea,” quoth he, “but wot ye what the wife said, that complained to her gossip of her husband’s frowardness? She said her husband was so wayward that he would never be pleased. ‘For if his bread,’ quoth she, ‘be dough-baked, then is he angry.’ ‘Marry, no marvel!’ quoth her gossip. ‘Marry, and wot ye what, gossip?’ quoth she. ‘And if I bake it all to hard coals, yet is he not content neither, by Saint James!’ ‘No,’ quoth her gossip, ‘ye should bake it in a mean.’ ‘In a mean?’ quoth she. ‘Marry, I cannot happen on it.’ And so in a pair of Matins it is much work to happen on the mean. And then to say them too short is lack of devotion; and to say them too seriously is somewhat superstitious. And therefore the best way were, in my mind, to say none at all.”

“Yea,” quoth I, “but then is God as wayward a husband as ye spoke of—that will neither be content with his bread burned to coals nor dough-baked, neither.”

“By our Lady,” quoth he, “but be he content or not, I ween he hath much dough-baked bread among. For the Matins, I tell you, be in some places sung faster than I can say them.”

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1 wherein: wherever // him list: he wanted // him liked: he pleased
4, 5, 13 (Divine) Service: the Divine Office // 7, 10, 11 Evensong: Vespers
8 overwhelmed: crushed // him hurt: harm; problem
12 falsely wrought: improperly constructed
14 folly: foolishness // if: unless // in faith: in all // apace: at a high speed
18, 30 were: would be // evil: bad // 18–19 a... both: i.e., between the two extremes a happy medium that could serve // wot ye: do you know // 20, 21, 23, etc. gossip: chum
21 of: about // frowardness: perverseness // wayward: ornery
22 he would never be pleased: there was no pleasing him
23, 34, 36 dough-baked: doughy; underdone // marry, no marvel: well, no wonder
24 marry... what: well, but you know what // and if: even if // 25, 33, 35 content: happy
26 in: to // mean: point in between // marry: goodness // pair: set
28 too short: in too short a time // too short // set
29 seriously: painstakingly // mind: opinion
30 mind: opinion
35 ween: think // hath much: gets a lot of // among: now and then
“Peradventure,” quoth I, “so were it need. For if they should sing Matins no faster than ye say them, they should, I ween, sing very few Matins in a year!”

“In faith,” quoth he. “And some that say them make me to doubt much whether the bees in their hives use to say Matins among them! For even such another buzzing they make.”

“How God’s Service ought to be said or sung”

“How God’s Service ought to be said or sung”

“Surely,” quoth I, “that is as true as it is evil done. For as it is a vice, and some fault, to be in the Service of God superstitious instead of religious; overly dreadful and scrupulous instead of devout and diligent: so is it a much more fault to be therein reckless and negligent. For accursed is he, as Holy Scripture saith, that doth the work of God negligently. The peril thereof appeareth by Eutychus, the young stripling (that is spoken of by Saint Luke in the Acts of the Apostles) who, falling in sleep while the apostles and the disciples were occupied in reading, preaching, and prayer, fell out of a high window down unto the ground, and there had died—God wot in what case—if the merits of Saint Paul had not recovered him. And, now, if he be of God accursed that negligently doth his work, how much is he more accursed that casteth his work away and leaveth it quite undone—such work, I say, as they be bound to do? But in this matter we spend more time than needeth. For it is not much to our present purpose—saving that if it be truth that the man whom we talk of fell first in such superstition, it is the more likely that the devil did cast him therein… for none other intent but that he might after, for very weariness thereof, bring him into a contempt of all the things that he was waxen weary of, and set him in a delight of ‘liberty’… whereby, with leaning to his own wit, he might reckon everything good or bad as himself would account it. Which was the ready way to bring him to these heresies wherein he was now fallen.”

The Third Chapter

The author showeth that men ought not to be light in mistrusting of any judgment given in the Court. And that much less ought any man to be bold in the reproving of a

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1 peradventure: perhaps // so were it need: that would be necessary
2 ween: think 4 in faith: true // and: i.e., but // to doubt much: really wonder
5 use to say: make a habit of saying 6 even: just 7 surely: to be sure; certainly
7 evil: ill 8 some fault: something of an offense 9 Service of God: Divine Office
10 dreadful: fearful 11 more fault: greater offense 14 appeareth: is evidenced
16 in sleep: asleep 18 had: would have // wot: knows 19 case: state (of soul)
19 recovered: revived 20 of: by 21 quite: completely 22 bound: obliged
22–23 in this matter: on this subject 23 spend: are spending // needeth: is necessary
25 in: into 28 was waxen weary of: had gotten sick and tired of
29 leaning to: relying on // wit: mind 34 light: quick
36 reproving: criticizing
common law. And he showeth also the cause why that the law
admitteth more slight witnesses in heinous criminal
causes than in slighter matters of covenants or
contracts.

“Fallen?” quoth your friend. “What? Abide! We be now gone over the
stile ere we come at it! We be yet in question whether it were
righteously judged that he was fallen in them or not. For I think
it no sin to doubt thereof yet till I hear how the matter was proved.”

“Indeed,” quoth I, “that is, as ye say, the matter whereof we first have to
talk. And yet, if ye never heard further therein… but that he was
judged faulty; although ye had ever accounted the man in your
own mind for very virtuous and of right belief: yet, since he cannot
be good except more men than he be naught… whom ye ought no
more to misdeem than him, and especially his judges, which are elected
and chosen for indifferent, and which without likelihood of lucre
or loss be set to consider, examine, and by their judgment order
the cause of another man, whereas the parties may reasonably be
more mistrusted themselves—both the accuser, which may speak of
malice, and especially the party that is accused, which is well
likely to lie for his defense in a matter of peril if he were proved
guilty—ye therefore ought not to mistrust the judgment… except ye
knew the matter untruly judged indeed, or by very good and
substantial folk that were present and indifferent… had
plain and sure information thereof.”

“Marry,” quoth he, “men think that if any such information may
serve, they have had enough thereof by men of wisdom, learning, and
honesty… both by mouth and by writing… that were present at all the
handling of the matter.”

“Well,” quoth I, “we shall let their wisdom and their learning alone.
But as for their honesty, shall somewhat show itself… upon the
truth or untruth of their report. Wherein first I pray you, could
they say that he was not convicted by as many witnesses, and as good
and as credible, as the law requireth?”

“So many,” quoth he, “and such, as the law requireth? Would God,” quoth
he, “that we could as easily find good men and true… as we may find
so many such! For the law doth, as I hear say, require but twain, and, yet, in cause of heresy careth not much how bad they be—not though they be heretics themselves! And is not this a wondrous case, that whereas in a matter of a little money no law receiveth any witnesses but honest and credible, the law made by the Church should in so great a matter—so highly touching the utter destruction of a man in body and goods, with a death the most painful that can be devised—admit and receive a person infamed, and give faith and credence to an infidel, whom they have proved and re-proved.

Why simple witnesses in heresy are admitted false in his faith to God? Nor methinketh the excuse but very slender that I have ere this heard in this point alleged for the Church: that such simple witnesses are admitted in heresy… because the crime is so great and so odious… that therefore it is worthy to be handled with the more rigor and the less favor. And this thing will I well agree for good reason in the punishment of the crime, when it is proved. But, before God, not in hatred and persecution of the person ere the crime be proved.

“But, now, whereas they receive the witness of so slight and false fellows for a proof, they pursue the person and not the crime. Whereas methinketh, on the other side, the more heinous, odious, and abominable that the crime is, the more slow should we be to believe it, and the more sure and plain proof should we have ere we should judge any man for so evil to commit it.”

“There is,” quoth I, “no doubt but that the world is so bad… that there be many so naughty… that they will be ready enough to bear false witness. And yet God forbid that it were so bad as ye say—that a man might sooner find such than good men and true. And also, though the witnesses were false and would lie, yet when they be wisely and severally examined, they can seldom so well make their tale before… but that their untruth shall in some part appear. And, finally, the law bindeth not the judge so precisely to the words of the witness… but that it leaveth many things to be pondered and weighed by his wisdom. For it is in a judge as it is in a physician; to whom there be many good books written, able to give good light and instruction… and yet whoso would so precisely bind him to his own hear say: hear it said   // twain: two  2 yet: moreover
2 cause of heresy: a heresy case  3–4 a wondrous case: an astonishing situation
4 receiveth: allows the admitting of   // touching: concerning; bearing upon
8 person infamed: convicted felon  9 proved and re-proved: time and again proved
11 slender: flimsy  11–12 ere this: previously  13 simple: poor; wretched
15 favor: leniency  16 for good reason: to make good sense  18 persecution: prosecution
19 where: wherever // receive: accept // witness: testimonies // so: such
19 slight: unsubstantial  19, 29 false: dishonest  20 fellows: lowlifes
20 pursue: go after  24 to commit: as to have committed  26 naughty: wicked
28 true: truthful  29 though: even if // wisely: astutely  30 severally: separately
30–31 so well make their tale before: have so well prepared their story ahead of time
31 untruth: untruthfulness  32, 36 precisely: strictly  32 words: statements
34 in: with  36 whoso: whoever
book that he should nothing use the discretion of his brain—he should sometimes do full evil service.

   “And yet is it, as Aristotle saith, well done indeed to make the laws so sufficient that as few things as may... shall remain and be left to the discretion of the judge, since that the common laws be commonly made by many more than are the particular judges... and also many such as are as wise as judges. And over that, the laws be to the judges a sure and substantial shield, to defend and keep them from the hatred and obloquy that else would follow their sentence on the one side or the other, were their judgments never so just. For men be so partial always to themselves... that our heart ever thinketh the judgment wrong... that wringeth us to the worse. For be it never so right... all reckon we wrong whereof we feel harm.

   “But yet, of all things, specially the law should best content us, for that it is furthest out of all cause of suspicion. For whereas a The causes which incline a judge meddles with a matter present, and persons whom he seeth and knoweth, whereby there may percase favor, hatred, hope, or dread, pity, cruelty, meed, request, or some other affection incline him to misorder himself in the matter: the laws always be made for the punishment of things only that are yet to come; and who shall fall in peril, the makers cannot tell. Haply their foes, haply their friends, and (as men's manners be mutable) peradventure themselves; for which cause the makers of the law made by the people in cases criminal... can be but indifferent. And therefore I marvel the more... since that fault ye find now is not in the judges, but in the laws themselves; wherein ye think it evil provided that, for the hatred of a heinous crime, the person peradventure innocent should fall in peril of a painful death by the taking of more slight witness than would be taken for sufficient in a far slighter matter. Somewhat ye said indeed if the hatred of Why simple witnesses are taken in criminal cases the crime were all the cause. But therein ye go far wide. For the chief cause why that in heinous criminal cases, as theft, murder, treason, and heresy, the law taketh such for witnesses as it will not accept in a matter of money or other contract

1 nothing: not at all  2 do full evil service: give very bad service; do a very bad job 6 many more than are: a number of people that is much larger than that of 7 over: besides  9 follow: follow upon // sentence: verdict 10 never so: no matter how 12 wringeth us to the worse: causes us the more distress 14 specially: precisely  15 for that: because 16 meddles: deals 18 percase: perchance // favor: favoritism  19 meed: bribery // request: entreaty 20 affection: motivation // misorder: misconduct // matter: case 22, 23 haply: maybe 23 manners: ways // mutable: subject to change 24, 29 peradventure: perhaps 25 by: about // indifferent: impartial 26 marvel the more: am the more astonished 27 evil: ill; wrongly  28 for: on account of // heinous: high 29 in: into 30 more slight: less reliable  31 somewhat ye said indeed: you would indeed have something there 33 wide: astray 34 heinous criminal cases: cases of high crime // as: such as
made between two parties... is for that else all such crimes should pass forth unpunished—and thereby should the world swarm full of such mischievous people—for lack of proof and trial in the matter, by cause that those which go about such a heinous deed as coming once to knowledge would bring them to a shameful death... do not use commonly to take a notary and honest witness with them to make an instrument thereof (as many men do, and all men may do, in a contract or covenant), but use to do it by stealth, as covertly as they can. By reason whereof, reason moveth and necessity compelleth (except ye would have all go to naught) to receive such records as they be wont to make of their counsel—which be, as ye wot well, none but such as they be themselves. And yet sometimes, which may seem more strange, we be content, and reason would we so were, with the witness of the parties themselves. For if that ten thieves robbed four men at once in a wood, though all the good that they take away were one common purse of all four—and would all ten, when they were taken, well and stiffly say nay—yet were I their Whereto witness serveth judge (since all witness serveth but only to induce a credence, or credulity, in the judges' minds), I would not let (except some other circumstance withstood it) to believe the four complainants, in their own matter, against all ten defendants. And albeit that percase a judge might be in a contract made between two parties... induced in his own mind, without any doubt to the contrary, to give credence in such a point to the one party against the other for the well-known troth and honesty of the one, and in the other party the contrary—yet doth the law, through the world almost, prohibit him so to proceed in a civil case, lest they should bring that form of judgment in custom... wherein for lucre ensuing to the party, there were occasion to corrupt the judge; and also forasmuch as that fashion were in a civil case clean without necessity, since the parties may, if they list, for the surety of their bargains, have writing or good witness thereat. Which if they list not for to do (either for folly, sloth, or trust), good reason is that it rather turn themselves to loss... than, for the redressing of their oversight, to bring in place that

1–2 pass forth: go 3 mischievous: evil; terrible // proof: evidence 3 trial: examination // by cause: by reason of the fact 4, 11 which: who 6 use commonly: ordinarily make it their practice 8 covenant: pact // use: are wont 9 moveth: proposes 9–10 compelleth... to receive: mandates... the acceptance of 10 records: witnesses 11 make of their counsel: take into their confidence 11 wot: know 13–14 would we so were: would we have be 14 if that: if 15 wood: forest // though: even if // good: money 17 well and stiffly say nay: very staunchly deny it 20 let: hesitate // except: unless 20–21 withstood it: stood in the way 21 complainants: plaintiffs // matter: suit 22 percase: perchance 25 troth: integrity 26 honesty: uprightness 27 through the world almost: almost throughout the world 30–31 were... clean: would... be completely 32 list: wish 32 have writing or: i.e., have them put in writing or have 33 list not for: do not care 33 folly: foolishness // sloth: laziness 34 good reason is that: good sense it makes that 35 in: into
form and fashion of judgment that may be the cause of other men’s wrongful trouble. Whereas in heinous criminal causes, neither is there always such cause of corruption… specially toward the condemnation upon which side only falleth the fault and peril that ye speak of… and is also, as ye see, inevitable necessity, for lack of possibility of other record and witness—till ye provide that thieves and murderers will be content to take honest witnesses with them, that may bear witness against them.”

The Fourth Chapter

The author showeth upon what ground and cause the man was convicted. And also divers other things not then brought in judgment… whereby it may well appear that he was greatly guilty. And so he showeth incidentally wherefore it were not reason in a detection of heresy… to suffer, after the witnesses published and the crime well proved, any new witnesses to be received for the party that is accused.

“Howbeit, though this serve for such matters in general, yet for this one matter that we now speak of, we stand far in another case. For this man was not convicted by the words of one or twain… but by the oaths of one or twain above twenty… not such men as we now speak of—Lollards and heretics—but honest men, and almost of all sorts: of religious folk, husbandmen, and gentlemen.”

“Indeed,” quoth he, “to say the truth, I heard say there were many witnesses. But I heard, again, that he offered to bring twice as many—and that of such as were present as well as they, and stood as near as they…and understood as well as they, and slept no more at his preaching than a parson doth at his offering…and would depose plainly for him.”

“Whether he said so or not,” quoth I, “that can I not tell you, but this I wot well. Himself was well learned in the law, and never could say that he was denied any favor that the law would grant. And many a
witness was there to whom he laid none exception... nor could say the contrary but that they were at his sermons and heard him. And then, when he was so clearly convicted by so many... so honest and so far from all suspicion of corruption, it were peradventure a thing not convenient, after those witnesses published, to bring proofs afresh upon the principal matter. For if it so should be, then should either the new proofs depose the same that the others did before... or else they should depose the contrary... or, finally, say such thing as neither could make nor mar. Now, if they did the first—that is to say, depose as the first did—then were we no further than we were before, and that time lost and the matter delayed in vain. If they did the third—deposing, percase, that themselves were not present... or asleep... or not well understood or not well remembered the matter—yet were we still at one stay. Put now the second point (which were in manner the only thing that might seem to have any color for him): that the new proofs would depose that they were at the same time present, and stood near him, marked him well, and were also well remembered that he said not so—yea, and peradventure that he said the contrary. This case were possible; but surely it were so seldom likely... that it were not worth to change a law therefor. But, now, if it so should happen, here were a great confusion. And how could any sentence be given if they should believe the second as well as the first?"

“That maketh,” quoth he, “no matter. For if the matter appear upon his side thereby—either clearly or doubtfully—then may the judges acquit and assoil the defendant. And better were it the faulty to be acquitted than the faultless to be punished.”

“It were a strange thing,” quoth I, “if the law should in such a matter as this is, after the witnesses once published... and thereby the matter well proved, then examine other witnesses afresh upon the principal point. This were, in my mind, perilous, not only for fear of subornation and false instruction of witnesses (a thing easy to be done upon the sight of that that is deposed already before), but also for that if the affirmative be proved—especially in this case of heresy, being by so many sufficiently proved—that one taught and preached such things in his open sermons: if others that were present

1 laid none exception: made no objection
2 it... matter: it perhaps would not have been a good idea to bring in, after those slated witnesses, new witnesses concerning the principal charge
3 honest: respectable
4-6 it... matter: it perhaps would not have been a good idea to bring in, after those slated witnesses, new witnesses concerning the principal charge
7, 16 proofs: witnesses
9 mar: break (him)
11 matter: proceedings
13-14 or... stay: or did not really understand or quite remember what he said, we would always still be at the same impasse
15 in manner: just about
15-16 have any color for him: work at all in his favor
17-18 marked him well: paid close attention to him
18 were also well remembered: also remembered clearly // said not so: did not say such and such
20-21 were... therefore: would not be worth changing a law for
22 sentence: verdict
24 maketh... no matter: is... immaterial
24-25 if... thereby: i.e., if the truth thereby is shown to be on his side
25 doubtfully: possibly
26 assoil: clear; exonerate // faulty: guilty
27 faultless: innocent
29 once published: have already been slated
32 false: dishonest // easy to be: easily
34 for that: because
35 one: someone
36 open: public
at the same sermons would now depose the contrary, it may be that
the first heard the thing which the second marked not, as many
times it happeth. And more likely is it, also, that one may forget
the thing that he heard… than that another should remember that
ting that he heard not. And if they would peradventure add thereto
that he said the contrary of such things as was proved against
him, then can it at the best be no better taken than that he in one
sermon said, taught, and preached both twain—that is to wit, the
truth and the heresies. In which case he well were worthy in judgment
to acknowledge his fault and be corrected therefor.”

“By my troth,” quoth he; “yet methinketh ever that it ought to be
heard, all that any man will say; and take all to the best for him that
is accused—and especially in heresy pretended to be preached where so
many be present.”

“Surely,” quoth I, “what were best, God wotteth; for I cannot tell. But
this wot I well: that the wit of the whole world, in effect, agreeth…
that in all such heinous crimes… reason is clear to the contrary
and quite against your mind. And whereas ye think your mind
worthy to take special place in the proof and examination of
heresies, surely meseemeth that of all crimes, in heresy might it

\begin{align*}
\text{Heresies} & \text{ least be suffered. For well ye wot that} \\
\text{heresies be false belief and factious ways} \\
\text{full of busyness. And such as give themselves thereto… be sturdy and} \\
\text{studious about the furtherance of their seditious sect. And since} \\
\text{they be fallen from God and his true faith, they have no great care} \\
\text{of truth… nor be very scrupulous in the lending of an oath till} \\
\text{they need in like case to be paid again. So that if their} \\
\text{‘nay’ may stand against other good men’s ‘yea,’ and where the heresy} \\
\text{is proved to have been preached, there men may be heard and believed} \\
\text{in deposing the contrary, the false preacher may be bold} \\
\text{to say what him list. For he shall never fail to have his records} \\
\text{ready.”}
\end{align*}

“Yea,” quoth he, “but this way would not serve him. For men might
take exception to them if they were heretics.”

“Nay,” quoth I, “not if they be so, but if they be proved so. And that shall
they never be if your way were received. For each of their witnesses
shall always serve other.”

2 first: i.e., first set of witnesses // the thing: i.e., this thing // marked not: did not notice
6 proved: testified // one: one same // well worthy in judgment: would well deserve the
sentence of having // fault: guilt // corrected: punished // therefor: for it
11 by my troth: yes indeed // methinketh ever: it always seems to me // mind: way of thinking
13 pretended: purported // wot(teth): know(s)
16 the wit:… agreeeth: practically the whole world is in agreement in understanding
17 heinous: high // 17–18 is: … quite: dictates the exact opposite and is completely
18 mind: way of thinking // proof: trying // suffered: gone along with
23 busyness: feverish activity // sturdy: ruthless // studious: assiduous
25–26 care of: concern for // like case: a similar situation // again: back
28, 29, 30 may: can // list: brazenly say whatever he wants to
31 records: witnesses // were received: i.e., gains acceptance // other: another
“Forsooth,” quoth he, “it seemeth somewhat perilous, as ye say, if men should against the affirmative proved… lean to the contrary witnesses, for the negative, in any crime that is seditious and hath daily folk of evil conscience fervently fall in thereto. But yet I much marvel of one thing. For I have heard it credibly reported that there were twain… and both beneficed men, both very cunning men, both twain very virtuous men… which heard him preach as well as they did that had deposed against him; and those twain affirmed, and offered to depose, that he preached not the things which he was accused of. And surely, had I been judge, I would have believed those twain above other twenty… except witnesses be taken only by number and not by weight.”

“Surely,” quoth I, “my mind and yours be not far asunder. For since all witnesses serve to induce the judge’s mind to conceive a credence and an opinion—or, rather, a certain persuasion—on the one side, I could not myself but believe some twain better than some twenty. And would not fail to weigh them, rather than take them by tale. Howbeit,” quoth I, “of those twain that ye speak of—the one was, indeed, such as ye say. But as for the other, was neither then held very clear… and since that time, proved clearly naught. But though the one was, as he was indeed, a very good man, yet for the man’s excuse he was no very good witness; nor the other, neither, although he had been as good a man as he; nor if they had been forty men more, as good as the better of them both, saying as they did.”

“Why,” quoth he, “said they not well for him?”

“Yes,” quoth I, “for as far as they went; but they went not far enough.”

“Oh,” quoth he, “their words were of likelihood narrowly taken.”

“They were,” quoth I, “taken as large as they were spoken—which was that he preached not such heresies in a place where they heard him in London. But then was his detection, and the proof made thereupon, of those heresies preached at sundry places out of London; whereby their words went as wide for his excuse as if one that were arraigned for a felony done at Salisbury on Shrove Tuesday… brought in good witnesses to the bar that would depose and

2 lean to: side with  4–5 much marvel of: really wonder about  6 cunning: astute
7 which: who  11 other twenty: twenty others  // except: unless
13 mind: thinking  // asunder: apart
15 on the one side: i.e., on the one side or the other  18 tale: count
20 held very clear: considered very bright and shining  // clearly naught: glaringly bad
21 though: even if  22 excuse: defense  23 although: even if
24 saying: speaking  26 why: oh  // said: spoke  29 of likelihood: probably
30 large: broadly  31 such: such and such
32 his detection: the accusation made against him  // proof: examination
33 of those: about those  // out of: outside of; not in
34 for his excuse: of the mark of defending him  35 one: someone
35–36 Shrove Tuesday: the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday
swear for him that he did no such felony at Shrewsbury on Sheer
Thursday, for they were with him there all that day themselves. But,
for conclusion, he was convicted by more than twenty… and excused
by never one. And therefore, if his judges wronged him, there was
never man had right. And yet were there, besides the witnesses, some
letters written of his own hand unto one of his judges—which
letters I have since seen—sounding, in mine ears, to as evil heresies
as those were that he was detected of. Which letters were never
laid into the Court till that, after the proofs published and read,
he appeared obstinate, standing still in the denial and proudly
refusing to submit himself to his abjuration. For then said
his judge to whom they were written… that since he refused to be
reconciled to the Church, he would keep no counsel of his. And
therewith brought in those letters and filed them among the
records of the Court.

“This man had also been, before that, accused unto the greatest prelate
in this realm; who, for his tender favor borne to the university,
did not proceed far in the matter against him, but accepting his
denial… with a corporal oath that he should, from that time forth, be no
setter-forth of heresies, but in his preachings and readings impugn
them… dismissed him very benignly—and, of his liberal bounty,
gave him also money for his costs. And yet was none of all these
matters laid unto his charge. Which if they had been… would peradventure
have put him to peril.

“I was also myself, since his abjuration, present (as it happped)
with an honorable prelate at such time as one that was an ancient
heretic had been examined… and there had confessed that he had
held, taught, and in divers countries spread about almost all
the heresies that any lewd heretic holdeth—”

“May ye not tell his name?” quoth he.
“Which of them?” quoth I. “For he had more names than half a leaf
Heretics most commonly can hold.”
“Where dwelled he?” quoth your friend.
“Everywhere and nowhere,” quoth I. “For
he walked about, as an apostle of the devil, from shire to shire and
town to town through the realm… and had in every diocese a
diverse name. By reason whereof he did many years much harm ere he could be found out. This heretic—touching all his other heresies, he acknowledged them in conclusion to be naught, and offered to abjure them. But as for despising of images, relics, and pilgrimages—those things, he said, were no heresies, but very good and true points; for he heard them preached, he said, of the ‘great doctor,’ naming the man we speak of… and told where. Confessing also that he liked so well his sermons… that he letted not to go twenty miles to hear him. And yet was there since that another heretic that confessed for his own part the like. So that ye may see that good Christian folk were offended with his preaching, and heretics liked his preaching… and grounded their heresies upon his preaching. And then look you what manner of preaching it was likely to be!

“I told you also, right now, that one of those two that ye took for so good and cunning men… was after found worse than many men would have went. Sir, so was it, indeed, that he was detected for buying of many books of Luther, Lambert, and Zwingli, with others of that sort—and well proved, and by himself also confessed, that he had bought of those books very many—which he brought forth at last… where he had laid them up no less suspiciously than secretly, and so secretly that all the town should have sought them long ere they should have found them out.

“He had also set a priest of his, and a secular servant of his besides, to buy many of the same suit… and double and treble of one sort… which were by them uttered to divers young scholars, such as they found properly witted, featly learned, and newfangledly-minded. And thus labored to corrupt the realm. Another parish priest had he before, that kept his cure also as this other did, which was after proved a very pernicious heretic.”

“But what was,” quoth he, “done to the master?”

“Forsooth,” quoth I, “great favor had he—and as some men said, great wrong, too—that he was not openly declared. Howbeit, because he was in good estimation, there was of pity much regard had to the conservation of his honesty. And nothing was there, in effect, exacted of him… but his amendment with the acknowledging of his fault. For surely, that man was of such a poor spirit in Christ… that,
for any oath that could be given him, long it was ere pride would
for shame suffer him to say the truth. After which once confessed
with his handwriting, then—as far as I have heard, without any
other abjuration—there was secretly his solemn oath taken in
judgment… that he should do no such thing anymore, upon pain
of a relapse; and so, with certain secret penance, dismissed. But the
thing that I tell you my tale for is this. This man—besides that all
the books, in effect, which he had bought of this Lutheran sect
were diligently read over and studied, and with such manner of
notes marked in the margin, and words written of his own hand
where the worst matters were, that he left no man in doubt, that read
them, what fervent affection he bore unto them—he had, I say,
besides all this, divers epistles (I wot ne’er whose, but written were
they with his own hand) wherein were plenty of pestilent
heresies. And a sermon also, worse than they all, written with his
own hand also, ready to be preached, as it seemed, if the world would
so change that the time would serve it. And when he was in his
examination sore pressed upon to tell for what intent he made
such a sermon ready and laid it up so secretly: destitute at last of
all excuses that might bear any color of any good cause, ‘Well,’ quoth
he, ‘I see well I must tell all. I am loath to hurt anybody.’ And thereupon
he told how it was made, the most part, by the man that was abjured of
whom we specially speak. So that, now setting all this gear together—
this man’s confession, his secret friend and companion in such
matters, his old accusations of like matters, the heretics’
confessions that founded their heresies in the same matters upon the
authority of his sermon, and besides all this, more than twenty witnesses
plainly proving the matter against him—I would fain wit
who had right if he had wrong… although there had been used
to him more rigor a great deal than there was.”

The Fifth Chapter

The author proveth that the spiritual judges did the
man marvelous favor—and almost more than lawful—in
that they admitted him to such an abjuration as they did…
and that they did not, rather, leave him to the secular hands.

1 given: administered to
5 judgment: adjudication
6 a relapse: a backsliding into heresy (with the resultant punishment)
6 secret: private
8 of: from
10 of his own hand: in his own handwriting
11 matters: things
13 divers: several
13 epistles: letters
15 I wot ne’er whose: composed by I don’t know whom
13, 15 written: written out
17 serve: be right for
20 color: semblance
22 made: composed
23 setting: putting
24 secret: close
25–26 the . . . founded: the confessions of the heretics who based
28 matter: case
28 fain wit: like to know
29 had: was done

// although: even if
29–30 there . . . was: he had been treated a great deal more severely than he was
32 spiritual: ecclesiastical
33 marvelous: extraordinary
35 hands: authorities
“Why,” quoth he, “what devil rigor could they more have showed for the first time… than make him abjure and bear a fagot?”

“Yes,” quoth I—“some man had liefer bear twain cold in his neck… than have one bear him hot, on a fire at his feet!”

“In faith,” quoth he, “they could not have done that to him at the first time.”

“No,” quoth I, “not if he willingly returned to the Church, acknowledging his fault… and ready to abjure all heresies… and penitently submitted himself to penance. And else, if he prove himself obstinate and impenitent, the Church neither is bound nor ought to receive him, but utterly may forsake him and leave him to the secular hands! But now was he so obstinate that he would not abjure, of long time. And divers days were his judges fain, of their favor, to give him—with sufferance of some his best friends, and whom he most trusted, to resort unto him. And yet scantily could all this make him submit himself to make his abjuration. And finally were they fain, for saving of his life, to devise a form of abjuration whereof I never saw the like—nor, in so plain a case, never would, were I the judge, suffer like hereafter.”

“What manner of abjuration was that?” quoth he.

“Marry,” quoth I, “his abjuration was such that he therein abjured and forswore all heresies, acknowledging himself lawfully convicted. But whereas they be wont to confess in their own abjuration that they have held such heresies, and be guilty thereof—that would he do in no wise; but, as clearly as his fault was proved, and by as many, yet would he not, to die therefor, confess himself faulty, but always stood still upon it, in virtue of his oath, that all they belied him.”

“It might happen,” quoth he, “that he had forgotten that he so had preached.”

“That were,” quoth I, “great wonder. For I am sure, when he had preached so in so many places, he had not done it of a sudden adventure, but of a deliberate purpose; which except he fell mad, it were not well possible for him in so great a matter to forget. And besides this, it was also deposed… that in a place where he preached, he

1 what devil rigor: what the devil severity  2, 5–6 the first time: a first offense
2, 3, 4 bear: carry  2 fagot: bundle of sticks
3 some man had liefer: someone would rather  // twain cold: two cool ones  // in: around
5 in faith: well, seriously  // at: after  8, 25 fault: guilt
10–11 receive him: take him back  12 hands: authorities
12 of: for a  13 divers: several  // fain: willing  // favor: exceptional kindness
14 sufferance of: permission for  15 resort unto: visit
16–17 finally… to: finally, to save his life, they had to  18 plain: clear
19 suffer: allow the  21 marry: indeed  25 wise: way
26 to die therefor: even if the refusal would mean his death  // faulty: guilty
27 stood still upon it: kept maintaining  // in virtue of his oath: under oath
27 all they: all of them  // belied: (had) slandered
30 were… great wonder: would be… really amazing
31–32 of a sudden adventure: by any spur-of-the-moment accident  32 purpose: intent
32 except he fell mad: unless he went insane  34 a place: i.e., a certain place
was after the sermon reasoned with forthwith. And by an honest layman had it laid unto his charge... that he had perilously preached—showing him wherein. Whereunto he made answer, not that he had not said so, nor that he had not meant so, or that they had mistaken and wrongly understood his words, but that he would preach there again soon after... and prove his preaching true by the old doctors of the Church. And this happed him not long before that he was accused. Was it now possible, by your faith, that he could have forgotten this?"

“It was,” quoth he, “possible enough that altogether was false, and that they lied all. For so might they do by possibility, being but men... and though they had been more than they were. And then he peradventure knowing that they so did, why should he falsely confess a fault in himself for the falsehood of other folk?”

“That is,” quoth I, “true if he so knew it. But how could that be so... against so many proofs sworn and deposing the matter upon their oaths... being, though they were but men, yet men of wit and honesty, and some well learned, also... and men that bore him no displeasure for any other matter than his evil preaching? Men almost all such as could have none other matter to him; folk that never had other matter with him—and many of them of little acquaintance or none the one with the other, so that there was no fear of conspiring together in one tale.”

“Yet,” quoth he, “were it possible that they might lie all.”

“And what,” quoth I, “that he had been accused in other places before? As he was, indeed, not only to the most honorable prelate, that I told you... but besides him, unto two other bishops too!”

“Well,” quoth he, “and yet they that so accused him might happen to lie too!”

“And what,” quoth I, “that his own secret acquaintance confessed that he made the first draft of that ungracious sermon that I told you?”

“ Heard you that yourself?” quoth he.

“Myself,” quoth I, “nay; but such as I heard it of were men of more worship, and truth thereto, than that any man, I ween, would mistrust their tale.”

\[1\] after... forthwith: immediately after the sermon confronted about it  
\[2\] honest: reputable  
\[3\] it laid unto his charge: it imputed to him; the accusation made to him  
\[4\] perilously preached: preached terribly  
\[5\] showing: telling  
\[6\] mistaken: erroneously taken  
\[7\] old doctors: early theologians  
\[8\] by your faith: do you seriously believe  
\[9\] altogether: the whole thing  
\[10\] they all were lying: even if  
\[11\] more: i.e., more numerous  
\[12\] fault: guiltiness  
\[13\] honesty: good repute  
\[14\] proofs: witnesses  
\[15\] wit: intelligence  
\[16\] evil: bad  
\[17\] matter: quarrel; issue  
\[18\] to: with  
\[19\] other matter with: any other connection to  
\[20\] what: what about the fact  
\[21\] honorable: high-ranking  
\[22\] told you: told you about  
\[23\] secret: personal  
\[24\] made: wrote  
\[25\] ungracious: ungodly  
\[26\] it of: it from  
\[27\] worship: prestige  
\[28\] trust: integrity  
\[29\] thereto: as well  
\[30\] mistrust: doubt  
\[31\] tale: story
"As worshipful as they were," quoth he, "and as trusty, too, I could mistrust their tale well enough sometime—for lack of indifference, peradventure, as they stood unsworn. And yet though I mistrusted not them all, it might be that they said true... and that the other lied... which for his own excuse laid the first making of that sermon to the other man."

"The laying thereof to him," quoth I, "could not excuse himself. For he confessed that himself liked it and allowed it... and therefore wrote it out... and added also many things more thereto."

"Well," quoth he, "and yet all this might be."

"And what," quoth I, "of the heretics that grounded their opinions upon his sermons?"

"May it not be," quoth he, "that they lied?"

"And what," quoth I, "of them that accused him to other prelates before?"

"By God," quoth he, "even as I told you before, it might be that they lied, well enough!"

"And what then," quoth I, "of all those twenty that deposed against him now?"

"Marry," quoth he, "as I told you now, it might be that they did even the same!"

"This is," quoth I, "a strange thing to me."

"Why," quoth he, "should this be strange to you? Methinketh it should be strange to no man, but very plain to every man, that it might be so. For I pray you, might it not so be? Were it not possible that they might all lie, and though they were as many more?"

"Possible?" quoth I. "That I say not nay, but that it were possible though they were a thousand times as many."

"Well," quoth he, "since it might be so, then put case it was so. Did not he right, then, in that he still said so? And if he had died therein, had he not died for the truth? For, knowing in himself that all they belied him, he was not bound to belie himself with them, and confess against himself an untruth, but had been in great sin if he so should have done. What say ye to this?"

"I say," quoth I, "to this that all the force and effect of your conclusion hangeth upon the case which ye put—that all that ever aught said

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1 worshipful: prestigious // trusty: trustworthy
2, 3 mistrust(ed): doubt(ed)
3 as they stood unsworn: since they were not put under oath // though: even if
4 said true: told the truth // which: who // excuse: exoneration // laid: ascribed
5 making: writing // confessed: admitted // allowed: approved of
11 grounded: based // opinions: tenets
16, 20 even: just
20 marry: good heavens // now: just now // plain: obvious
24 pray: ask
26, 27 thought: even if
31 had he not: would he not have // in: within
31–32 all they belied him: all of them were slandering him
32 bound: obliged
32 belied: slander
33 had: would have
273/36—274/1 all . . . deposed: all those who ever said or deposed anything
or deposed against him lied, all the meinie. Which case ye would needs have granted because it was possible. And then—that case once granted—ye deduce your conclusion very surely. And in good faith, ye bring me therewith so to my wit’s end that I wot not well which way to answer you admitting your case. But ever my mind giveth me that your case, though it be possible, were rather to be granted at a school, in argument, than at a court, in judgment. And I pray you for the proof thereof let me put you another case… which, in good faith, I am half ashamed to put you, saving that ye drive me to seek a shift. And yet shall not my case in my mind be much unlike to yours. If it so were that Wilkins had laid a wager with Simkins… that in a certain way named between them, usual enough for men and horses both, there had gone of late a horse or two, and that he would so clearly prove it that it could not be the contrary;

if Simkins said, and laid his wager, the contrary… and then they both should choose us for judges; and we coming, all four, into the way, Wilkins would show us on the ground, part in the clay and part, peradventure, in the snow, the prints of horse feet, and of men’s feet also, by a long way (ten miles together, and ye will), till they come at a water where went away by ship no man can tell who nor whither (it forceth not for our wise case); but, now, if Wilkins would say that he had won his wager, ‘for lo, here ye see the prints of the horse feet all this way shown, and all with the very nails in them, so that it may be none otherwise but horse hath gone here’—if Simkins, after all this, would say the wager were his, ‘for it is not proved that any horse had gone there, for it might be that they were geldings, or mares’—here were we fallen in a great question of the law: whether the gray mare may be the better horse or not… or whether he have a wise face or not that looketh as like a fool as a ewe looketh like a sheep. And in this question if the parties demurred in our judgment… we might ask advice further of learned men and judges.”

“We might,” quoth he, “by suit, to be sure of the matter, make it an Exchequer Chamber case. Or, saving the praemunire, we might have it tried in the Rota, at Rome.”
“Very well,” quoth I; “so that, I see well, by your wit and mine together… one shift or other we should find for a final end therein—if the doubt were in that point. But, now, if Simkins stuck not thereto, but would say thus—‘Lo, here ye see the men have gone this way; and how can ye then be sure that any horse went here? For I put case,’ saith he, ‘that these men which went here had horseshoes in their hands, made fast upon long steels; and always, as they went, pricked them down hard in the ground.’”

“Tut,” quoth he, “this were a wise invention!”

“Verily,” quoth I, “to me it would not seem very gay. But, now, if Simkins were contentious and would say the wager were his ‘except it be so proved that it can be none otherwise but that horses have of late gone there,’ and then will say to us, ‘Lo, sirs, as ye see it, it may be otherwise; for men might make with their hands all the prints of horseshoes in the ground’; and then if we would say that was never so, he would ask us how can we be sure thereof, while we cannot say nay but it might be so; and would still press upon us with this question ‘May it not be so?’”—

“It may,” quoth he, “by possibility be so!”

“Then,” quoth I, “when we grant him once that it may be so, then will he by and by put case that it were so. And then, if we grant him his case once for the possibility, then will he shortly conclude that the other part is not so surely proved as it must be if Wilkins should win the wager. What should we say to him now? To whom should we give the wager?”

“In faith,” quoth he, “I wot ne’er what to say to him. And the matter is so mad that as for the wager, what I would give Wilkins I wot ne’er, but as for Simkins, except he better impugned the proof, if the wager were but a butterfly… I would never award him one wing.”

“Surely,” quoth I, “and you shall rule the matter for me. For if ye give him naught… he getteth as little of me. But, now, what if he wax angry that his proper invention were no more set by, nor his wit no more regarded, and would thereupon help forth his part with his oath, and swear upon a Book that himself saw when the men made

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2 shift: maneuver 3 stuck not thereto: did not make an issue of that
5 put case: propose 7 made fast upon long steels: fastened to long poles made of steel
9 were: would be // wise: brilliant // 9, 32 invention: contrivance
10 verily: truth to tell // gay: plausible // 16 while: since // 17 say nay but: deny that
17 still press upon: keep pressing on // 21 by and by: immediately
21 put case: postulate // 22 shortly: in short order // 23, 33 part: side (of the argument)
23 surely: definitely // 23–24 if Wilkins should: for Wilkins to // 26 in faith: honestly
26, 27 wot ne’er: have no idea // 26 matter: case // 27 mad: crazy
28 except: unless // 30 surely: assuredly
30 you shall rule the matter for me: it’s fine with me for you to rule the case
31 naught: nothing // of: from // wax: gets // 32 proper: excellent
32 were no more set by: was not taken more seriously
32–33 nor his wit no more regarded: nor his intelligence held in higher regard
33 forth: along // 34 Book: Bible
those prints in the ground with horseshoes held in their hands? What would ye then say?"

"Marry," quoth he, "then would I say—and swear, too—that besides the loss of his wager, he had like a false, foolish knave lost his honesty and his soul too!"

"In good faith," quoth I, "and for aught I see yet, I durst be bold to swear with you. And then, letting Wilkins alone with Simkins disputing their sophism themselves, let us return home again to our own matter. In which while there were so many so clear and open proofs against the man of whom we speak all this while, though it were possible that all they might be false… yet could there none indifferent judge so think… except it were so proved—and that by other means than the only oath of the party that is accused… swearing alone against them all."

"Yet," quoth he, "for all that, if he know indeed that he did it not, he doth but well to abide by the truth."

"Very sooth ye say," quoth I. "Nor Simkins, neither, if he saw the men print the horseshoes in the highway—though it seemed us never so unlikely, yet had he done well to say it, and swear it, too, and stiffly to stick thereby. And yet ye remember, pardie, that if he so would have sworn, ye and I both durst right now right boldly have believed that he lied. And might we not well believe the same in our case too?"

"Yes," quoth he, "that will I well. And therefore the judges did him but right to reckon him as convicted, and therefore to compel him to abjure. But yet they showed him therein no such favor as ye speak of… in that they admitted him to his abjuration without confessing of the fault. For if they had forced him thereto, they had in my mind done him plain and open wrong, because it might be that he said and swore true. And then should they have forced him against his conscience… to say of himself untrue. And that should they do not only clean against right, but also without necessity, considering that they might—as in conclusion they did—abjure him otherwise. And therefore, they took the best way, both for him and for themselves also; but since they did therein none otherwise than as they were of duty bound, it well appeareth he had therein no such favor as ye would make it seem that they showed him.”
“Well,” quoth I, “since yourself agreeth that he had no wrong: albeit no favor had been showed him, yet were your errand answered as far as toucheth his abjuration. And now if I should prove you that his judges showed him such favor, I fear me lest I should therewith somewhat seem to charge them that they had done... though not wrong, yet very near wrong; the favor appearing to be showed... if not against the law, yet at the least way the law for favor so far stretched forth that the leather could scant hold. But yet choose they for me. For since I have said it, I will tell you why—and so much the more boldly between us twain... for that I perceive not in you any such manner of mind toward them that ye would blow abroad any fault of unlawful favor found in them.”

“Ah, well said!” quoth he, and laughed. “Ye ween I were more ready to report their rigor than any point of their favor!”

“Well taken of you!” quoth I. “I see well a man cannot have a good opinion of you but your conscience construeth it to the contrary! But, now, for the matter, I trow we be agreed both... that all were it so that the man had been faultless in deed, yet were the proofs against him so many, so good, so clear and evident, and so much more than sufficient, that neither his judges nor ourselves neither—nor, I think, his own father neither, if he had heard them—could have thought him other than very greatly guilty.”

“Surely,” quoth he, “that is true.”

“Now,” quoth I, “that being true, that they could none otherwise reckon in him though he still swore the contrary: must it not needs be that in his denying in virtue of his oath the things which they could not but believe true, they must needs therewith believe him all that while to lie and be perjured?”

“That followeth,” quoth he.

“Now,” quoth I, “when one is accused and convicted of heresy, what thing will the law that the Church shall receive him to?”

“What thing?” quoth he. “Marry, to mercy!”

“Nay,” quoth I, “mercy is the thing, as it seemeth, that they receive him by—not the thing that they receive him to.”

“Then is it,” quoth he, “to penance.”

“That seemeth well said,” quoth I. “For the Church by mercy receiveth him to penance.”
“But, now,” quoth I, “doth the Church openly receive to penance any person appearing and proving himself still impenitent?”

“Nay,” quoth he.

“Appeareth not he still impenitent,” quoth I, “that still appeareth Confession the first part of perjured… and still standing in perjury? penance

And whereas the first part of penance is confession and humble acknowledging of the fault, can the Church reckon him penitent that still refuseth to confess his fault; that lieth falsely still, and falsely forswareth himself?”

“The Church,” quoth he, “cannot surely know whether he swear true or false; and therefore they cannot surely judge him forsworn. For it may be, by possibility, that all the witnesses lied.”

“It may be too,” quoth I, “by possibility, if we go this way to work, that all the men lied that ever have said they came from Rome… and that all the briefs and bulls were feigned that ever were supposed to be brought from thence… for aught that he can tell that never came there himself. For some one man might lie, and some one bull or brief might be feigned… and so some other, and one by one… and so forth, of all the remnant. For like possibility is there in every one as is in any one. And peradventure as for your own self, have never yet talked with twenty that have told you they have been at Rome.”

“No, no,” quoth he, “nor, I ween, with ten neither.”

“And how many bulls,” quoth I, “and briefs, have ye seen that came thence?”

“By our Lady,” quoth he, “bulls very few, and briefs never none; for I never ask after them.”

“Then,” quoth I, “might you by your own reason as well doubt whether there were any Rome or no… as whether that man lied and were forsworn or no. But in this point I will not long stick with you. For surely, standing the matter in such case that his judges could not otherwise think of him but that he was faulty of things which he still in virtue of his oath denied; all were it so that they might think therewith that by possibility they might be in that mind deceived; yet while they could not think, nor they

1 openly: publicly  6 whereas: given that  8, 9 fault: guilt
9 falsely: despicably // forswareth: perjures  11, 12 surely: with certainty
12 forsworn: to have committed perjury  16, 19 feigned: forged
16 supposed to be: supposedly  17 thence: there
17 that never came: i.e., who has never been  20 remnant: rest  22 at: to
23 ween: think  25 thence: from there  27 after: about  28 reason: reasoning
30 were forsworn: had committed perjury // in: over // stick: wrangle
31 standing the matter in such case: the case standing in such a state  32 faulty: guilty
33 all were it so: even if it were the case
34–35 in that mind deceived: mistaken in that view  35 while: as long as
could have none other mind, but that he, though it might by possibility be true that he swore, yet was forsworn in deed, and in very deed persevered in perjury—now, the matter, I say, standing in such case—since he that with so plain-appearing perjury standeth in the denial of his fault and false defense of himself cannot be reckoned of his fault penitent, and unto penance ought none impenitent person to be admitted: I will not say that his judges did wrong, but surely methinketh I may well say that they showed him great favor, in that they received him to penance without the A strange fashion of confession of his fault. And I think verily it was a favorable fashion of abjuration… and so strange that the like hath been very seldom seen, if ever it were seen before. And that did they in hope that God shall send him more grace in time to come—and so I beseech him to do. For, I promise you, for my part… I never can conceive good hope of his amendment all the while that I see that pride abide still in his heart that cannot suffer him for shame to confess his fault.”

The Sixth Chapter

The author showeth that the person abjured—for his own worldly honesty, and for the more fruit of his preaching if he be suffered to preach in time to come, it were much better for him openly and willingly 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," quoth he, “peradventure better thus. For then should he slander himself—and the word of God also, if he should hereafter preach again.”

“Nay, marry,” quoth 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

1 mind: view 1–2 it . . . swore: what he swore to could possibly be true 2 was forsworn in deed: had in fact lied under oath 3 very deed: actual fact 3 persevered in perjury: was continuing to commit perjury 5, 6, etc. fault: guilt 9–10 the confession: his admitting to 11 favorable: partiality-showing 12 strange: unusual; extraordinary 18 confess: admit to 20 abjured: made to renounce his heresies under oath 21 honesty: reputation 22 suffered: allowed // were: would be 23 openly: publicly // willingly: voluntarily 25, 27, 31 slander: (bring into) discredit 30 marry: indeed
be from thence forth a very good man. Whereas now, thinking him to persevere in a proud perjury, we can none other think but that he must needs be very naught 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 a hypocrite, and therewith so foolish, too, that for a false hope of his own estimation preserved, he laboreth 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 whole 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 the truth cannot be proved against him. Whereunto the author answereth that he is bound upon peril of perjury to say and confess 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 indeed. And with this finisheth he the matter of his abjuration.

“In good faith,” quoth 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?” quoth I.

“Marry,” quoth he, “I have heard some well-learned men say if a man

1 from thence forth: from then on
2 naught: wicked  //  though: even if
3 never so well: no matter how correctly  //  were: would be  //  sore: serious
4 slander: discredit  //  well: correctly
5 his own estimation preserved: salvaging his own reputation
6–8 laboreth as much as in him is: tries as hard as he can  //  were: forsworn  //  stike: since
7 true: honest  //  naught: wicked
8 so mad: so insane as  //  plight: state  //  move: poses
9 would: prove  //  wist: knew
10 say the truth of: tell the truth about  //  in: with regard to  //  had: held
11 well: licitly  //  abjured: made to renounce heresies under oath  //  forswear: perjure
12 out: outside  //  matter: subject matter  //  marry: well  //  well-learned: well-educated
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

\[ \text{It is sin for a man to defame himself.} \]

5 his judge. For only God is judge of man’s heart. And if he should confess it where
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.

\[ \text{Sir } 41:12 \]

For Holy Scripture saith, ‘Curam habe de bono nomine’ (‘Take heed of thy good
name’); et “Melior est nomen bonum quam divitie multe’ (‘Better is a good name than much riches’). And it saith also, ‘Maledictus homo qui negligit famam suam’ (‘Accursed is that man that careth not what men say of him’). And therefore I have

10 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 witnesses.” “Forsooth,” quoth 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. Marry, truth it is that a man’s oath receiveth interpretation, and is not always bound precisely to the words.

\[ \text{An oath receiveth interpretation.} \]

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 bound to make

\[ \text{Whether a priest may swear that he knoweth not that he heard in confession} \]

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 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

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1 a fault that were true indeed: a sin that he is in fact guilty of
1, 3, etc. secret: hidden; private 8 defame: be committing detraction against
8 were: would be 11 et: and 12 riches: wealth 14, 26, 32 of: about
15 well-learned: well-educated 16 matter: charge 20 once: once and for all
21 lawfully: licitly // be forsworn: commit perjury // marry, truth it is: it is, of course, true
21 receiveth: admits of 22 precisely: absolutely
23 swear me generally: put me under a general oath
26–27 nothing belonging to him: not at all belonging to his jurisdiction
27 were: . . . bound: would . . . be obligated 32 might: could // boldly: freely
32 swear: say under oath that 33 for: by virtue of // gloss: explanation
34 for: by reason of the fact
35 dischargeth him of showing: exempts him from having to disclose
36 given: administered to 281/36—282/1 out of: outside of; apart from
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. Not 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 case 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 therefore 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 soever he should endure therefor. And in like wise, if any judge would give an oath to any person to tell him the truth of any crime which were so secret as that 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 bound, upon pain of eternal damnation, without covering or cautel 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 ye 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 indeed. 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

1, 15, 17 would: wanted to  2 express: explicit   //  swear: tell under oath  
3 had . . . remedy: would in my opinion have no choice  4 swear: take this oath  
3, 13 plainly: straight-out  5 to die therefor: even if this refusal should cost me my life  
5 in: about   //  for: concerning  6 though: even if   //  anon: right now  
7 should grow by: would come of  7–8 excuse an innocent: get an innocent person acquitted by  
8 truly: truthfully   //  case: i.e., court case  //  either be forsworn: have to either commit perjury  
10, 13 swear: speak under oath  15 give . . . person: put anyone under oath  
15 of: about   //  secret: unknown about  17 for his only: just for his  19 deny: refuse  
19 swear: be put under oath //  make him: give him any   //  therein: on that subject  
20 detected: informed on  20–21 either . . . fame: by way of either widespread report  
21 conjectures: reasonable grounds for supposition   //  likelihoods: indications  
22 give . . . an: put . . . under  23 search: investigation  24 covering: covering up  
24 cautel: craftiness   //  show: tell   //  respect: regard  26 alleged: cited  
27 from this point: i.e., from relevant here  30 defame: bad-mouth  
33 of . . . words: what bad people might say   //  reckoning: telling  34 ill: evil  
35 willingly: voluntarily
offer himself to the sufferance of open shame, there were no
5 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
6 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, Achan, that had committed sacrilege (whereof is written in
7 Joshua), was exhorted by Joshua 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
8 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
9 cross. And surely if men’s old faults were still their infamy
after their amendment… then was Saint Peter little beholden to
10 Saint Matthew and others 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
naught, the better he was the more sin it is, and the more shame
11 also. And is it not then in reason, on the other side, if a naughty man
wax good—the worse he was, the better is for him, and the more worship
12 also? Our Lord saith himself that for one sinner coming
again to grace… there is more joy in heaven than upon almost a
hundred good folk that never sinned. And reckon we then that
man shamed by the knowledge of his sin here among sinful men…
15 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
naught and is good. And the shame that he conceiveth in his heart before
the world… getteth him great honor before God; and the short
19 glowing heat in his cheeks speedily burneth up and wasteth the
It is damnable to convey a
fault by any cautel.
never-wasting fire of hell, standing him
further in stead 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 upon boldness of any doctor’s opinion… hide or cover his fault
by any cautel… after a lawful oath given him to tell the plain
truth therein. And whoso will say the contrary, he 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 he refuse to swear—and may
not first swear and then say false; which every man must, upon
damnation, eschew though he follily take an oath where he
lawfully might refuse it.”

“Forsooth,” quoth he, “methinketh ye take the sure way.”

“Well,” quoth 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 that we spoke 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 sin, 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,” quoth 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 an example certain
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.”

2 upon boldness of: in reliance on // doctor’s: scholar’s // fault: guilt
3 cautel: craftiness // a lawful oath given him: he has been put under a lawful oath
5, 8 give: administer (to) // may not: cannot // might: could // forswear: perjure
7 may not: cannot // swear: take the oath // though: even if
10 follily: foolishly // matter: case (against him) // of preaching: regarding preaching
13, 15, 18 matter: case (against him) // of preaching: regarding preaching
16 wist: knew // open: public // folly: foolishness // thereto: as well
18 matter: i.e., thing he was charged with having done // honest: honorable
19 indifferent: unbiased // evil: bad // mind: frame of mind; disposition
26 showeth: gives // evil: ill // pray: ask that // lately: recently
30–31 much marvel of: really wonder about
“It is,” quoth 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,” quoth your friend, “that it should be so clean contrary. For to some that read it, it seemed very like!”

“It is,” quoth I, “nevertheless contrary—and yet the more perilous. For like as to a true silver groat a false copper groat is nevertheless contrary though it be quicksilvered 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.”

“Oh, why,” quoth your friend, “what faults were there in it?”

“To tell you all—that,” quoth I, “were in a manner to rehearse you all the whole book; wherein there were found and noted wrong and falsely translated above a thousand texts by tale.”

“I would,” quoth he, “fain hear some one.”

“He that should,” quoth 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,” quoth he, “very strange except ye mean more in weight. For one can be but one in number.”

“Surely,” quoth 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,” quoth he, “somewhat like a riddle.”

“This riddle,” quoth 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,” quoth he, “but that was not well done. But I

pray you, what words be they?”

“The one is,” quoth I, “this word ‘priests’;
the other, the ‘church’; the third, ‘charity.’ For priests—wheresoever
he speaketh of the priests of Christ’s church, he never calleth them
‘priests,’ but always ‘seniors’; the Church he calleth always the ‘congregation’;
and charity he calleth always ‘love.’ Now do these names in
our English tongue neither express the things that he 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 presbyteri (as we might say, elder men), yet
neither were all priests chosen old—as appeareth by Saint Paul
1 Tm 4:12 writing to Timothy, ‘Nemo iuventutem
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 always 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 always called and
known by the name of the Church; which name what good cause
or color 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

5, 9, etc. tongue: language    7 mischievous mind: pernicious intent    9 well: quite
13–14 contemn thy: i.e., scorn you on account of your
16 one: i.e., one man   // will: wants to
19–20 by... Englishly: if he would in English call priests by that name of “elder men”
22 nothing: not at all    24 wist: knew    32 color: pretext
‘love.’ For though charity be always love, yet is not, ye wot well, love always charity.”

“The more pity, by my faith,” quoth 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… knelt down and held up his hands into heaven, highly thanking God that ‘charity’ was ‘not yet gone out of this wretched world.'”

“He had,” quoth I, “a good mind, and did like a good man… that deemed allthing to the best.”

“So say I too,” quoth 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 naught… if he should but find her in bed with a poor friar!”

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

“Surely,” quoth he, “very naught. And that it was not well nor wisely done… there will, I trow, no good wise man deny. But yet whether Hutchins 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,” quoth I, “would ye that the book should go forth and be read still in that fashion?”

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

“With that word,” quoth 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 inculcath that almost in the whole book his lewd change he never changeth: in this manner could no man deem other but that the man meant mischievously—scant such a good, seely soul as

1 wot: know 6 which: who 10, 13 mind: mentality; attitude
10–11 that deemeth allthing to the best: who puts the best face on everything
13 waxen: become
14 would . . . naught: would actually believe that his wife was being immoral
16 wanton: rogue; bad boy // in earnest: seriously 18 surely: to be sure
18 very naught: (it is) very bad // well: rightly // wisely: sensibly 19 trow: suppose
19 wise: sensible / sane 20 Hutchins: The surname used by some of Tyndale’s ancestors, and sometimes by Tyndale himself. // purpose: intent
23–24 would . . . fashion: would you have the book go out and keep being read with that wording
25 in good faith: in all honesty 27 surely: assuredly 29 allow: accept // suffer: tolerate
30 so: so long as // wink at: overlook 33 lewd: bad
35 meant mischievously: did it with pernicious intent // scant: scarcely // seely: poor
would ween all were well when he found his wife where ye said right now. If he called charity *sometimes* by the bare name of ‘love,’ I would not stick thereat. But, now, whereas ‘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 always speak of ‘love’ and always leave out ‘good,’ I would surely say that he meaneth naught.”

“In good faith,” quoth he, “so is it not unlikely.”

“Then,” quoth 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, Hutchins was with Luther, in Wittenberg, and set certain glosses in the margin… framed for the setting forth of the ungracious sect.”

“By Saint John,” quoth your friend, “if that be true, that Hutchins 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!” quoth 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 Luther’s heresies perceive. For since Luther and his fellows among other 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 laboreth of purpose to diminish the reverent mind that men bear to charity… and *therefore* he changeth that name of *holy*, *virtuous* affection into the bare name of ‘love,’ common to the

1 ween: think 2 right: just // bare: mere 3 stick thereat: object to that 8 meaneth naught: is up to no good; does not mean well 13, 15 Hutchins: See note for 287/20. 14 framed for: aimed at 14 setting forth: promoting // ungracious: ungodly 16 plain token: clear indication // wrought: worked 17 after: according to 18 willing to help his matters forward: wanting to help advance his theses 19 made for: made out to be // as touching: as for // confederacy: collusion 21 is: i.e., that is // plainly: openly // confessed: admitted 22 such as: i.e., people who // taken: arrested for 23 thence: there 23 hither: over here // 24 thither: to there 25 how it sprang: as to how well it sprouted 28 fellows: cohorts 29 other: their other 30 standeth in: depends on 31 nothing force of good works: good works count for nothing 32 he laboreth of purpose: what he is trying to do is 34 bare: mere
virtuous love that man beareth to God… and to the lewd love that is
between fleck and his make. 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
Hutchins 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 some such heretics were the church that God spoke 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 whosoever 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 Hutchins
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 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

2 fleck: lowlife // make: squeeze; illicit lover
3 very: true // in: on
5 wot: knows
8 willing that it should: wanting it to
13 as touching: regarding
15 holy order: ordination
17 choice: election // by and by: immediately
22 may: can
23 set forth: promote
24 29 put away: do away with
27 still: always
32 holy orders: i.e., the subdiaconate, diaconate, and so forth
33 feigned: made-up
whereby they be consecrated 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 always signified an anointed person… 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,” quoth your friend, “it seemeth verily that he meant not well.”

“Surely,” quoth I, “ye would well say so if ye saw all the places, which I shall cause you to see when ye 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 of ‘grace’ into this word ‘favor’—whereas every favor is not ‘grace’ in English; for in some favor is there little grace. ‘Confession’ he translateth into ‘acknowledging.’ ‘Penance’ into ‘repentance.’ A ‘contrite’ heart he translateth 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 laboreth 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 years misrepresented the Gospel, and Englished the Scripture wrong, to lead the people purposely out of the right way.”

3 tongue: language  7 Dieu vous garde, Senior: God keep you, sir.  9 turning: changing 13 cause you to: have you // will: wish to // soon: readily 14 yourself: i.e., for yourself // were: would take 14, 15, 16 rehearse(d): relate(d) (to) 16 might: could // shortly: in short order  22 untruly: inaccurately 24 reason upon: talk about; discuss 25 in question: into debate 26 used: conducted 27 translation: translating 29 set forth: promote 30 laboreth: is trying 31 ween: suppose 33 nothing: not at all 34 misrepresented: misrepresented; misstated
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 Almaine—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 raileth 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 that translation very good for their purpose toward the destruction of the Mass!”

“By Saint Mary Mass,” quoth your friend, “that 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,” quoth I, “it appeareth not in the book. For the book is put forth nameless—and was in the beginning reckoned to be made by Tyndale. And whether it so were or not we be not yet very sure. Howbeit, since that time Tyndale hath put out in his own name another book, entitled Mammona, which book is very mammona iniquitatis—a very treasury and wellspring of wickedness. And yet hath he since put forth a worse also, named The Obedience of a Christian Man—a book able to make a Christian man that would believe it... leave off all good Christian virtues and lose the merit of his 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 Friars Observant), came to him where he was, showing him that he would cast off his habit and leave his religion... and ‘assay now to serve God’; and that afterward he left him and went unto Roye—which is, as I think ye know, another
apostate—by whose counsel Tyndale saith that the friar Jerome
made the book; wherein Tyndale saith that he misliketh his rhymes and
his ‘overmuch railing.’ And saith also that he feareth lest Friar Jerome
‘shall not well prove all that he promiseth in that book.’”

“Why,” quoth your friend, “is that all the fear that he findesth in himself, and
all the fault that he findesth in the friar and his book?”

“Yea, in good faith,” quoth I—“every whit!”

“Then findesth he,” quoth your friend, “no fault in his apostasy?”

“No more,” quoth I, “than I show you.”

“Nor findesth he,” quoth 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,” quoth I, “more than you hear.”

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

“That is all,” quoth 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,” quoth your friend, “much more cause, as me thinketh, 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,” quoth 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
therewith I showed your friend a book with the places already 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 whoa, and verily confessed that the book in such wise
translated was very naught and nothing meet 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,” quoth 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 sew up every hole in a net, so were it almost as little labor, and less, to translate the whole book all new… as to make in his translation so many changes as need must be ere it were made good. Besides this: that there would no wise man, I trow, take the bread which he well wist was of his enemy’s 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 incidentally 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,” quoth your friend, “I will not greatly stick with you in that point. 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 others… 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 therefor. And thereupon they burn up the book, and sometimes the good man withal, alleging for the defense of their doing… a law of their own making: a 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 aught 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 ourselves!

“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 ourselves, but by their constitution 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 forbidden the Gospel…
but if they will make us worse than Jews? Wherein I can, in good

Scripture faith, see no excuse they can find. For the Scripture is to good folk the nourisher
of virtue… and to them that be naught, it is the means of amendment.
And therefore while the clergy doth withdraw it 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 forbidden that we should have any at all.”

“Your words,” quoth I, “be somewhat pugnant and sharp. But
surely they prick somewhat more the men than the matter. For
whereas 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.

2, 33 tongue: language  5 troth: word // perceive by: tell by way of
6 honest: upright; honorable  14 suffer: allow  15 cannot well: really cannot
16 letted to read: prevented from reading
17 learned and lewd: the educated and the uneducated
18 for . . . far: that for . . . are far // strange: foreign // than: i.e., than anything
20 but if: unless // they: i.e., the clergy
20 will make us worse than: want to make us out to be inferior to
20–21 in good faith: in all honesty  23 naught: bad  24 while: as long as
24 withdraw it: withhold it from  27 damning: condemning
29 pugnant: piercing  30 surely: certainly  31 whereas: given that
31 touch in effect: are in fact criticizing  32 evil: ill; wrongly
34 vice: moral depravity  35 toucheth: is relevant to
35 matter: concern; subject under discussion
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 own 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 dispicions 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 defamed already by their own obstinate malice. But, yet, whereas ye speak of other countries, making an argument that our clergy is the worst of all others—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 temporalty that we be as good and as honest as anywhere else: so dare I boldly say that the spiritualty of England, and especially 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 living, well able to match (and, saving Comparisons be odious. that comparisons be odious, I would say further, 'far able to overmatch'), number for number, the spiritualty of any nation Christian. I wot well there be therein many very lewd and naught. 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. Now, whereas ye say that ye see more vice in them than in ourselves: truth it is that everything in them is greater... because they be more bound to be better. But else the things that they misdo... be the selfsame that we sin in ourselves; which vices that, as ye say, we see more in them than in ourselves... the cause is, as I suppose, for we look more upon theirs than on our own, and fare as

1 toucheth: has to do with  // as: such as
1–2 the clergy... living: the clergy of being in their personal lives very immoral
2 as: just as  // worse: less good 4 charge them with: blame them for 5 in: on
5 keep no schools: not engage in any academic discussion // dispicions: (any) debating
6 gladly meddle of: concern myself with  // living: personal conduct
8 meddle of: concern myself with  // living: personal conduct
9 manner: demeanor 10 evil: bad 11 damned: condemned
11 defamed already: already made infamous 12 by: on account of 14, 24 wot: know
14–15 spiritual and temporal: clerical and lay people 17 by: about // temporalty: laity
17, 21 honest: upright 18 boldly: confidently; with assurance
18, 24 spiritualty: clergy 25 lewd: bad // naught: immoral
26 to be: i.e., for it to be 28 all the matter: the whole problem 29 were: would be
29 amended: rectified 31 bound: obligated
Aesop saith in a fable—that every man carrieth a double wallet on his shoulder, and into the one that hangeth at his breast he putteth other folks’ faults… and therein he tooteth 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 others 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

A way to amend were the way to amend both them and us. Now they blame us… and we blame them… and both blameworthy… and either party more ready to find other’s faults than to amend 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, 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 example 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 example 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 or 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 example. But let a lewd friar be taken with a wench, we will jest and rail upon the whole order all the year after, and say, ‘Lo what example they give us!’ And yet, when we have said, we will follow the same… and then say that 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,’ quoth 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 give light to the people that was but very young.’

‘Marry,’ quoth I, ‘God forbid else! Ye may see that often and ye will!’

‘Truly,’ quoth 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?’ quoth I.

‘Marry,’ quoth he, ‘it happed that a young priest very devoutly, in a procession, bore a candle before the cross… for lying with a wench; and bore it lighted 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 before the people!’’

‘Forsooth,’ quoth 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 sins, and in the sight of their shame. Good is it 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

Note

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 Ham, which fell into the curse of his father, Noah, for that he made a gaud and showed forth in scorn the secret members of his father, that of adventure lay and slept uncovered; which parts Shem and Japheth, the blessed children, reverently covered, going backward to him because they would not see him. And surely we have little cause to laugh at their lewdness. For undoubtedly,

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2 listed as well: cared as much 3 because ye speak: i.e., speaking 4 fair: beautiful 7 marry: goodness // may: can // and ye will: if you want to 8 pity: i.e., a pity; a shame 10 in faith: seriously 11 wondered as fast thereon: stared at it as fixedly 13 marry: indeed 14 bore: carried 16–17 laughed apace: immediately started laughing 20 were pity . . . punished: would be a pity if a bad priest were not punished 21 pity: i.e., of a pity 23 on: at 24–25 have . . . to hear: take . . . in hearing 25 harm: suffering some affliction 28 had: held 29 affection: disposition 30 which: who 31 gaud: spectacle (of him) 32 secret members: private parts // that: who 32–33 of adventure: by chance 35 going: walking // because they would not: so as not to 36 their: i.e., the clergy’s 36 lewdness: immoral behavior
Master Colet if the clergy be naught we must needs be worse, as I heard once Master Colet, the good dean of Paul’s, 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 Savior saith himself, which saith of them that they be salt of the earth... and if the salt once appall, the world must needs wax unsavory. And he saith that they be the light of the world; and then if the light, saith he, be darkened, how dark will then the darkness be—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 many very naught—whose faults be neither the faults of the temporalty nor of the spiritualty, but of those lewd persons themselves—yet are, I trust, neither their party nor ours come to that point but that there be many good men among us... and as for among them, I wot ne’er whether I may say many more or not, but surely I think many better.”

“I fear me,” quoth your friend, “that those ‘many’ be very few in comparison of the multitude.”

“I cannot,” quoth I, “look into their hearts to see who is good and who is bad; nor have the leisure, if they were all known, 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 upheld—as we find in Scripture places more than one... declaring plainly the profit that a whole sinful city, or sometimes a 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 naught... 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 others far the more available.”

1, 12, 30 naught: bad; immoral 3 Paul’s: St. Paul’s Cathedral 4 under: below 6 which: who 7 once appall: ever gives out 8 wax: become 10 the world beside: the rest of the world 13 temporalty: laity // spiritualty: clergy 14 lewd: bad 16 wot ne’er whether: don’t know if 21 about: around 22 tell them by the polls: do a head count 26 maintained: supported 27 places more than one: more than one passage 27 declaring: showing 32 clergy: priesthood; being a member of the clergy 33 available: efficacious
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 naught, albeit that he do some way much harm both to himself and others... yet this advantage take we by the privilege and prerogative of his priesthood (besides the administration of the sacraments unto us, the goodness whereof his naughtiness cannot impair): that, be he never so vicious, and therewith so impenitent, and so far from all purpose of amendment, that his prayers were before the face of God rejected and abhorred, The sacrifice of the holy Body of Christ yet that sacred sacrifice and sweet oblation of Christ’s holy Body offered up by his office... can take none impairing 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 as 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 others... nor the oblation himself—as with whom God is the more greatly aggrieved... in that, being so bad, he durst presume to touch it.”

“Marry,” quoth 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 themselves never so naught, then seemeth it better for us to make yet more though they were yet worse, that we might have more Masses.”
That reason," quoth I, "will not hold. For though God of his goodness how bad soever 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 neighbor’s harm. And also, we should of our duty to God… rather forbear the profit that ourselves might attain by a Mass… than to see his Majesty disreverenced by the bold presumption of such an odious minister as he hath forbidden to come about him. Like as if ye sent a present unto a prince which were very pleasant unto him… though the messenger much disliked him, so far that he had been forbidden the Court: yet if ye were not aware 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 naught, 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 often offended with a displeasant 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… scantily would there four monks be bold to be priests. Then was all holy orders in high honor. Then find we that the degree of a deacon was a great thing, and of such dignity… that when one of them went, sometimes, in pilgrimage, he would not be acknown 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 villainy. 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 grown by the means of so great a number
of priests and so familiar among us. Which thing needs must
diminish 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,” quoth he, “there is more plenty of priests than of good men,
and there be too many but if they were better chosen.”

“Doubtless,” quoth I, “there would be more diligence used in the choice…
not of their learning only, but, much more especially, 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, especially if the proverb were true that ye spoke 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, as 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.

The dignity of priesthood

And whereas the dignity passeth all princes,
and they that lewd be… desireth it
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,” quoth he, “I would ye were! And my lady your wife
popess, too!"

“Well,” quoth 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!”

1 gear: mess // grown: come     3 estimation toward: esteem for     4 in: for
5 set by: prize // 7 in faith: truth to tell // more plenty: a greater abundance
8 but if: unless     9 would: should
12 good store against God send: a good provision toward such time as God may send
13 mend: i.e., mend their ways // haply: perhaps     15 very surety: real certainty
16 to . . . company: for there not to be many very bad people in any group
17 main: huge     20 able: qualified     21 passeth: exceeds that of     22 lewd: lowborn
23 winning: gain     24 bounden: beholden     25 vouchsafe: deign     26 would: wish
28 devise: make the arrangements     29 touching: concerning
33 mean man: common man; Joe Schmoe
34–35 to the . . . horsekeeper: with the result that priesthood is scorned as being as low-status
an occupation as that of the man’s horsekeeper
“That is,’’ quoth 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,” quoth 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 diminished 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 priesthood until he have a title of a sufficient yearly living, either of his own patrimony or otherwise. Nor at this day they be none otherwise accepted.”

“Why,” quoth he, “wherefore go there, then, so many of them a-begging?”

“Marry,” quoth 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 rovers 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,” quoth he, “that ye might have too few to serve the rooms and livings that be provided for them, except the prelates would provide that Orders were not so commonly given… but always receive into Orders as rooms and livings fall void, to bestow them in, and no faster.”

“Surely,” quoth 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

2 meseemeth surely: it certainly seems to me // more honest: more respectable; higher-status
5 broken: abolished  6 gear: stuff  9 slander: discredit; disrepute
10 lewd: (a) low-class  11 a title of: an entitlement to  15 why . . . wherefore: well . . . why
16 marry: goodness // for: because // delude: foil  18 discharge: waive
18 ere: before // have: receive  20 writing: document
21 deluded: circumvented // the Order: i.e., the holy order of priesthood
21 rebuked: brought into contempt  22 lewd living: bad way of living
22–23 which either is fain to walk at rovers: who is forced either to roam helter-skelter
23 trentals: sets of thirty Masses said for the soul of a deceased person; i.e., stipends
24 should not need: would not be necessary // gap: i.e., gap between theory and practice
25 stopped: stopped up  27 sure: assured  28 serve: fill
29, 31 rooms and livings: positions and benefices  29 except: unless
30, 31 Orders: Holy Orders  31 fall void: become vacant // bestow: place
33 surely: certainly // suddenly: at the moment  34 so: that way
34 should they need: they would need // titles: entitlements
35 at rovers: helter-skelter
whereof there groweth, among, no little corruption in the priests’ manners… by the conversation of lay people and company of women in their houses.”

“Nay, by our Lady,” quoth 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. Whereunto the author maketh answer.

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

“Marry,” quoth I, “so saith Luther, and Tyndale also—saving that they Tyndale’s books are furnished with Luther’s heresies. (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) doth in his frantic book of Obedience—wherein he raileth 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, against all 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 Paul where he writeth to Timothy, ‘Oportet episcopum esse irreprehensibilem, unius uxoris virum’—that ‘a bishop must be a man unreprovable, and the husband of one wife’—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 Saint Paul would there should in

\[1\] growth: comes about \ // among: now and then \ // manners: morals
\[3\] conversation of: mingling with \ // lightly: well
\[8\] moveth: submits \ // ween: think \ // might: could \ // marry: indeed
\[15\] in effect: just about \ // words: statements \ // forth: out
\[18\] frantic: insane \ // at large: at length
\[22\] all Divine Service: the whole Divine Office \ // althing: everything
\[25\] wisely: brilliantly \ // unreprovable: irreproachable
\[31\] after Luther: following Luther’s lead

303/32—304/1 in no wise: by no means
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 Saint Paul? In which, of so many
great, cunning fathers and holy saints as have often read, and
deepl'y considered, those words before, there was never none that
had either the wit or the grace to perceive that great special
commandment this fifteen hundred years… 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 friar should have lost
his marriage of that holy nun, and Tyndale some good marriage
that I think him toward. Tyndale nothing answereth in his book
to that point… but runneth and raileth over without reason… and
saith 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… say that the scripture which he allegeoth to
be very plain for him is very plain against him—as it is indeed.
For Saint Paul 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 one wife.’ Meaning such as then

A priest must be the husband

of one wife.

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
understood. And not only where Saint Paul 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 Paul, whose epistles wherein he writeth anything of this matter... was, peradventure, not come to the hands of other apostles... when they took yet the

5 Bigamy is a let to take Holy Orders. 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 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 Paul saith 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 Paul'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 Paul saith 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 years. Now, as I say, upon Tyndale's taking, Saint Paul should mean not that a priest should have but one wife (for that 'but' is not in Saint Paul's words), but he should mean that a priest must have one at the least—as though Saint Paul had liefer that the priest had twenty, save for overcharging. Yet it seemeth that Tyndale so

1 bigamy by the wedding of: the bigamy of wedding  3 of: about
4 took: adopted  5 order: policy // by: by means of  8, 10 let: hindrance
11 wise: brilliant  11–12 old holy fathers: early fathers of the Church
12 cunning doctors: learned exegetes  16 by: according to
17 leave: depart from // true: correct  20, 23 may: can
20 as for that place: on the basis of that text  21 once: one time
21 twain: (at) two times // and he will: if he wants
25 were: would be  26 compatible: i.e., legally and morally compatible
27 make them: make them out to be
33 had liefer: would prefer  34 overcharging: the overburdening
take it indeed… and that a priest might have divers wives at once… especially for the great reason that he setteth thereto. For whereas Saint Paul, 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 mistaught his wife and his children… were unmeet 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 meet to bear a rule. As though we never saw any man that never had wife… govern a 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 meet to be a priest as Tyndale taketh it: then—since Saint Paul 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 governor 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 Paul in a much like matter. Saint Paul, as he writeth to Timothy 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 founded of the goods of the Church that were ‘younger than sixty years,’ 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 Paul should mean not that he have or have had but one wife, but that he must needs have one wife: then must we likewise take the words spoken by Saint Paul of the widow… as though Saint Paul should mean not a widow which

1, 15 divers: several  2 for: in light of  // reason: argument  // setteth: adds 2 whereas: on the basis of the fact that  4 willed: decided 6 mistaught: misdirected // were: would be 7, 9 (un)meet: (un)fit 7 great cure: large curacy 9–10 bear a rule: hold a position of authority 12–13 a man meet: a man’s being fit 14 after: according to 14 appear: be shown 15 together: concurrently 15 after Tyndale: according to Tyndale’s logic // specially: particularly 20 construction: construing; interpreting 25 founded of: provided for out of 30 after: in accord with 34 which: who
had never had more than one husband, but a widow that had had one husband; as though Saint Paul had nothing feared nor forbidden... but lest Timothy 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 Paul 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 Paul, in like wise, 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 Saint Paul set in for naught, 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 Paul meant there should be but one wife at once and one husband at once: then did Saint Paul 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 Paul’s days, a layman had but one wife at once. And the folly of this construction appeareth in the words spoken of Saint Paul in the choice of the widow, wherein Tyndale would by this way make Saint Paul to say thus: ‘Take and choose in but such a widow as hath had but one husband at once’—as though the guise were in his days that wives might have two husbands at once!”

“In faith,” quoth your friend, “I think Saint Paul meant not so. For then had wives been in his time little better than grass widows be

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4 were this not wisely construed: wouldn’t this be a brilliant interpretation
5 but if: unless // mad: crazy 13, 34 might: could 14 and he list: if he likes
15 shift: escape hatch 16 naught: nothing 17 but: than
21, 30 construction: interpretation 23, 25, etc. at once: at a time
26 had: would have // purpose: argument // so were: thus there would be
27–28 a bare: a mere; just a
28 yet were it little to purpose: also there would be little point to it
29 folly: foolishness 30 spoken of: spoken by
31 in: about
34 guise: custom 36 in faith: seriously // meant not so: did not mean that
37 had wives been: would wives have been // grass widows: women who sleep around
now. For they be yet as several as a barber’s chair… and never take but one at once.”

“In faith,” quoth 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 years so taught his whole Church… that never was there pope so covetous yet that durst dispense in this point, seeing the consent of Christ’s church so full and whole therein, and the mind of Saint Paul so clearly 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 troth,” quoth your friend, “if Tyndale and Luther have none other hold than that place of Saint Paul, they be likely to take a fall. But I think they say more than that.”

“Surely,” quoth I. “Tyndale hath another reason indeed. He saith that chastity is an exceedingly seldom gift, and unchastity exceedingly perilous for that state. And thereon he concludeth that priests must needs have wives. But, now, what if a man would deny him—though chastity is a great gift—that, yet, it is a seldom gift? For

Chastity in deed is not a seldom gift. thought it be rare and seldom in respect of the remnant of the people, that have it not, yet is it not seldom in deed; for many men have it. And Christ saith that all men take it not, 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 plainly false, for many hath done and doth—but, now, if we did, I say, grant him that thing: though he might, peradventure, thereupon

1 several: exclusive  2 at once: at a time  3 in faith: seriously
3 folly: foolishness  4 constructions: construings // very: real; actual
6 covetous: greedy  6–7 durst… point: dared give a dispensation in this regard
7 consent: consensus  8 mind: intention // to suffer: (to be) to allow
10 open follies: obvious idiocies  11 substantially: soundly
15 suffer… take: allow… to take  17 tale: account // will or no: want to or not
18 troth: word  19 hold: support; leg to stand on // place of: text from
21 surely: as a matter of fact
21 hath another reason indeed: does indeed have another argument
22, 25 chastity: celibacy  22, 25, etc. seldom: exceptional
26–27 in respect of: with respect to  27 remnant: rest  28 deed: fact; actuality
30, 31, 32 take(th): receive(s)  32 inconvenience: impropriety  34 chaste: celibate
35 plainly: obviously; patently  36 might: (rightly) could // peradventure: perhaps
conclude that there should not be so many priests made and
bound 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 idly occupied, to labor 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," quoth 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
In Wales priests be suffered to have wives.

In Wales priests be suffered to have wives. them have wives that would, as they have
in Wales. And I hear say that in Almaine they find great ease therein. For like as
here the goodwife 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," quoth I, "ye be wrong informed; for wives have they
not. But truth it is that incontinence is there, in some places, little
looked unto; whereof much harm groweth in the country. And as for
Almaine, such part thereof as that is used in—which is only where
Luther's sect is received—whoso consider well what commodity
hath come to them by such ungodly ways... I think shall have no
great fantasy to follow them."

"Well," quoth he, "let Wales and Almaine go. Yet priests had wives
of old, when they were better than they be now. And yet have in
Greece, where they be better than they be here."
In Greece priests have wives. “As for the priests of Greece, I will not dispraise them,” quoth 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,” quoth 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 marveled 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 were at liberty, some of the worst sort would yet, I ween, rather have ‘women’ than wives. But others 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!” quoth I. “Well,” quoth 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; to which God would never bind any man.” “The Church,” quoth I, “bindeth no man to chastity.” “That is truth,” quoth he, “except a priest be a man.” “Ye mistake the matter,” quoth I, “as I shall show you after.” “There would,” quoth he, “many harms be avoided, and much good would there grow thereof, if they might have wives that would.” “What good or harm,” quoth 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 naught 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 that 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), besides 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

The Church bindeth no man to chastity.

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 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… blameth not only the clergy, but also the temporety, 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 cleanliness 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

\[\text{2 naught: bad} \quad \text{4 surely: assuredly} \quad \text{6 in effect: just about; almost} \]
\[\text{6 were: got} \quad \text{9 growing: coming} \quad \text{10 proof: trying out thereof} \quad \text{14 consent: concurrence} \]
\[\text{15 proof: trying out; testing} \quad \text{16 made: i.e., was made} \]
\[\text{17–18 lay . . . that: accuse of being unreasonable those who} \quad \text{19, 23, etc. chastity: celibacy} \]
\[\text{19 somewhat . . . say: there would be something in what you say; you would have a point there} \]
\[\text{22 not to be priest but at his pleasure: not to become a priest unless he wants to} \]
\[\text{23 bond: shackle} \quad \text{in: around} \quad \text{25 whereas: given that} \]
\[\text{25 by their own minds: of their own volition; by their own decision} \quad \text{26 chaste: celibate} \]
\[\text{27 of: from} \quad \text{sort: set} \quad \text{content: willing} \quad \text{28 blameth: is casting aspersions on} \]
\[\text{29 temporety: laity} \quad \text{30 partners: sharers} \]
\[\text{31 whereof . . . provision: the provision of which no one can find fault with} \]
\[\text{31 but if: unless} \quad \text{33 pleasant: pleasing} \quad \text{34 evil: ill} \]
taken of the purest and most pleasant sort. Whereunto the very paynims had such respect… that their priests durst not presume to the sacrifice of their maumets but after certain time of corporeal cleanness; kept from their wives. And some of them bound to perpetual chastity… with the loss of that part of their body wherewith they might do the contrary.”

“Yea, marry,” quoth he, “that was a good, sure way!”

“It was,” quoth I, “sure indeed, but not so good as this. For therein 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 time of their ministration forbore 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 Saint Luke’s Gospel.

Chastity is a meet thing for priests.

So that chastity was thought both to God and man a thing meet 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 of a virgin… and lived and died a virgin himself… and exhorted all his to the same? Whose counsel in that point since some be content to follow and some to live otherwise, what way were, I say, more meet 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,” quoth he.

“They say,” quoth 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

1 pleasant: pleasing (to God)  //  sort: set
2 paynims: pagans
3–4 durst . . . maumets: dared not venture upon the offering of sacrifice to their idols
5 kept: i.e., of being kept away  //  bound: i.e., were bound
7 might do: could have done  8 marry: indeed
11 motion: impulses; urges  //  would: wanted to
16 as it well appeareth: as is made quite evident  18 chastity: celibacy
18 thought: deemed  //  to: by
19, 26 meet: fitting  19 convenient: appropriate
20 them . . . generation: i.e., the Jews.  //  most magnified: made the biggest deal of
21 to: with regard to
22 which: who
28 after the cleanness of: i.e., in the clean manner called for by
30 truth: i.e., true
30 so would: wanted to do that
31 will: are willing to
32 warned: informed
but if he first professed chastity... is as far against reason as if he
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 wotteth 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 example than the seditious
and schismatic priests of Saxony."

"Surely," quoth he, "ye have well declared the Church touching that
law. But—whatevsoever the cause be—by my troth, naught they be;
and as far worse than we... as they be bound to be better! And
yet be we the worse for them!"

"There be," quoth 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 whither party 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

There is but one shrewd wife that they defame them falsely. For he
saith plainly that there is but one shrewd wife in the world; but he saith, indeed,
that every man weeneth he hath her... and that one is his own. So
would I fain that every man would ween there were but one man
naught in all the whole world... and that one were himself. And
that he would thereupon go about to amend that 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
broach, 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,” quoth he, “I trow that be true, and pray God we so may.”

The 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.”

“Marry,” quoth I, “that is soon answered. Lay the charge to them that made it.”

“Marry,” quoth he, “so I do! For who made that constitution but they?"

“Surely,” quoth I, “nobody else—nor they neither.”

“No?” quoth he. “What? Every man knoweth it!”

“Verily,” quoth I, “many men talk of it; but no man knoweth it. For there is none such in deed. There is, of truth, a constitution that speaketh of such matter... but nothing of such fashion. For ye shall understand that the great archheretic Wycliffe—whereas the whole Bible was, long before his days, by virtuous and well-learned men translated into the English tongue, and by good and godly people with devotion and soberness well and reverently read—took upon him, of a Wycliffe’s translation of the Bible malicious purpose, to translate it of new. In which translation he purposely corrupted that 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

1 boldly: with assurance 2 so . . . other: as ready to pray for one another 3 seek . . . rebuke: i.e., look for things to reproach and criticize in one another 4 in faith: honestly // trow: believe 6 doubt moved: question raised 7 constitution provincial: synodal decree // and: i.e., and answers 8 fault: blameworthiness 9 showing: making known 10 made: written 11 to . . . with: back to the matter we had in hand 14, 25 tongue: language 14 an evil-made law: an ill-made law; a law it was wrong to make 15, 17 marry: well 15 lay the charge to them that: put the blame on those who 18 surely: assuredly 20 verily: actually 21 none such in deed: in fact no such constitution 22 nothing of: not at all in 24 well-learned: well-educated 26 devotion: piety // well and: very
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 Bohemia and there taught by John Hus
and others... 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 diverse ages before—so doth 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,” quoth 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,” quoth 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 Wycliffe, and also of
some others that after him helped to set forth his sect, then for that

It is a dangerous thing to cause—and forasmuch as it is dangerous
to translate the text of Scripture out of
one tongue into another, as holy Saint
Jerome testifieth, forasmuch as in translation it is hard always
to keep the same sentence whole—it was, I say, for these causes, at a
council held at Oxford, provided upon great pain that
no man should from thence forth translate into the English tongue
or any other language, of his own authority, by way of book,
libel, or treatise... nor no man, openly or secretly, any such book,
libel, or treatise read... newly made in the time of the said John
Wycliffe 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 rought to
seek whether they say truth or no. For I trow that in this law ye see nothing unreasonable. For it neither forbiddeth the translations to be read that were already well done of old, before Wycliffe’s days, nor damneth his because it was new, but because it was naught; nor prohibiteth new to be made, but provideth that they shall not be read if they be mismade… till they be by good examination amended—except they be such translations as Wycliffe made, and Tyndale, that the malicious mind of the translator had in such wise handled it as it were labor lost to go about to amend them.”

“I long, by my troth,” quoth 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,” quoth 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 fetched him forth the constitutions provincial with Lyndwood thereupon, and turned him to the place in the title “De magistris.” Which when himself had read, he said he marveled much how it happened that in so plain a matter, men be so far abused “to report it so far wrong.”

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

The Fifteenth Chapter

The messenger moveth against the clergy that though they have made no law thereof, yet they will in deed suffer none English Bible in no man’s hand, but use to burn them where they find them—and sometimes to burn the man too. And for example he layeth one Richard Hunne, showing that the chancellor of London murdered him in prison and after hanged him (feigning that he hanged himself), and after condemned him of heresy… because he had
an English Bible; and so burned the Bible and him together. Whereunto the author answereth.

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

“Forsooth,” quoth I, “if this were so, then were it in my mind not well done. But I believe ye mistake it. Howbeit, what ye have seen, I cannot say. But myself have seen, and can show you, Bibles fair and old, written in English, which have been known and seen by the bishop of the diocese… and left in laymen’s hands—and women’s too—such as he knew for good and Catholic folk… that used it with devotion and soberness.

But of truth, all such as are found in the hands of heretics… they use to take away. But they do cause none to be burned, as far as ever I could wit, but only such as be found faulty. Whereof many be set forth with evil prologues or glosses maliciously made by Wycliffe and other heretics. For no good man would, I ween, be so mad to burn up the Bible wherein they found no fault… nor any law that letted it to be looked on and read.”

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

“Who told you this tale?” quoth I.
“Forsooth, divers honest men,” quoth he, “that saw it; and specially one that saw the man hanging in the bishop’s prison ere he was cut down. And he told me that it was well and clearly proved that the chancellor and his keepers had killed the man first… and then hanged him after. And that they had laid heresy to him only for hatred, that he sued a praemunire against divers persons, for a suit taken (about a mortuary) in the audience of the Archbishop of Canterbury. And then they ‘proved’ the heresy by nothing else but by the possession of a good English Bible. And, upon heresy so ‘proved’ against him whom they had hanged (lest he should say for himself), they burned up the Holy Scripture of God… and the body of a good man therewith. For I have heard him called a very honest person, and of a good substance.”

“Forsooth,” quoth I, “of good substance. He was, I think, well worth a thousand marks. And of his worldly conversation among the people I have heard no harm. But surely as touching his faith toward Christ, methinketh I may be bold to say that he was not honest. And as touching truth in words… he that hath told you this tale was not so honest in deed as methinketh ye take him for.”

“Why,” quoth he, “do ye know the matter well?”

“Forsooth,” quoth I, “so well I know it, from top to toe, that I suppose there be not very many men that knoweth it much better. For I have not only been divers times present myself at certain examinations thereof, but have also divers and many times sunderly talked with almost all such, except the dead man himself, as most knew of the matter. Which matter was many times in sundry places examined. But especially at Baynard’s Castle one day was it examined at great length; and by a long time every man being sent for before… and already there—all that could be found that anything could tell, or that had said they could anything tell, in the matter. And this examination was had before divers great lords, spiritual and temporal, and others of the King’s honorable Council… sent thither by His Highness for the nonce, of his blessed zeal and princely desire borne to the searching of the truth. Whereunto his gracious mind was much inclined; and
had been by a right honorable man informed... that there was one

Richard Hunne
	had showed a friend of his that he could ‘go take him by the sleeve,
that killed Hunne’—for Richard Hunne

was his name, whom ye speak of. I was

also myself present at the judgment given in Paul’s... whereupon

his books and his body were burned. And by all these things I very

well know that he of whom ye have heard this matter hath told

you tales far from the truth.”

“In good faith,” quoth your friend, “he told me one thing that

ye speak of now: that there was one that said he could ‘go take
him by the sleeve, that killed Richard Hunne’—and that he did so

indeed, before the lords, and came even there to the chancellor... and said, ‘My lords, this is he!’ But when he was asked how he

knew it, he confessed that it was by such an ‘unlawful craft’ as was

‘not taken for a proof.’ For it was, they say, by necromancy. (And the

bishops that were there would have had that man burned too, for

witchcraft.) And told me also that there was another which had

The King’s almoners have seen many men that had hanged themselves:

a man that had been long in

office under divers of the King’s almoners—
to whom the goods of such men as

kill themselves be appointed by the law, and his office, as deodands,
to be given in alms. This man, as I have heard say, showed unto

the lords, by such experience as he had, good and plain tokens

by which they perceived well that Hunne did never hang himself.

I have heard also that a spiritual man—and one that loved well

the chancellor, and was a laborer for that part—yet could not
deny before all the lords but that he had told a temporal man,

and a friend of his, that Hunne had never been accused of

heresy if he had never sued the praemunire. And by Saint Mary,

that was a shrewd word. Howbeit, in deed it went not so near
the matter as the other two things did.”

“Yes, in good faith,” quoth I—“all three like near, when they were all heard.

But of truth, many other things were there laid... that upon the

hearing seemed much more suspicious than these. Which yet

when they were answered... always lost more than half their strength.
But as for these three matters, I promise you, proved very trifles—and such as if ye had heard them, ye would have laughed at them seven years after."

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

   "I am loath," quoth I, "to let you… and lose your time in such trifles. Howbeit—since ye long so sore therefor—rather than ye should lose your child for them, ye shall have them, all three, as shortly as I can. First ye must understand that because the coming together of the lords from Greenwich to Baynard’s Castle for the trying out of the matter should not be frustrate, there was such diligence done before… that every man that aught had said therein… was already there against their coming. Where they began with the first point that ye spoke of, as the special motion whereupon the King’s Highness had sent them thither. Wherefore, after the rehearsal made of the cause of their coming, the greatest temporal lord there present said unto a certain servant of his own standing there beside, ‘Sir, ye told me that one showed you that he could “go take him by the sleeve, that killed Hunne.” Have ye brought him hither?’

   ‘‘Sir,’ quoth he, ‘if it like Your Lordship, this man it was that told me so’—pointing to one that he ha d caused to come thither. Then my lord asked that man, ‘How say ye, sir? Can ye do as ye said ye could?’

   ‘‘Forsooth, my lord,’ quoth he, ‘and it like Your Lordship, I said not so much; this gentleman did somewhat mistake me. But, indeed, I told him that I had a neighbor that told me he could do it.’

   ‘‘Where is that neighbor?’ quoth my lord.

   ‘‘This man, sir,’ quoth he, bringing forth one which had also been warned to be there. Then was he asked whether he had said that he could do it.

   ‘‘Nay, forsooth,’ quoth he, ‘my lord, I said not that I could do it myself, but I said that one told me that he could do it.’

   ‘‘Well,’ quoth my lord, ‘who told you so?’

   ‘‘Forsooth, my lord,’ quoth he, ‘my neighbor here.’

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1, 4 proved: (they) turned out (to be)  
5 lose: waste  
6 therefore: for it  
7–8 as shortly as I can: in as short a time as I can manage  
8 because: in order that  
10 trying out of: inquiry into  
11 before: ahead of time  
11–12 aught had said therein: had said anything about it  
12 against: in advance of  
12 their coming: i.e., the lords’ arrival  
13–14 as the special motion: it being the specific ground  
14, 21 thither: there  
15 after the rehearsal made of: after making the speech about  
16 temporal: secular  
17 beside: i.e., beside him  
18, 21, 29, 33 one: someone  
18 showed: told  
19 hither: here  
20, 24 like: please  
21, 34 so: that  
21 caused: gotten  
24, 32, 35 forsooth: actually  
24 and: if  
29 which: who  
30 warned: summoned
“Then was that man asked, ‘Sir, know you one that can tell who killed Richard Hunne?’

‘Forsooth,’ quoth he, ‘and it like Your Lordship, I said not that I knew one surely that could tell who had killed him; but I said, indeed, that I know one which I thought verily could tell who killed him.’

‘Well,’ quoth the lords, ‘at the last, yet, with much work, we come to somewhat. But whereby think you that he can tell?’

‘Nay, forsooth, my lord,’ quoth he, ‘it is a woman. I would she were here with Your Lordships now!’

‘Well,’ quoth my lord, ‘woman or man, all is one. She shall be had, wheresoever she be.’

‘By my faith, my lords,’ quoth he, ‘and she were with you, she would tell you wonders. For, by God, I have wist her tell many marvelous things ere now.’

‘Why,’ quoth the lords, ‘what have you heard her told?’

‘Forsooth, my lords,’ quoth he, ‘if a thing had been stolen, she would have told who had it! And therefore I think she could as well tell who killed Hunne as who stole a horse.’

‘Surely,’ said the lords, ‘so think all we too, I trow. But how could she tell it? By the devil?’

‘Nay, by my troth, I trow,’ quoth he, ‘for I could never see her use any worse way than looking in one’s hand.’

‘Therewith the lords laughed, and asked, ‘What is she?’

‘Forsooth, my lords,’ quoth he, ‘an Egyptian; and she was lodged here at Lambeth, but she is gone overseas now. Howbeit, I trow she be not in her own country yet; for they say it is a great way hence, and she went over little more than a month ago.’

“Now, forsooth,” quoth your friend, “this process came to a wise purpose! Here was a great post whittled to a pudding prick! But I pray you, to what point came the second matter—of him that had been in office under so many of the King’s almoners… that he knew by his own experience, and proved, that Richard Hunne had not hanged himself?”
"Forsooth," quoth I, "he was called in next. And then was he asked
whereby he knew it. But would God ye had seen his countenance!
The man had of likelihood said somewhat too far, and was
much amazed—and looked as though his eyes would have fallen
out of his head into the lords’ laps. But to the question he answered
and said that he saw that very well… for he saw him ‘both ere he
was taken down and after.’"'

"‘What then?’ quoth the lords. ‘So did there many more… which yet
upon the sight could not tell that.’

"‘No, my lords,’ quoth he—‘but I have another insight in such things
than other men have.’

"‘What insight?’ quoth they.

"‘Forsooth,’ quoth he, ‘it is not unknown that I have occupied a great
while under divers of the King’s almoners… and have seen and
considered many that have hanged themselves; and thereby, if I see
one hang, I can tell anon whether he hanged himself or not.’

"‘By what token can you tell?’ quoth the lords.

"‘Forsooth,’ quoth he, ‘I cannot tell the tokens; but I perceive it
well enough by mine own sight.’

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

"‘Yea, forsooth, my lord,’ quoth he, ‘even as Your Lordship saith! For
I know it well enough myself, I have seen so many by reason of
mine office.’

"‘Why,’ quoth another lord merrily, ‘your office hath no more

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2 his countenance: the look on his face
3 of likelihood: probably
4 said somewhat too far: gone somewhat too far in what he had said
4 much amazed: very terror-stricken
5, 21–22 would have fallen: were about to fall
8 what then: so what // which: who
13 occupied: served; been in employment
14 divers: several
15 considered: scrutinized
16 one hang: someone hanging
16 anon: right away
17, 18, 27 token(s): indication(s)
22 in: into // forbear: keep from
23 surely: certainly // by yourself: all your own; that no one else has
24 as: just as
26 right: genuine
28 marks: signs; criteria
31 even as: (it is) just as
experience in hanging than hath a hangman... and yet he cannot tell!'  
"'Nay, sir,' quoth he, 'and it like Your Lordship, he meddleth not with them that hang themselves, as I do!'  
"'Well,' quoth one of the lords, 'how many of them have ye meddled with in your days?'  
"'With many, my lord,' quoth he, 'for I have been officer under two almoners, and therefore I have seen many.'  
"'How many?' quoth one of the lords.  
"'I cannot tell,' quoth he, 'how many; but I wot well I have seen many.'  
"'Have ye seen,' quoth one, 'a hundred?'  
"'Nay,' quoth he, 'not a hundred.'  
"'Have ye seen fourscore and ten?' Thereat a little he studied, as one standing in a doubt, and that were loath to lie; and at last he said that he thought nay, not fully fourscore and ten. Then was he asked whether he hath seen twenty. And thereto, without any sticking, he answered nay, not twenty. Thereat the lords laughed well, to see that he was so sure that he had not seen twenty... and was in doubt whether he had seen fourscore and ten. Then was he asked whether he had seen fifteen. And thereto he said shortly nay. And in like wise of ten. At last they came to five... and from five to four... and there he began to study again. Then came they to three... and then, for shame, he was fain to say that he had seen so many and more too. But when he was asked when, whom, and in what place, necessity drove him at last unto the truth—whereby it appeared that he never had seen but one in all his life. And that was an Irish fellow called Crookshank, whom he had seen hanging in an old barn. And when all his cunning was come to this, he was bidden walk like himself. And one said unto him that because he was not yet cunning enough in the craft of hanging, it was pity that he had no more experience thereof by one more.'  
"'Forsooth,' quoth your friend, 'this was a mad fellow! Came the third tale to as wise a point?'  
"'Ye shall hear,' quoth I. 'The temporal man that had reported it upon
the mouth of the spiritual man was a good worshipful man, and for
his troth and worship was in great credit. And surely the
spiritual man was a man of worship also… and well known both
for cunning and virtuous. And therefore the lords much marveled,
knowing them both for such as they were, that they should
be likely to find either the one or the other either make an
untrue report or untruly deny the truth. And first the
temporal man, before the lords, in the hearing of the spiritual person
standing by, said…

“‘My lords all, as help me God and holydom, Master Doctor
here said unto me his own mouth… that if Hunne had not sued the
praemunire, he should never have been accused of heresy.’

“‘How say you, Master Doctor?’ quoth the lords. ‘Was that
true? Or else why said you so?’

“‘Surely, my lords,’ quoth he, ‘I said not allthing so; but marry,
this I said in deed: that if Hunne had not been accused of heresy,
he would never have sued the praemunire.’

“‘Lo, my lords,’ quoth the other, ‘I am glad ye find me a true man!
Will ye command me any more service?’

“‘Nay, by my troth,’ quoth one of the lords, ‘not in this matter; by
my will, ye may go when ye will. For I have espied, good man,
so the words be all one, it maketh no matter to you which way
they stand, but all is one to you—a horse mill and a mill horse,
“Drink ere ye go” and “Go ere you drink.”’

“‘Nay, my lords,’ quoth he, ‘I will not drink, God yield you.’ And
therewith he made courtesy and went his way, leaving some of the
lords laughing to see the good plain old honest man, how
that, as contrary as their two tales were, yet when he heard them
both again, he marked no difference between them, but took
them both for one… because the words were one.”

“By my troth,” quoth your friend, “these three things came merrily
to pass, and I would not for a good thing but I had heard

Misunderstanding

them. For here may a man see that misunderstanding
maked misreporting,

and a tale that flieth through many mouths catcheth many new
feathers… which when they be pulled away again… leave it as

1, 3, 8 spiritual man / person: churchman 1 worshipful: distinguished // for: because of
2 troth: integrity 2, 3 worship: distinction 2 great credit: high repute // surely: certainly
4 cunning: learned // much marveled: highly doubted 7 untruly: dishonestly
8 temporal man: layman 10 as: so // holydom: all things holy
10, 13 Master Doctor: (this) eminent scholar 12, 17 praemunire: See note for 318/6.
12 should: would 14 why said you so: why did you say that 15 surely: assuredly
15 said not allthing so: didn’t say it all in that way 15–16 marry… deed: indeed, this is what I
actually said 18 true: truthful 20, 31 troth: word 20–21 by my will: as far as I’m concerned
21 ye will: you wish 22 so: (that) as long as 22 be all one: are all the same // matter: difference
22–23 which way they stand: what order they are in 23 all is one: it’s all the same
25 yield: reward 26 courtesy: obeisance (to the lords) 30 one: the same
31–32 came merrily pass: turned out to be very funny
32–33 for a good thing but I had heard them: i.e., for anything have missed hearing them
36 away again: back off
pilled as a coot, and sometimes as bare as a bird’s ass. But I think
verily, for all this, there was great evidence given against the
chancellor; for he was at length indicted of Hunne’s death, and was a
great while in prison, and in conclusion never durst abide the
trial of twelve men for his acquittal, but was fain by friendship to
get a pardon. But I beseech you, for my mind’s sake, show me
what thought yourself therein.”

“Of truth,” quoth I, “there were divers suspicious things laid
against him—and all those well and substantially answered again
for him. Howbeit, upon the telling of a tale oftentimes happeth…
that when all is heard that can be said therein, yet shall the hearers
some think one way and some another. And therefore, though I
cannot think but that the jury, which were right honest men,
found the verdict as themselves thought in their own conscience
to be truth—yet in mine own mind, for aught that ever I heard
thereof in my life, as help me God, I could never think it.”

“If he had not been guilty,” quoth your friend, “he would never have
sued his pardon.”

“Yes,” quoth I, “right wise men have I heard say ere this… that they
will never refuse neither God’s pardon nor the King’s. It were no
wisdom in a matter of many suspicious tales, be they never so
false, to stand on twelve men’s mouths where one may find a
surer way. But I think verily that if he had been guilty, he

King Henry VIII

should never have gotten his pardon. For

in this world a prince of more benign nature, nor of more
merciful mind, than is our sovereign lord that now reigneth
(and long mote reign!) upon us, whereby never king could
find in his heart more freely to forgive and forget offenses done and
committed unto himself: yet hath His Highness such a fervent
affection to right and justice in other men’s causes, and such a
tender zeal to the conservation of his subjects… of whose lives his
high wisdom considereth many to stand in peril by the
giving of pardon to a few willful murderers… that never was there

1 pilled: unfeathered  3 at length: eventually  // of: with
4 in conclusion: in the end  4–5 durst . . . of: dared stand trial by
5–6 was . . . pardon: had no choice but to get via friendship a pardon
6 show: tell  8 divers: several  // laid: charged  9 well and: good and; quite
9 substantially: solidly  10 for him: in his favor 13, 19 right: very
13 honest: honorable; upstanding  14–15 found . . . truth: i.e., determined and
gave the verdict that they themselves, in their own consciences, thought to be the
right one, the one corresponding to the truth 15 aught: anything 16 as: so
16 it: i.e., that it was 18 sued: petitioned
20–21 were no wisdom: would not be wise 21 never so: no matter how
22 stand: be dependent on  // may: can 23 surer way: safer route
24 should: would  25 trow: believe  26 in: into  28 mote: may (he)
28 never king: never a king; never was there a king who 31 affection: passion
31, 32 to: for  34 willful murderers: people who commit deliberate homicide
king, I believe, that ever wore the crown in this realm, which hath in so many years given unto such folk so few. And therefore I make myself sure that in such a willful, purpensed, heinous, cruel deed as this had been if it had been true, all the friends that could have been found for the chancellor in this world could never have gotten his pardon to pass in such wise... had it not been that upon the report of all the circumstances, the King's high prudence, which—without flattery!—pierceth as deep into the bottom of a doubtful matter as ever I saw man in my life, had well perceived his innocence. And since I verily believe that if he had been guilty, he never could have gotten, in such a heinous murder, any pardon of the King's Highness, I dare make myself much more bold of his innocence now. For ye shall understand that he never sued pardon therefor; but, after long examination of the matter, as well the chancellor as the others... being indicted of the deed, and arraigned upon the indictment in the King's bench... pleaded that they were not guilty, and thereupon the King's Grace—being well and sufficiently informed of the truth, and, of his blessed disposition, not willing that there should in his name any false matter be maintained—gave in commandment to his attorney to confess their pleas to be true without any further trouble. Which thing in so faithful a prince is a clear declaration that the matter laid to the chancellor was untrue.

“And as for myself, in good faith, as I told you before, I never heard in my life (and yet have I heard all, I ween, that well could be said) therein anything that moved me, after both the parties heard, to think that he should be guilty.

“And besides all this, considering that Hunne was (as they that well know him say he was indeed), though he were a fair dealer among his neighbors, yet a man high-minded and set on the glory of a victory... which he hoped to have in the praemunire—whereof he much boasted, as they said, among his familiar friends, that he trusted to be spoken of long after his days, and have his matter in the Years and Terms called ‘Hunne’s Case.’ Which when he perceived would go against his purpose, and that in the temporal law.
law he should not win his spurs—and, over that, in the spiritual
law perceived so much of his secret sores unwrapped and discovered...
that he began to fall in fear of worldly shame—it is to me
much more likely that for weariness of his life he rid himself
out thereof (which manner of affection we see not seldom happen),
especially since the devil might, peradventure, join therewith a
marvelous hope of that which after happed: that the suspicion of
his death might be laid to the charge and peril of the chancellor.
This is, I say, much more likely to me than the thing
whereof I never heard the like before: that the bishop’s chancellor
should kill in the Lollards’ Tower a man so sore suspected, and convicted,
of heresy, whereby he might bring himself in business, whereas
if he hated the man (for kill him he would not, ye wot well, if he
loved him), he might easily bring him to shame and peradventure
to shameful death also.”

“In good faith,” quoth your friend, “wist I that it were true that he
was a heretic indeed, and in peril to be so proved, I would
well think that in malice and despair he hanged himself.”

“God,” quoth I, “knoweth of allthing the truth. But what I have
heard therein, that shall I show you.

“Myself was present in Paul’s when the bishop, in the presence
of the mayor and the aldermen of the city, condemned him for
Huene was convicted of a heretic after his death. And then
were there read openly the depositions,
by which it was well proved that he was convicted as well of divers
other heresies as of misbelief toward the Holy Sacrament of the
Altar. And thereupon was the judgment given that his body
should be burned; and so was it.

“Now this is,” quoth I, “to me a full proof. For I assure you, the bishop
was a very wise man, a virtuous, and a cunning.”

“By Saint Mary,” quoth he, “the proof is the better by so much!”

“I shall tell you,” quoth I, “another thing... which when ye hear, ye
shall peradventure believe it yet the better.”

“That would I gladly know,” quoth he. “For as far as I can hear,
never man had him suspect of any such thing before.”
“Forsooth,” quoth I, “that can I not tell. But so it happed that—as I remember, six or seven years after that Hunne was thus hanged and his body burned for a heretic—there was one in Essex, a carpenter that used to make pumps, which had intended, with others such as he was himself, to do great robbery; and thereupon was he brought unto the Court. Where, by the commandment of the King’s Grace, a great, honorable estate of this realm and myself had him in examination. Wherein, among other things, he confessed that he had long held divers heresies… which he said that his brother, being a clerk of a church, had taught both his father and him. And I promise you, those heresies were of a height. Then he showed us what other cunning masters of that school he had heard read, and specially in a place which he named us in London… where he said that such heretics were wont to resort to their readings, in a chamber, at midnight. And when we asked him the names of them that were wont to haunt those midnight lectures, he rehearsed us divers—and among others he named Richard Hunne. Whereof we somewhat marveled in our minds; but nothing said we thereto, but let him rehearse on, all such as he could call to mind. And when he stopped and could remember no more, then asked we of them that he had named… what they were and where they dwelled. And he told us of some of them that were convicted, and some that were fled, and some that were yet at that time dwelling still in the town. And in the way, when we asked him what man was that ‘Hunne’ that he spoke of, he told us his person and his house. ‘And where is he now?’ said we. ‘Marry,’ quoth he, ‘I went to Tournai, and when I came thence again, then heard I say that he was hanged in the Lollards’ Tower, and his body burned for a heretic.’ And thus there learned we long after… that Hunne had haunted heretics’ lectures by night long before; which we declared unto the King’s Highness as he had confessed. And His Highness, though he was sorry that any man should be so lewd, yet highly did rejoice that the goodness of God brought such hidden mischief more and more to light. So after had we (by the King’s commandment) that man’s brother in examination; which did, indeed, confess nothing, neither of the felonies nor of the heresies; but yet his brother did abide by them and avowed

3 one: someone  4 intended: set out  5 do great robbery: commit grand larceny  
7 honorable estate: prestigious dignitary  9, 17 divers: several  10 being: who was  
10 clerk of a church: a parish clerk  11 promise: assure  11–12 of a height: serious (ones)  
12 showed: told  // cunning masters: learned teachers  13 read: give lectures  
13 specially: particularly  15 resort: go  // readings: lectures  // chamber: private room  
17 rehearsed: named  18 whereof: we somewhat marveled: which we somewhat wondered at  
19 rehearse: i.e., keep giving names  21 of them: about those  22 what: who  25 in: along  
26 his person and his house: what he looked like and what house he lived in  27 marry: goodness  
27 thence again: back from there  28 heard I say: I heard it said  31 declared: related  
31 he: i.e., that man  33 lewd: wicked  34 mischief: evildoing  // after: afterward  
36 which: who  36, 37 of: about  36 felonies: their crimes of grand larceny  
37 abide by them: i.e., stand by what he had said about them
them in his face… with such marks and tokens as it might well appear that he said truth. And surely marvel were it if he would falsely have feigned such heinous things against his own brother, his own father, and himself, being thereto nothing compelled, nor put either in pain or fear. Now was the father dead; and others could we not come by… whom we might further examine of that night school, saving that he which, as I told you, confessed this matter… showed us also, at the first time, of one man in London, taken for good and honest, which was, as he said, a scholar also of his brother in those heresies; which man, for his honesty, we forbore to meddle with till we should have the other brother. Whom as soon as we had in hands, and that he was committed to the Marshalsea, this other man which was, as I told you, detected unto us for a heretic and a scholar of his… came to me to labor and sue for him, pretending that he did it for charity. And forasmuch as we thought we could not fail of him when we would have him, we forbore, therefore, to examine him till we should have examined the other whom he labored for. But then were we not aware in what wise we should be disappointed of him. For so mishappened it indeed… that, after his being at me to labor for him whose scholar in heresy he was detected to be, he was in his own house suddenly struck and slain. And that wretched end had he. What conscience he died with, God knoweth; for I can tell you no further.”

“By Saint John!” quoth your friend. “But, upon the whole tale, it seemeth to me very clear that Hunne was himself not clear of the matter.”

“Surely,” quoth I, “so seemed it, as far as I could wit, unto as many as ever heard it; and would yet, I ween, have seemed so more clearly if they had been present at the examinations… and seen under what manner the man came forth therewith.”

“But yet,” quoth your friend, “as for his English Bible… though Hunne were himself a heretic, yet might the Book be good enough.
And no good reason is there why a good Book should be burned with an evil man."

"Ye call me well home," quoth I, "and put me well in mind. For that was the thing whereby ye took occasion to talk of Hunne; of whom we talked so long... that at last I had forgotten wherefore and whereupon we entered into that communication. And yet make those Books not a little to the matter that we had in hand; I mean, toward the perceiving what opinion that Hunne was of. For surely, at such time as he was denounced for a heretic, there lay his English Bible open (and some other English books of his), that every man might see the places noted with his own hand—such words... and in such wise... that there would no wise man that good were... have any great doubt, after the sight thereof, what naughty minds the men had, both he that so noted them and he that so made them. I remember not now the specialties of the matter, nor the formal words as they were written. But this I remember well: that, besides other things framed for the favor of divers other heresies, there were in the prologue of that Bible such words touching the Blessed Sacrament... as good Christian men did much abhor to hear, and which gave the readers undoubted occasion to think that the Book was written after Wycliffe's copy... and by him translated into our tongue. And yet whether the Book be burned or secretly kept I cannot surely say. But truly, were the clergy of my mind, it should be somewhere reserved... for the perpetual proof of the matter, there hath gone so much suspicious rumor thereof. Which, as I believe, were all well answered and the mind fully satisfied of any man that wise were and good therewith... that once had overlooked, read, and advisedly considered that Book."

The Sixteenth Chapter

The messenger rehearseth some causes which he hath heard laid by some of the clergy wherefore the Scripture should not be suffered in English. And the author showeth his mind—that it were convenient to have the Bible in English—and therewith endeth the Third Book.
“Sir,” quoth your friend, “yet, for all this, can I see no cause why the clergy should keep the Bible out of laymen’s hands… that can no more but their mother tongue.”

“I had went,” quoth I, “that I had proved you plainly that they keep it not from them! For I have showed you that they keep none from

What manner of English them… but such translation as be either Bibles are kept from men not yet approved for good… or such as be already reproved for naught—as Wycliffe’s was, and Tyndale’s. For as for other, old ones, that were before Wycliffe’s days, remain lawful—and be in some folks’ hands had and read.”

“Ye say well,” quoth he. “But yet, as women say, somewhat it was always that the cat winked when her eye was out. Surely so is it not for naught that the English Bible is in so few men’s hands… when so many would so fain have it.”

“That is very truth,” quoth I. “For I think that though the favorers of a sect of heretics be so fervent in the setting forth of their sect… that they let not to lay their money together and make a purse among them for the printing of an evil-made or evil-translated book… which though it hap to be forbidden and burned, yet some be sold ere they be spied, and each of them lose but their part: yet I think there will no printer lightly be so hot to put any Bible in print at his own charge—whereof the loss should lie wholly in his own neck—and then hang upon a doubtful trial whether the first copy of his translation was made before Wycliffe’s days or since. For if it were made since, it must be approved before the printing. And surely how it hath happed that in all this while, God hath either not suffered or not provided that any good, virtuous man hath had the mind in faithful wise to translate it, and thereupon either the clergy or at the leastwise some one bishop to approve it, this can I nothing tell. But howsoever it be, I have heard, and hear, so much spoken in the matter… and so much doubt made therein… that peradventure it would let and withdraw any one bishop from the admitting thereof… without the assent of the remnant. And whereas many things be laid against it, yet is

2–3 laymen’s . . . tongue: i.e., the hands of lay people who know no language but their native one
4 went: thought  5 showed: told  7, 8 for: as
8 reproved: condemned // naught: no good  9 were: came into existence
10 remain: i.e., they remain  12 ye say well: what you say is true
12–13 somewhat it was always: somehow it always happened  13 her eye: i.e., one of her eyes
14 naught: nothing  15 fain: love to  16 very truth: i.e., very true // though: even if
16 favorers: partisans  17 setting forth: promoting  18 let not: do not forbear // lay: put
18 purse: fund  19 evil-: ill-; perniciously // made: written
21 ere they be spied: before they are caught sight of // their part: their own share (of the cost)
22 lightly: likely  23–24 in his own neck: on his own shoulders
24 hang upon: be at the mercy of // doubtful trial: dicey investigation as to
28 suffered: let it happen  31 nothing: not at all  32 in: on
32–33 doubt made therein: apprehension expressed about it  33 let: hinder
33 withdraw: deter; keep back  34 admitting: allowing
35 remnant: rest // whereas: while // laid: adduced
Why the clergy doth not suffer the Bible to be had in English

there in my mind not one thing that more putth good men of the clergy in doubt to suffer it than this: that they see, sometimes, much of the worse sort more fervent in

the calling for it… than them whom we find far better. Which maketh them to fear lest such men desire it for no good, and lest if it were had in every man’s hand, there would great peril arise, and that seditious people should do more harm therewith… than good and honest folk should take fruit thereby. Which fear, I promise you, nothing feareth me… but that, whosoever would of their malice or folly take harm of that thing that is of itself ordained to do all men good, I would never for the avoiding of their harm… take from others the profit which they might take and nothing deserve to lose. For else, if the abuse of a good thing should cause the taking away thereof from others that would use it well, Christ should himself never have been born, nor brought his faith into the world… nor God should never have made it, neither… if he should, for the loss of those that would be damned wretches, have kept away the occasion of reward from them that would with help of his grace endeavor them to deserve it.”

“I am sure,” quoth your friend, “ye doubt not but that I am fully and wholly of your mind in this matter, that the Bible should be in our English tongue. But yet, that the clergy is of the contrary and would not have it so—that appeareth well in that they suffer it not to be so. And over that, I hear in every place, almost, where I find any learned man of them, their minds all set thereon to keep the Scripture from us. And they seek out for that part every rotten reason that they can find… and set them forth solemnly to the show… though five of

Gn 3:1–7, 22–24; Mk 4:33–34 those reasons be not worth a fig. For they begin as far as our first father, Adam… and show us that his wife and he fell out of Paradise with desire of knowledge and cunning. Now, if this would serve, it must from the knowledge and study of Scripture drive every man—priest and other—lest it drive all out of Paradise.

Then say they that God taught his disciples many things apart… because the people should not hear it; and therefore they would the people should not now be suffered to read all. Yet they
say further that it is hard to translate the Scripture out of one tongue into another—and especially, they say, into ours. Which they call a tongue vulgar and barbarous. But of all things, especially they say that Scripture is the food of the soul... and that the common people be as infants, that must be fed but with milk and pap; and if we have any stronger meat, it must be champed before by the nurse, and so put into the baby’s mouth. But methink though they make us all infants, they shall find many a shrewd brain among us... that can perceive chalk from cheese well enough, and if they would once take us our meat in our own hand, we be not so evil-toothed but that within a while they shall see us champ it ourselves as well as they. For let them call us young babies and they will—yet, by God, they shall, for all that, well find in some of us that an old knave is no child!"

“Surely,” quoth I, “such things as ye speak... is the thing that, as I somewhat said before, putteth good folk in fear to suffer the Scripture in our English tongue. Not for the reading and receiving... but for the busy champing thereof, and for much meddling with such parts thereof as least will agree with their capacities. For undoubtedly, as ye spoke of our mother Eve, inordinate appetite of knowledge is a means to drive any man out of Paradise. And inordinate is the appetite when men unlearned though they read it in their language... will be busy to ensearch and dispute the great secret mysteries of Scripture... which though they hear, they be not able to perceive. This thing is plainly forbidden us that be not appointed nor instructed thereto. And therefore holy Saint Gregory Nazianzen, that great, solemn doctor, sore toucheth and reproveth all such bold, busy meddlers in the Scripture, and showeth that it is in Exodus... by Moses ascending up upon the hill, where he spoke with God, and the people tarrying beneath... signified that the people be forbidden to presume to meddle with the high mysteries of Holy Scripture, but ought to be content to tarry beneath and meddle no higher than is meet for them, but, receiving from the height
of the hill, by Moses, that that is delivered them—that is to wit, the
laws and precepts that they must keep, and the points they
must believe—look well thereupon, and often, and meddle well therewith…
not to dispute it, but to fulfill it. And as for the high, secret
mysteries of God, and hard texts of his Holy Scripture, let us know
that we be so unable to ascend up so high on that hill… that it shall
become us to say to the preachers appointed thereto as the people
said unto Moses—‘Hear you God, and let us hear you.’ And surely, the
blessed holy doctor Saint Jerome greatly complaineth and
rebuketh that lewd homely manner that the common lay people—men
and women—were in his days so bold in the meddling, disputing,
and expounding of Holy Scripture… and
showeth plainly that they shall have evil
proof therein… that will reckon themselves to
understand it by themselves, without a reader. For it is a thing that
requireth good help, and long time, and a whole mind given
greatly thereto. And surely, since, as the holy apostle Saint Paul in
his church that he will have some readers, and some hearers; some
teachers, and some learners: we do plainly pervert and turn upside down
the right order of Christ’s church when the one party meddleth with
the other’s office. Plato, the great philosopher, specially forbiddeth such as be not
admitted thereunto nor men meet therefor… to meddle much and
embusy themselves in reasoning and disputing upon the
temporal laws of the city; which would not be reasoned upon but
by folk meet therefor, and in place convenient. For else, they that
cannot very well attain to perceive them… begin to mislike,
dispraise, and contemn them. Whereof followeth the breach of
the laws, and disorder of the people. For till a law be changed by
authority, it rather ought to be observed than contemned; or
else the example of one law boldly broken and set at naught
The common people long to
live all at liberty.
be used like. And commonly the best
laws shall worst like much of the common

3 thereupon: at all of that // meddle well therewith: get plenty involved with it
4 dispute: discuss // secret: esoteric  8 surely: indeed  9 holy doctor: theologian
9 complaineth: bemoans  10 rebuketh: castigates // lewd: loathsome
10 homely: offhand  11 meddling: tackling // disputing: discussing
13 showeth plainly: states straight-out  13–14 evil proof: a bad outcome
15 a reader: (the help of) an expert  18 divers: several
20 some: i.e., some be  22 meddleth with: encroaches upon  24 specially: expressly
25, 28 meet: qualified  25–26 meddle...embusy: much involve and busy
26 reasoning: discussing // disputing: holding debates  27 would: should
28 place convenient: an appropriate place  29 attain: manage
29 perceive: understand // mislike: dislike  30 dispraise: criticize
30, 32 contemn(ed): scorn(ed)  30 breach: breaking  33 set at naught: disregarded
34 waxeth: becomes // remnant: rest  35 used like: treated the same way
36 worst like: least please // much: a lot
people... which most long (if they might be heard and
followed) to live all at liberty, under none at all. Now, if Plato, so
wise a man, so thought good in temporal laws, things of men’s
making: how much is it less meet for every man boldly to
meddle with the exposition of Holy Scripture—so devised and
indited by the high wisdom of God... that it far exceedeth, in many
places, the capacity and perceiving of man! It was also provided by
the Emperor, in the law civil, that the common people should never
be so bold to keep dispicions upon the faith or Holy Scripture;
nor that any such thing should be used among them, or before them.
And therefore, as I said before, the special fear in this matter is
lest we would be too busy in ‘champing’ of the Scripture ourselves—
which ye say we were able enough to do; which undoubtedly the wisest
and the best-learned... and he that therein hath by many years
bestowed his whole mind... is yet unable to do. And then far more
unable must he needs be... that boldly will upon the first reading,
because he knoweth the words, take upon him therefore to teach
other men the sentence, with peril of his own soul and other
men’s too... by the bringing men into mad ways, sects, and
heresies... such as heretics have of old brought up and the
Church hath condemned. And thus, in these matters, if the common
people might be bold to ‘champ’ it, as ye say, and to dispute it, then
should ye have the more blind the more bold; the more ignorant the more busy;
the lesser wit the more inquisitive; the more fool the more talkative
of great doubts and high questions of Holy Scripture and of God’s
great and secret mysteries—and this not soberly, of any good
affection, but presumptuously and un reverently, at meat and at
meal. And there, when the wine were in and the wit out, would
they take upon them with foolish words and blasphemy to handle
Holy Scripture in more homely manner than a song of Robin Hood.
And some would, as I said, solemnly take upon them, like as they were
ordinary readers, to interpret the text at their pleasure—and therewith
fall themselves, and draw down others with them, into seditious
sects and heresies; whereby the Scripture of God should lose his
honor and reverence, and be, by such un reverent and unsitting
demeanor, among much people quite and clean abused... unto the
contrary of that holy purpose that God ordained it for. Whereas if
How laymen should read the Scripture we would no further meddle therewith but well and devoutly read it… and in that that is plain and evident, as God’s commandments and his holy counsels, endeavor ourselves to follow, with help of his grace asked thereunto; and in his great and marvelous miracles consider his Godhead; and in his lowly birth, his godly life, and his bitter Passion, exercise ourselves in such meditations, prayer, and virtues as the matter shall administer us occasion, acknowledging our own ignorance where we find a doubt; and, therein leaning to the faith of the Church, wrestle with no such text as might bring us in a doubt and weresty of any of those articles wherein every good Christian man is clear: by this manner of reading can no man nor woman take hurt in Holy Scripture. Now, then, the things, on the other side, that unlearned people can never by themselves attain—as in the Psalms and the prophets and divers parts of the Gospel… where the words be sometimes spoken as in the person of the prophet himself, sometimes as in the person of God, sometimes of some others (as angels, devils, or men), and sometimes of our Savior Christ (not always of one fashion, but sometimes as God, sometimes as man; sometimes as head of this mystical body his Church Militant here in earth, sometimes as head of his Church Triumphant in heaven; sometimes as in the person of his sensual parts of his own body, otherwhile in the person of some particular part of his body mystical), and these things, with many others, oftentimes interchanged, and suddenly sundry things of diverse matters diversely mingled together—all these things which is not possible for unlearned men to attain unto, it were more than madness for them to meddle with… but leave all these things to them whose whole study is beset thereupon, and to the preachers appointed thereunto… which may show them such things in time and place:

Temper thy sermon after thy audience. convenient, with reverence and authority, the sermon so tempered as may be meet and convenient always for the present.
audience. Whereunto it appeareth that our Savior himself, and his apostles after him, had ever special respect. And therefore, as I say, forsooth, I can in no wise agree with you that it were meet for men unlearned to be busy with the ‘champing’ of Holy Scripture... but to have it ‘champed’ unto them. For that is the preachers’ part—and theirs that after long study are admitted to read and expound it. And to this intent weigh all the words, as far as I perceive, of all holy doctors that anything have written in this matter. But

There can be no reason why the Bible should not be translated into English. never meant they, as I suppose, the forbidding of the Bible to be read in any vulgar tongue. Nor I never yet heard any reason laid why it were not convenient to have the Bible translated into the English tongue... but all those reasons, seemed they never so gay and glorious at the first sight, yet when they were well examined, they might, in effect, for aught that I can see, as well be laid against the holy writers that wrote the Scripture in the Hebrew tongue, and against the blessed evangelists that wrote the Scripture in Greek, and against all those, in like wise, that translated it out of every of those tongues into Latin, as to their charge that would well and faithfully translate it out of Latin into our English tongue. For as for that our tongue is called barbarous, is but a fantasy. For so is, as every learned man knoweth, every strange language to other. And if they would call it barren of words—there is no doubt but it is plenteous enough to express our minds in anything whereof one man hath used to speak with another. Now, as touching the difficulty which a translator findeth in expressing well and lively the sentence of his author—which is hard always to do so surely but that he shall sometimes diminish, either of the sentence or of the grace that it beareth in the former tongue—that point hath lain in their light that have translated the Scripture already, either out of Greek into Latin or out of Hebrew into any of them both, as by many translations which we read already... to them that be learned appeareth. Now, as touching the harm that may grow by such blind bayards as will, when they read the Bible in English, be more busy than will become them: they that touch that point harp upon the right string, and
touch truly the great harm that were likely to grow to some folk—howbeit, not by the occasion, yet, of the English translation, but by the occasion of their own lewdness and folly; which yet were not, in my mind, a sufficient cause to exclude the translation, and to put other folk from the benefit thereof, but, rather, to make provision against such abuse... and let a good thing go forth. No wise

No good thing ought to be put away because of the misuse thereof.

Nor this letted not, as I said, the Scripture to be first written in a vulgar tongue. For the Scripture, as I said before, was not written but in a vulgar tongue, such as the whole people understood; nor in no secret ciphers, but such common letters as almost every man could read. For neither was the Hebrew nor the Greek tongue, nor the Latin, neither, any other speech than such as all the people spoke. And therefore if we should lay that it were evil done to translate the Scripture into our tongue... because it is vulgar and common to every Englishman: then had it been as evil done to translate it into Greek or into Latin, or to write the New Testament first in Greek or the Old Testament in Hebrew, because both those tongues were as very vulgar as ours. And yet should there by this reason also not only the Scripture be kept out of our tongue... but, over that, should the reading thereof be forbidden both all such lay people and all such priests, too, as can no more than their grammar... and very scantily that. All which company, though they can understand the words, be yet as far from the perceiving of the sentence in hard and doubtful texts... as were our women... if the Scripture were translated to our own language. Howbeit, of truth, seldom hath it been seen that any sect of heretics hath begun of such unlearned folk as nothing could else but the language wherein they read the Scripture; but there hath always commonly these sects sprung of the pride of such folk... as had with the knowledge of the tongue some high persuasion in themselves of their own learning besides. To whose authority some other folk have soon after—part of malice, part of simpleness, and much part of pleasure and delight in newfangledness—fallen in, and
increased the faction; but the head hath ever commonly been either some proud learned man… or at the least, besides the language, some proud smatterer in learning. So that if we should for fear of heretics that might hap to grow thereby… keep the Scripture out of any tongue, or out of unlearned men’s hands: we should for like fear be fain to keep it out of all tongues, and out of learned men’s hands, too—and wot not whom we might trust therewith. Wherefore there is, as methinketh, no remedy but if any good thing shall go forward… somewhat must needs be adventured. And some folk will not fail A commodity ought not to be to be naught. Against which things kept back for the harm that provision must be made… that as much may come of it. good may grow, and as little harm come, as can be devised; and not to keep the whole commodity from any whole people… because of harm that by their own folly and fault may come to some part. As though a lewd surgeon would cut off the leg by the knee to keep the toe from the gout, or cut off a man’s head by the shoulders to keep him from the toothache. There is no treatise of Scripture so hard but that a good, virtuous man—or woman, either—shall somewhat find therein that shall delight and increase their devotion. Besides this: that every preaching shall be the more pleasant and fruitful unto them when they have in their mind the place of Scripture that A preacher in his preaching they shall there hear expounded. For must use discretion. wisdom for a preacher to use discretion in his preaching, and to have a respect unto the qualities and capacities of his audience; yet letteth that nothing… but that the whole audience may without harm have read and have already the scripture in mind that he shall in his preaching declare and expound. For no doubt is there but that God and his Holy Spirit hath so prudently tempered their speech through the whole corpus of Scripture… that every man may take good thereby, and no man harm… but he that will in the study thereof lean proudly to the folly of his own wit. For albeit that Christ did speak to the people in parables and forbore to tell some things to them also, because they were not as

yet able to bear them—and the apostles, in like wise, did sometimes
spare to speak to some people the things that they did not let
plainly to speak to some others: yet letteth all this nothing the translation
of the Scripture into our own tongue, no more than in the
Latin. Nor it is no cause to keep the corpus of Scripture out of the
hands of any Christian people so many years fastly confirmed in faith…
because Christ and his apostles used such provision in their
utterance of so strange and unheard mysteries either unto Jews,
paynims, or newly christened folk—except we would say that all the
expositions which Christ made himself upon his own
parables… unto his secret servants and disciples, withdrawn from
the people… should now, at this day, be kept in like wise from the
commoners, and no man suffered to read or hear them but those that
in his Church represent the state and office of his apostles. Which
there will, I wot well, no wise man say… considering that those
things which were then commonly most kept from the people… be
now most necessary for the people to know. As it well appeareth by
all such things, in effect, as our Savior at the time taught his
apostles apart. Whereof I would not, for my mind, withhold the
profit that one good, devout unlearned layman might take by the
reading, not for the harm that a hundred heretics would fall in by
their own willful abuse; no more than our Savior letted for the
weal of such as would be, with his grace, of his little chosen flock…
to come into this world and be ‘lapis offensionis, et petra scandali’

1 Pt 2:7–8

(‘the stone of stumbling, and the stone of falling’)—and ruin—to all the willful
wretches in the world beside. Finally, methinketh that the
constitution provincial of which we spoke right now hath
determined this question already. For when the clergy therein
agreed that the English Bibles should remain which were
translated before Wycliffe’s days—they consequently did agree
that to have the Bible in English was no hurt. And in that
they forbade any new translation to be read till it were approved
by the bishops, it appeareth well thereby that their intent was
that the bishop should approve it if he found it faultless—and
also, of reason, amend it where it were faulty… but if the man were
a heretic that made it, or the faults such and so many as it
were more easy to make it all new than mend it. As it happed, for
both points, in the translation of Tyndale.

Now, if it so be that it would haply be thought not a thing
meetly to be adventured to set all on a flush at once, and dash
rashly out Holy Scripture in every lewd fellow’s teeth—yet thinketh
me there might such a moderation be taken therein… as neither
good, virtuous lay folk should lack it… nor rude and rash brains

*Good counsel* abuse it. For it might be with diligence

well and truly translated by some good

Catholic and well-learned man—or by divers, dividing the
labor among them… and after, conferring their several parts
together, each with other. And after that might the work be allowed
and approved by the ordinaries, and by their authorities so put
unto print… as all the copies should come, whole, unto the bishop’s
hand. Which he may, after his discretion and wisdom, deliver
to such as he perceiveth honest, sad, and virtuous… with a good
admonition and fatherly counsel to use it reverently, with humble heart
and lowly mind, rather seeking therein occasion of devotion
than of dispicion. And providing as much as may be… that the
Book be after the decease of the party brought again and reverently
restored unto the ordinary. So that, as near as may be devised,
no man have it but of the ordinary’s hand… and by him thought and
reputed for such as shall be likely to use it to God’s honor and
merit of his own soul. Among whom if any be proved after to
have abused it, then the use thereof to be forbidden him, either forever
or till he be waxen wiser.”

“By our Lady,” quoth your friend, “this way misliketh not me. But who
should set the price of the Book?”

“Forsooth,” quoth I, “that reckon I a thing of little force. For neither
were it a great matter for any man, in manner, to give a groat or
twain above the mean price for a book of so great profit… nor for
the bishop to give them all free—wherein he might serve his
diocese with the cost of ten pounds, I think, or twenty marks. Which sum,
I dare say, there is no bishop but he would be glad to bestow
about a thing that might do his whole diocece so special a pleasure
with such a spiritual profit.”
“By my troth,” quoth he, “yet ween I that the people would grudge to have it on this wise delivered them, at the bishop’s hand… and had liefer pay for it to the printer than have it of the bishop free.”

“It might so happen with some,” quoth I. “But yet, in mine opinion, there were in that manner more willfulness than wisdom, or any good mind, in such as would not be content so to receive them. And therefore I would think, in good faith, that it would so fortune in few. But, before God, the more doubt would be lest they would grudge, and hold themselves sore aggrieved, that would require it and were haply denied it. Which I suppose would not often happen unto any honest householder… to be by his discretion reverently read in his house. But though it were not taken to every lewd lad in his own hands, to read a little, rudely, when he list, and then cast the Book at his heels—or, among others such as himself, to keep a

A pot parliament quodlibet and a pot parliament upon—I trow there will no wise man find a fault therein. Ye spoke right now of the Jews, among whom the whole people have, ye say, the Scripture in their hands. And ye thought it no reason that we should reckon Christian men less worthy thereto than them. Wherein I am, as ye see, of your own opinion. But yet would God we had the like reverence to the Scripture of God that they have! For I assure you, I have heard very worshipful folk say which have been in their houses… that a man could not hire a Jew to sit down upon his Bible of the Old Testament; but he taketh it with great reverence in hand when he will read… and reverently layeth it up again when he hath done. Whereas we, God forgive us, take little regard to sit down on our Bible with the Old Testament and the New too. Which homely handling, as it proceedeth of little reverence, so doth it more and more engender in the mind a negligence and contempt of God’s holy words. We find also that among the Jews, though all their whole Bible was written in their vulgar tongue… and those books thereof wherein their laws were written were usual in every man’s hands, as things that God would have commonly known, repeated, and kept in remembrance—yet were there, again, certain parts thereof which the common people of the Jews of old time, both of

1 troth: word // yet ween I: I yet think 1–2 grudge to have: resent having
2 on this wise: in this way 2–3 had . . . printer: would rather pay the printer for it
3 have . . . free: get it from the bishop for free 6 mind: mentality 7 fortune: turn out
8 more doubt: greater fear 9 grudge: grumble  hold . . . aggrieved: consider themselves
done terribly wrong  // require: request 11 honest: upstanding; decent
11 to be: i.e., who wanted it in order for it to be 12 lewd: ignorant / crass 13 rudely: ineptly
13 list: likes 15 quodlibet: scholastic debate  // pot: drinking 16 trust
16–17 find . . . therein: find fault with that 17 spoke right now: were speaking just now
19 no reason: not reasonable 22 worshipful: respectable 23 hire: pay
28 take little regard to sit: think little of sitting 29 homely: casual 30 of: from
31 negligence: heedlessness  // contempt: disregard 33 vulgar tongue: ordinary language
34 usual: ordinarily 35 commonly: i.e., by all of them 36 again: on the other hand
reverence and for the difficulty, did forbear to meddle with. But

The veil of the Temple is now since the veil of the Temple is broken
broken asunder. asunder that divided among the Jews…
the people from the sight of the secrets,

and that God had sent his Holy Spirit to be assistant with his whole
Church to teach all necessary truth; though it may therefore be the
better suffered that no part of Holy Scripture were kept out of honest
laymen’s hands—yet would I that no part thereof should come
in theirs which to their own harm and haply their neighbors’
too… would handle it over-homely… and be too bold and busy therewith.

And also, though Holy Scripture be, as ye said while ere, a medicine
for him that is sick… and food for him that is whole: yet, since there is
many a body sore soul-sick that taketh himself for whole; and in Holy
Scripture is a whole feast of so much diverse viand… that, after the
affection and state of sundry stomachs, one may take harm by the
selfsame that shall do another good; and sick folk often have such
a corrupt tallage in their taste that they most like the meat that is
most unwholesome for them—it were not, therefore, as methinketh,
unreasonable that the ordinary (whom God hath in the diocese
appointed for the chief physician… to discern between the whole
and the sick, and between disease and disease) should, after his
wisdom and discretion, appoint everybody their part… as
he should perceive to be good and wholesome for them. And therefore,
as he should not fail to find many a man to whom he might
commit all the whole: so, to say the truth, I can see no harm therein
though he should commit unto some man the Gospel of Matthew,
Mark, or Luke… whom he should yet forbid the Gospel of Saint
John; and suffer some to read the Acts of the Apostles… whom
he would not suffer to meddle with the Apocalypse. Many were there,
I think, that should take much profit by Saint Paul’s epistle
ad Ephesios… wherein he giveth good counsel to every kind of people…
yet and yet should find little fruit for their understanding in his
The Epistle to the Romans epistle ad Romanos… containing such
containeth high difficulties. high difficulties as very few learned men
can very well attain. And in like wise
would it be in divers other parts of the Bible, as well in the Old

1 meddle with: concern themselves with  1–4: See Matthew 27:51.
4 secrets: mysteries  5 assistant: actively present  7 suffered: sanctioned
7 honest: honorable 10 over-homely: too unceremoniously
11 while ere: a while back 12, 13, 20 whole: well 13 sore: terribly
14 so much diverse viand: so many different foods 14, 21 after: according to
15 affection: disposition 17 corrupt tallage in their taste: distorted sense of taste
17 meat: food 18 were not: would not be 19 ordinary: bishop
20 discern: distinguish 22 appoint: grant to
24–25 might commit all the whole: could commit it in its entirety 26 though: if
28 suffer: allow 29 meddle with: involve themselves with; get into
29 Apocalypse: Book of Revelation  // were there: would there be
33 containing: i.e., it containing 35 attain: get at 36 divers: several
Testament as the New. So that, as I say, though the bishop might
unto some layman betake and commit, with good advice and instruction,
the whole Bible to read, yet might he to some man well and
with reason restrain the reading of some part; and from some busy
body, the meddling with any part at all... more than he shall hear
in sermons set out and declared unto him; and in like wise, too,
take the Bible away from such folk again... as be proved by their
blind presumption to abuse the occasion of their profit unto
their own hurt and harm. And thus may the bishop order the
Scripture in our hands... with as good reason as the father doth by
his discretion appoint which of his children may, for his sadness,
keep a knife to cut his meat... and which shall for his wantonness have
his knife taken from him, for cutting off his fingers. And thus am I
bold, without prejudice of other men's judgment, to show you
my mind in this matter: how the Scripture might without great
peril, and not without great profit, be brought into our tongue and
taken to lay men and women both—not yet meaning thereby but that
the whole Bible might, for my mind, be suffered to be spread abroad in
English. But if that were so much doubted that percase all might
thereby be letted—then would I rather have used such moderation as
I speak of... or some such other as wiser men can better devise. Howbeit,
on that I read lately in the epistle that the King's Highness translated
into English... of his own (which His Grace made in Latin,
answering to the letter of Luther), my mind giveth me that His
Majesty is, of his blessed zeal, so minded to move this matter unto
the prelates of the clergy—among whom I have perceived some of
the greatest, and of the best, of their own minds well inclinable thereto
already—that we lay people shall in this matter ere long time pass,
except the fault be found in ourselves, be well and fully satisfied
and content."

"In good faith," quoth he, "that will in my mind be very well done.
And now am I, for my mind, in all this matter fully content and
satisfied."

"Well," quoth I, "then will we to dinner, and the remnant will we
finish after." And therewith went we to meat.

The end of the Third Book
The Fourth Book

The First Chapter

The author showeth wherefore it were not well done to suffer Luther’s books—or any other heretic’s—to go abroad and be read among the people… though there were some good things in them among the bad.

When we had after dinner a little paused, your friend and I drew ourselves aside, into the garden. And there, sitting down in an arbor, he began to enter forth into the matter, saying that he had well perceived that not in his country only, but also in the university where he had been, there were that had none evil opinion of Luther, but thought that his books were by the clergy forbidden of malice and evil will, “to the end that folk should not surely see and perfectly perceive what he saith—or, at the least, what thing he meaneth by his words. Which will not appear, they think, by a line taken out in the midst of a leaf, but by the diligent consideration of the whole matter. Without which men might impute a wrong blame, they say, to the best writers that ever wrote in this world. But they think that the clergy will not have his books read because that in them laymen may read the priests’ faults—which was, they say, the very cause of the condemnation. For else… whether he had written well or evil… yet, they say, his books had been kept in men’s hands and read. For there is, they think, therein, though some part were naught, many things yet well said… whereof there was no reason that men should lose the profit for the bad. And also, reason men think it were… that all were heard that can be said touching the truth to be known concerning the matters of our salvation; to the intent that, all heard and perceived, men may for their own surety the better choose and hold the right way.”

“Forsooth,” quoth I, “if it were now doubtful and ambiguous whether

3–4 showeth . . . suffer: explains why it would not be good to allow
4 go abroad: get out there
5, 23 though: even if
7 a little paused: taken a little break
10 country: part of the country; neck of the woods
11 were: i.e., were some; were those
11 of: none evil: no bad
12 of: out of
13, 22 evil: ill
16 taken out in the midst of a leaf: extracted from the middle of a page
18 blame: blameworthiness
20 faults: wrongdoings
22 had been: would have been
24 naught: bad
24–25 there was no reason: it did not stand to reason
25 for: on account of
26 reason men think it were: people think it would stand to reason
26, 28 all: everything
26 were: was
27 touching: with regard to
28 perceived: understood
29 surety: safety
30 ambiguous: unclear
the church of Christ were in the right rule of doctrine or not, then were it very necessary to give them all good audience that could and would anything dispute on either part, for it or against it, to the end that if we were now in a wrong way, we might leave it and walk in some better. But, now, on the other side, if it so be, as indeed it is, that Christ's church hath the true doctrine already… and the selfsame that Saint Paul would not give an angel of heaven audience to the contrary: what wisdom were it now therein to show ourselves so mistrustful and wavering that, to search whether our faith were false or true, we should give hearing not to an angel of heaven… but to a fond friar; to an apostate; to an open incestuous lecher, a plain limb of the devil, and a manifest messenger of hell? In which words if ye would haply think that I use myself too sore, to call him by such odious names: ye must consider that he spareth not—both untruly and without necessity—in his railing books, to call by as evil… them whom his duty were highly to reverence; whereas I do, between us twain, call him but as himself hath showed him… in his writing, in his living, and in his mad ‘marriage.’ And yet I neither do it nor would… were it not that the matter itself of reason doth require it. For my part is it of necessity to tell how naught he is… because that the worse the man is, the more madness were it for wise men to give his false fables hearkening against God’s undoubted truth… by his Holy Spirit taught unto his church… and by such multitude of miracles, by so much blood of holy martyrs, by the virtuous living of so many blessed confessors, by the purity and cleanness of so many chaste widows and undefiled virgins, by the wholesome doctrine of so many holy doctors, and, finally, by the whole consent and agreement of all Christian people this fifteen hundred years, confirmed. And, therefore, not any respect unto his railing against the clergy… is, as some would have it seem, the cause of his condemnation and suppression of his books. For the good men of the clergy be not so sore grieved with them that touch the faults of the bad… nor the bad themselves.
be not so tender-eared… that for the only talking of their faults they would banish the books that were good in other things besides. For else could not the books of many old holy fathers have endured so long… wherein the vices of them that in the clergy be naught… be The cause why Luther's books be not suffered to be read very vehemently rebuked. But the very cause why his books be not suffered to be read… is because his heresies be so many, and so abominable… and the ‘proofs’ wherewith he pretendeth to make them probable be so far from reason and truth, and so far against the right understanding of Holy Scripture (whereof, under color of great zeal and affection, he laboreth to destroy the credence and good use), and, finally, so far stretcheth allthing against good manner and virtue—provoking the world to wrong opinions of God, and boldness in sin and wretchedness—that there can no good… but much harm… grow by the reading. For if there were the substance good, and of error or oversight some cockle among the corn… which might be sifted out and the remnant stand in stead, men would have been content therewith, as they be with such others. But now is his not besprent with a few spots, but with more than half venom poisoned… the whole wine—and that right rotten of itself. And this done of purpose and malice—not without an evil spirit in such wise walking with his words… that the contagion thereof were likely to infect a feeble soul… as the savor of a sickness-sore infecteth a whole body. Nor the truth is not to be learned of every man’s mouth. For as Christ was not content that the devil should call him God’s Son though it were true, so is he not content that a devil’s limb, as Luther is, or Tyndale, should teach his flock the truth… for infecting them with their false, devilish heresies besides. For likewise as the Holy Scripture of God, because of the good Spirit that made it, is of his own nature apt to purge and amend the reader… though some that read it, of their invincible malice, turn it to their harm: so do such writings as Luther’s is, in the making whereof the devil is of counsel (and giveth therewith a breath of his assistance),

1 for the only talking of their faults: just for the talking about their wrongdoings  
3 old holy fathers: (of the) early fathers of the Church  
4 naught: wicked  
6 suffered: allowed  
8 pretendeth: professes  
9 probable: worthy of acceptance  
11 color: pretext // affection: love (for it)  
12 allthing: everything  
13 manner: habitual behavior  
14 opinions of: ideas about  
15 grow by: come of  
16 of error or oversight: by mistake or inadvertence  
17 might: could  
17 remnant: rest  
18 stand in stead: remain in place  
19 besprent: besprinkled  
21 of:… malice: on purpose and out of malice  
22 walking with: accompanying  
23 as: just as // savor: odor; i.e., stench  
24 sickness-sore: plague sore  
25 of: from  
26 Christ was not content: it was not all right with Christ  
27 were: was  
27–28 is he not content: it is not all right with him  
28 limb: agent // as: such as  
29 for infecting: lest they should infect / in order to infect  
31 that made: who wrote // his: its  
32 invincible: unconquerable
though the goodness of some men master the malice thereof—
walking harmless with God’s help, as the prophet saith, upon

Ps 91:13

the serpent and the cockatrice, and treading
upon the lion and the dragon—yet be

such works of themselves always right unwholesome to meddle with, meet
and apt to corrupt and infect the reader. For the proof whereof we
need none other example than this that we be in hand with…

if we consider what good the reading of his books hath done in

What fruit doth grow of

reading Luther’s works

Saxony. And this find we more than too

scantly find twain but that they not only cast off prayer and
fasting and all such godly virtues as Holy Scripture commendeth…
and the Church commandeth… and virtuous people have ever had in

great price, but also fall in plain contempt and hatred thereof. So
that what fruit should grow of the reading ye may soon guess.”

The Second Chapter

The author showeth many of Luther’s heresies to be so
abominable… and some part also so peevish… that the very bare
rehearsal is enough, without any further dispicion thereupon,
to cause any good man abhor them… and to be
ashamed also to seem so foolish as to hold them. And for
an example the author rehearseth divers… whereof some be
newly set forth by Tyndale in his English books… worse yet,
in some part, than his master Luther is himself.

“And in good faith, I would ween that any good man, except some
reasonable necessity should compel him thereto, else would, if he heard
but his opinions once rehearsed, be very loath to lose his time in the
reading… either of his fond ‘proof’… or of the very titles and names thereof
again.”

“If they be such indeed,” quoth your friend, “and that they be not
mistaken or misreported.”
“Methinketh,” quoth I, “that the fruit which ye see spring of them... should suffice to make you perceive them for naught. And iwis a friar’s living that ‘weddeth’ a nun—when his living is such... should make it easy to wit that his teaching is not very good.”

“Surely,” quoth he, “I cannot say nay but that these be shrewd tokens.”

“I shall,” quoth I, “do more for you. For I shall find the means that ye shall see his own books... and therein perceive yourself that men belie him not.”

“I pray you,” quoth he, “let me hear some of his opinions by mouth the while, and for the seeing of them in his own books I shall bethink me after.”

“First he began,” quoth I, “with pardons and with the pope’s power, denying finally any of both to be of any effect at all.

“And soon after—to show what good spirit moved him—he denied all the seven sacraments except Baptism, Penance, and the Sacrament of the Altar, saying plainly that all the remnant be but feigned things and of none effect.

“Now, these that he leaveth for good... it is good to see how he handleth them. For in Penance... he saith that there neither needeth contrition nor satisfaction. Also he saith that there needeth no priest for the hearing of confession; but that every man, and every woman, too, is as sufficient to hear confession, and assoil, and do all that belongeth to a confessor, as is a priest.”

“Marry, sir,” quoth your friend, “this were an easy way for one thing. For the sorest thing that I find in confession is that when I see many confessors at a pardon, yet can I scant like one of them so well upon the sight... that I would tell any such tales to... once in seven years, and I might choose. But, now, if I might, after Luther’s way, be confessed to a fair woman, I would not let to be confessed weekly!”

“Ye would,” quoth I, “peradventure tell her a tale that ye would not tell every man. But yet if some men told some tales to a fair woman that they tell in confession to a foul friar, they would wish, I ween, among, that they had kept their counsel in their own breast.”

“Marry,” quoth he, “that may happen also in the confession that is made unto a priest.”

“Possible it were indeed,” quoth I. “And Tyndale, in his book of Obedience—or, rather, disobedience—saith that the curates do go and show...
Oh, what a false lie is this! the bishops the confessions of such as be rich in their parishes... and that the bishops thereupon do cite them, and lay their secret sins to their charge... and either put them to open, shameful penance... or compel them to pay at the bishop’s pleasure. Now dare I be bold to say—and I suppose all the honest men in this realm will say and swear the same—that this is a very foolish falsehood imagined of his own mind... whereof he never saw the example in his life. We see in some rather the contrary fault: that not only the rich, but the poor also... keep open queans, and live in open adultery... without payment or penance, or anything, almost, once said unto them. But therewith findeth Tyndale no fault in the bishops. For he saith plainly that the bishop hath none authority to punish any such thing at all. But he letteth not, on the other side, to belie the bishops and the curates too, feigning that the one doth utter folks’ confessions to the other. And when he hath so belied them—then, forthwith, as though he had proved his tale true, he taketh the same false, feigned lie for a ground, thereupon to build the destruction of that holy sacrament of Penance. For upon that lie and such others like, he saith plainly that confession to the priest is the worst thing that ever was found. Now, if that were true (as it is as false as he that said it), how happed it, then—which question Luther and he be asked often, and always make as they heard it not—how happed it, I say, that of so many virtuous, wise, and cunning fathers as have been in Christ’s church in so many hundred years, never none had the wit nor the grace to spy this great thing, but all teach confession, till now that Tyndale came? Which yet in this point passeth his master, Luther. For he saith he would in any wise have confession stand... but he would have it made at liberty as well to women as men. But Tyndale will have none at all... because he listeth to belie both the bishops and the curates, feigning that they should between them disclose our confessions.”

“In faith,” quoth your friend, “that is a thing that I never heard to have happened.”

“Nor he neither,” quoth I—“that dare I boldly say. And yet, I wot well, as ye said right now, that priests should utter folks’ confession were well possible—and in many of them nothing in this world more likely, neither—if God and his Holy Spirit were not, as it is, assistant
and working with his holy sacrament. But surely, whereas there be

Confession was devised by God. many things that well and clearly prove
the sacrament of confession to be a thing instituted and devised by God, yet if all the remnant lacked, which thing I find in the noble book that the King’s Highness made against Luther: that is to wit, that in so common a custom of confession ofter than once in the year, where no man letteth boldly to tell such his secrets... as upon the discovering or close keeping thereof his honesty commonly, and oftentimes his life also, dependeth; so many simple as be of that sort that hear them—and in all other things so light and lavish of their tongue, and some therewith so lewd in all their living, that for money they force little to steal, rob, and murder too... and might, many times, with the disclosing of some such things get so much as some of them would kill a man for less—yet find we never any man take harm by his confession, or cause given of complaint, through any such secrets uttered and showed by the confessor.”

“In good faith,” quoth he, “this is very truth, and a great thing in mine opinion. But undoubtedly if confession came once to women’s ears, there would be a sore change. For it would be hard for God and the devil too... to keep their tongues.”

All is in counsel that women tell. “Yes, yes,” quoth I, “a woman can keep a counsel well enough! For though she tell a gossip, she telles it but in counsel yet; nor that gossip to her gossip neither; and so, when all the gossips in the town know it, yet is it but counsel still. And therefore I say it not for any harm that would come by them, but for the novelty thereof.”

“Now, in earnest,” quoth your friend, “this was a much merry mad invention of Luther; and Luther is in a manner as mad as Tyndale. For it were as good, almost, to have no confession at all as to set women to hear it.”

“Forsooth,” quoth I, “if it had been wisdom and not against God’s will, it would of likelihood have been found by some

1 surely: assuredly // whereas: while 2 well and: quite
4 all the remnant lacked: all the rest were lacking 5, 32 were: would be
6 made: wrote 8 after: i.e., made more often
8–9 letteth boldly to tell such: refrains from telling frankly such of
9 discovering: disclosing; divulging // close: tight-lipped 10 honesty: reputation
11 so . . . them: i.e., with so many of that sort that hear them being very ordinary men
12 light and lavish of their tongue: unthinking and loose-lipped 13 lewd: bad; immoral
13 force: hesitate; scruple 14 might: could 16 less: i.e., less than
18 uttered: revealed // showed: made known 19 in good faith: in all sincerity
19 very truth: indeed true 20 came once: ever came 21 sore: drastic
22 keep: bridle 24, 26 counsel: confidence 25, 26, 27 gossip(s): confidante(s)
27 yet is it but counsel still: it is still just in confidence 28 it: i.e., this
28 for: on account of 30 in earnest: seriously // much merry: very funny
31 invention of Luther: idea of Luther’s // in a manner: just about
34 if it had been wisdom: i.e., if this had been a sound idea
35 it would of likelihood have been found: it probably would have been come up with
good men before these days, in this long time of so many hundred years. Howbeit, he goeth near enough to take it all away. And divers of his scholars besides Tyndale do now deny it utterly. And himself leaveth little substance and little fruit therein. For he would that we should not care much for any full confession of all deadly sins; nor be very studious in the gathering of our faults to mind… nor pondering the circumstances, nor the weight and gravity, thereof… nor taking any sorrow therefor. Now, these things taken away, and the Sacrament of Penance left such as he would have it, consider in yourself what fruit were a man likely to find in it. He that taketh a confessor he forceth not whom, and then confesseth he forceth not what… disposing him to repentance he forceth not how; good works in satisfaction accounteth for naught—what manner of amendment shall this man come to? And especially if, besides all this, he may take to his confessor a fair woman such as a young man would have a lust to break his mind unto! Doth it not plainly appear that this fond fellow so playeth with this holy sacrament of Penance… that he goeth about utterly to destroy it? And yet is this one of the three he leaveth, taking four away expressly.”

“Surely,” quoth your friend, “so doth he this too, as thinketh me.”

“Forsooth,” quoth I. “And he handleth the Sacrament of Baptism not much better. For he magnifieth Baptism but to the suppression of Luther’s conclusions and most shameful opinions of penance and of all good living. For therein he teacheth that the sacrament itself hath no virtue at all, but the faith only.

“Item: He teacheth that only faith sufficeth to our salvation with our baptism—without good works. He saith also that it is sacrilege to go about to please God with any works, and not with faith only. “Item: That no man can do any good work.

“Item: That the good and righteous man always sinneth in doing well.

“Item: That no sin can damn any Christian man… but only lack of belief. For he saith that our faith ‘suppeth up’ all our sins, how great soever they be.

“Item: He teacheth that no man hath no free will… nor can anything do
therewith… not though the help of grace be joined thereunto; but that everything that we do, good and bad, we do nothing at all therein ourselves… but only suffer God to do allthing in us—good and bad—as wax is wrought into an image or a candle… by the man’s hand, without anything doing thereto itself.

“Item: He saith that God is as verily the author and cause of the evil will of Judas in betraying of Christ… as of the good will of Christ in suffering of his Passion.”

“In Matrimony he saith plainly that it is no sacrament; and so saith Tyndale too.

“Item: That if a man be not able to do his duty to his wife, he is bound secretly, without slander, to provide another to do it for him.”

“Forsooth,” quoth your friend, “this was courteously considered of him! He is a very gentleman, I warrant you! It is no marvel though his wife be well teeming, if he make her such provision.”

“Surely,” quoth I, “this wise device hath he! And much other beastliness he saith in such things—and his disciple after him—of such sort as honest ears could scant abide the hearing.

“In the Sacrament of Orders he saith that priesthood and all holy orders be but a feigned invention.

“Item: That every Christian man, and every Christian woman, is a priest.

“Item: That every man may consecrate the body of Christ.”

“This is a shameful saying, in good faith!” quoth your friend.

“Abide ye,” quoth I, “and ye shall hear worse yet. For he saith further that every woman and child may consecrate the body of our Lord.”

“Surely,” quoth he, “then is the man mad outright.”

“He saith,” quoth I, “further yet… that the Canon of the Mass is false.

“Item: That the host in the Mass is none oblation nor sacrifice.

“Item: That the Mass with its Canon after the form that is and ever hath been used in Christ’s church… is sacrilege and abomination.

“And though much of this concerneth his damnable heresies touching the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, yet saith he thereof many lewd doctrines more. And among others he teacheth that it is heresy to believe that there is not very bread and very wine in the

1 though: even if 3 suffer God to do: have God do // allthing: everything 4 image: statue 7 evil: bad 9, 20 in: about; concerning 12 without slander: without causing scandal 15–16 it . . . teeming: it’s no wonder that his wife is so fertile 17, 28 surely: assuredly 17 wise device: brilliant idea 18 in such things: on such subjects 19 honest: respectable // scant: scarcely 21 holy orders: i.e., the diaconate, subdiaconate, and so forth / ordination 21 feigned: made-up; fictitious 24, 27 may: can 25 saying: thing to say // in good faith: for sure 26 abide ye: wait; hold on 28 mad outright: just plain crazy 29 false: bogus 31 after: in 35 touching: regarding 36 lewd: wicked 37 very: actual
Sacrament of the Altar joined with the Body and Blood of our Lord.

“Item: Zwingli and Oecolampadius, scholars of Luther, have built further upon this ungracious ground of their master… and teach that the Sacrament of the Altar is not the very Body nor Blood of our Lord at all. And Luther himself, albeit he now writeth against them therein, yet (as it by many things appeareth) minded and intended to put forth by leisure the same heresy himself… till he changed his mind for envy that he bore toward them… when he saw that they would be heads of a sect themselves; for that could he suffer no man to be but himself. But before, as I say, he did intend it himself. And therefore he made a way toward it by these other heresies that I have rehearsed you, and by divers others more.

“For he teacheth also that the Mass availeth no man quick nor dead… but only to the priest himself.

“Item: He teacheth that men should go to Mass as well after supper as before breakfast… and in his common clothes, as he goeth all day; without light or any other honorable rite used therein.

“Item: He saith it were best that men should never be houseled but once in their life—and that never till they lie a-dying. As they be but once christened, and that at their beginning.

“Item: He teacheth that every man and woman should take the Holy Sacrament… and spare not to touch it and handle it as much as them list.

“Item: He saith that the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar is ordained of God to be received, but not to be worshipped.”

“In faith,” quoth your friend, “these things be far out of course!”

“Ye see,” quoth I, “now, how he handleth all the blessed sacraments. But now hath he other wild heresies at large. For he teacheth, against Scripture and all reason, that no Christian man is or can be bound by any law made among men, nor is not bound to observe or keep any.

“Item: He teacheth that there is no purgatory.

“Item: That all men’s souls lie still and sleep till the Day of Doom.
“Item: That no man should pray to saints, nor set by any holy relics nor pilgrimages, nor do any reverence to any images.”

“By my troth,” quoth your friend, “I had forgotten... that when I was now in the university, in the communication that I had with my friends there in that matter... one of them objected against me that the worship of images hath been, ere this, condemned by a great council in Greece.”

“There was indeed,” quoth I, “a council once in Greece gathered by an emperor... that then was a heretic there... which was after, in the eighth synod, by the general council, damned and annulled. But this no more doth to the matter... than if there would now in Saxony, and Switzerland, and such other places, such people as be swerved from the faith gather themselves together and keep, as they would call it, a ‘general council’... wherein they might determine what they would; and yet were all that no prejudice to the right belief of the Catholic Church—which is always as one body with our Savior Christ in their former fast-confirmed faith... from which faithful body these other, withering branches be blown away by the devil. And therefore, as a council of Lutherans assembling themselves in Saxony could make none authority against the true faith of the Church, so could that council in Greece nothing prove their purpose... which made none interruption of the right belief and godly custom of worship done to saints and images; that yet did, for all that, continue still in all the Catholic Church of Christ, and ever since hath done.”

“Forsooth,” quoth he, “that is truth.

“But yet,” quoth he, “was there one at our communication, learned in the law—and in his chamber were we—which said that if he list, he could show a fair law, incorporated in the decrees of the Church, which law if it were laid in their light that would take upon them the defense of any worship to be done to images...
would make all their eyes daze. Then longed not only I, but all the
remnant also, very sore to see that law. In bringing forth whereof
he made a while somewhat strange, as of a thing kept for a secret
mystery.

“But in conclusion he set forth a book of the decrees; and therein he
read us, in good faith, a plain text (as me thought, and all that were present) by
which Saint Gregory writeth unto a certain
bishop that had broken down the images in his church;
and there Saint Gregory... albeit that he blameth him for breaking
them—yet, for all that, he commendeth him for that he would not
suffer them to be worshipped.”

“Did you,” quoth I, “read that law yourself?”
“In good faith,” quoth he, “I stood by and looked on that book while he
read it.”

“Did he,” quoth I, “or you either, read the next law following in the book?”
“Nay, verily,” quoth he, “for methought this was enough.”

“So was it, verily,” quoth I—“and too much, too, without more. But and if
ye had either read the next law following or the gloss upon the
selfsame law that ye read, ye should then have seen that the law which
he showed you made little for his purpose.”

“By my troth, as for the gloss,” quoth he, “neither I nor any man else
that there was had list once to look on, considering that the text was
plain and easy to understand. And as for the law next following, we
looked not after... for we thought to find it contrary. And if we should...
then should we not yet have wist which we should believe.”

“Yes, yes!” quoth I. “Ye would not much have doubted if ye had read
the law that followeth! For it is a law synodal, made in the sixth
synod, in which there is well and plainly
showed that images be to be worshipped
among Christian men; and well
declareth in what wise we worship them, and owe to do: that is
to wit, none image to be worshipped as God; nor the hope of our health
to be beset upon the image; nor to look that the image shall be
he which shall judge our souls in time to come; but we worship
the image, and reverence, and well owe to do, for the remembrance
of the thing that the image representeth. And yet, though we do
the image honor and reverence, yet for divine honor, and service
only done to God—that kind of worship, called latria, we neither
do nor may do... neither to image nor any creature in all the whole
world, either in heaven or earth. And this should ye have seen if ye
had either read, as I say, the law next following or the gloss of that
law that ye read."

"Marry," quoth he, "but in the law itself that we read, good Saint Gregory
saith plain the contrary! For he commendeth the bishop there
because he would not suffer the images to be worshipped at all!!"

"That word 'at all,'" quoth I, "ye set to yourself, more than ye find in
the book. For in deed the book saith no more but that they 'should not
be worshipped'... by this Latin word 'adorare.' By which word he
understood the divine worship called latria."

"Whereby know we," quoth he, "he understood it so? For I believe not
much the gloss."

"Ye may," quoth I, "perceive it by the law that followeth. Wherein albeit
Ch. "Venerabilis,"
De consecratione, Distinctio 4
is it there showed how we may 'adorare'—
that is to wit, how we may worship—
images."

"Why," quoth he, "if that law say 'quod possumus adorare,' and Saint
Gregory saith 'quod non licet adorare'—be not they twain plain
repugnant?"

The taking of this word 'adorare'

"Yes," quoth I, "if they both took that word
'adorare' in one sense. But when the synod
used that word for such worship as we
may do to a creature... and Saint Gregory useth it for such worship
only as may not be done but only to the Creator... then they be
nothing repugnant at all."

"But yet," quoth he, "whereby shall I be sure that Saint Gregory took it
so? For it appeareth by the law, as yourself saith, that the word may
be taken otherwise. For the same law itself taketh it otherwise; and
then, peradventure, so did he... and thereby forbade all manner worship
to be done unto images."

1 reverence: i.e., do reverence // owe to do: ought to 3 for: as for // service: homage
4, 15, etc. worship: veneration 7 of: for 9 marry: well
10 plain the contrary: the exact opposite 11 suffer: allow
11, 14, 21 worship(ped): venerate(d) 12 word: phrase
12 set to yourself, more than ye find: more add in yourself than find
27 one: the same 31 nothing repugnant at all: contradictory in no way at all
35 peradventure: perhaps
“That were very unlikely,” quoth I—“that Saint Gregory were of one mind and the whole synod of the contrary.

“But, now, since ye make the matter so clear upon the words of Saint Gregory incorporated in the decrees… and will not believe the gloss… which appeareth plainly that he meant only to forbid us to do such worship to images as is only due to God—will ye be content therein to believe Saint Gregory himself if he tell you himself that he meant none other?”

“Yea, before God,” quoth he, “that will I well!”

“Then,” quoth I, “we shall agree well enough.” And therewith I took down of a shelf, among my books, the ‘Register’ of Saint Gregory’s epistles… and therein turned to the very words which are by Gratian taken out of his second epistle ad Serenum, episcopum Massiliensem… and incorporated in the decrees. And then caused I him to read the formal words as they be couched in the decree. And by the collation of the one with the other, I caused him to see that Gratian had taken but a part of the epistle, and that by other words of the epistle itself… it appeareth evidently that Saint Gregory spoke of none other worship to be withdrawn from images but only divine worship and observance due to God; as by divers other things in the epistle

*Lk 4:8* appeareth plainly… as in that he saith *that*—that it is not lawful to ‘worship’ anything wrought by hand… because it is written, ‘Dominum Deum tuum adorabis, et illi soli servies’ (‘Thou shalt worship thy Lord God, and only him shalt thou serve’).

“Now is it in this place of Scripture meant none other worship nor service than *divine* honor, and service called *latria*—as is to learned men well known. And he that will affirm the contrary and say that in Scripture is forbidden from images *all* manner of worship, he must affirm also that *all* manner worship, and *all* manner service, is forbidden by Scripture from *all* manner creatures. For the Scripture saith there, ‘Thou shalt worship and serve only God’; and so should we, by that construction, neither worship nor serve father nor mother… master nor prince nor king. And in the same place Saint Gregory

*The worship called latria* saith that we do ‘worship’ only the Holy Trinity; which sheweth that he

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1 *were*: would be  
5 *appeareth plainly*: clearly submits  
6, 18, etc. *worship*: veneration  
6 *content*: willing  
11 *of*: from  
11 *among*: i.e., from among  
14 *caused him to read*: I had him read  
14 *formal*: exact  
15 *collation*: comparison  
18 *evidently*: conclusively  
19 *withdrawn*: withheld  
20 *divers*: several  
30 *service*: homage  
32–33 *by that construction*: according to that interpretation
speaketh only of divine worship, called *latria*, which is done with a mind that reputeth the thing worshipped to be very God. For else… by those words if he forbade *any* manner worship for to be done to anything saving the Trinity… then did he forbid *any* worship to be done to any saint—or to our Blessed Lady, either. And every man well *wotteth* how reverently himself worshipped both our Lady and all saints as well, by many books and epistles of his… as by the litany which, as his epistles well showeth, he ordained to be with great devotion used in honor of God, our Lady, and all holy saints. And, over that, by the great honor that he did to saints in churches specially dedicated unto them—and also great honor and reverence used unto their holy relics, as in his own books and epistles appeareth. And, finally, if his epistles had been lost out of which the decree is taken… yet the words of the decree itself

*Images be the books of lay people.* would well enough suffice. For therein is it specified that images be ‘the books of lay people, wherein they read the life of Christ.’ And then if it be, as it is indeed, well and virtuously done *The kissing of images* devoutly to kiss a book in which Christ’s life, and his death, is expressed by writing, why should it be evil done reverently to kiss the images by which Christ’s life and his Passion be represented by Scripture or painting?”

“In good faith,” quoth he, “I am well satisfied in this matter. And so would they that then were with me, if they had seen all that I see now.”

“They may,” quoth I, “soon see as much whenever they list to look therefor.

“But, now, to turn again to the matter… neither the bishop of Marseilles, that broke the images that they speak of, nor the council of Greece neither—schismatic as it was—went never yet so far as Luther and Tyndale and their company do; which not only set at *Luther’s other heresies most abominable* naught images, but also leave no saint unblasphemed—nor Christ’s own mother neither.

“For Luther cannot abide the common anthem of our Lady (and the most devout), *Salve Regina*, because we therein call that blessed virgin our advocate.

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2 *reputeth*. . . *God*: regards the object of the veneration as being God himself
3, 4 *worship*: veneration  
*anything*: any being  
*saving*: except
6 *wotteth*: knows  
*himself*: he himself  
*worshipped*: venerated
11 *specially*: expressly
12 *used*: shown  
*specified*: explicitly stated
18 *well and virtuously done*: a very virtuous thing to do
21 *evil done*: ill done; a bad thing to do
22 *Scripture*: This may be an error for “sculpture.”
23 *in good faith*: honestly
24 *would they*: i.e., would be those
25 *list*: care
26 *therefor*: for it
28 *broke*: destroyed
“Item: He saith that every other woman now living, if she have the same faith, may be prayed unto as well as our Lady… and with her prayer as much profit us.

“IItem: He teacheth that men should do no worship to the holy cross that Christ died on—saying that if he had it whole, or all the pieces thereof, he would cast it in such a place as no sun should shine thereon, to the end it should never be found to be worshipped more.

“Item: Of all feasts, he saith that he hateth the Feast of the Holy Cross… and the Feast of Corpus Christi.

“He teacheth also that no man or woman is bound to keep and observe any vow that he hath made to God of virginity… or widowhood… or other chastity out of marriage; but that they may marry at their liberty, their vow notwithstanding.”

“And how proveth he that?” quoth your friend.

“Marry,” quoth I, “by the breaking of his own, when he married the nun! And now he raileth against all chastity, and saith that if a priest live chaste, he is like to the priests of the idol Cybele!

“Long would it be to write you all the abominable heresies of this new sect. But some of them have I rehearsed… that ye may thereby consider whether he that teacheth such things… go not about utterly to destroy the whole faith, religion, and virtue of Christendom. And that he is not in any of these points belied… I shall find the means that ye shall see it in his own books. And there shall ye see how madly he laboreth to prove them.”

“Prove them?” quoth your friend. “The substance of these matters be too abominable to be reasoned! And to make him hated of all good folk, is enough to hear them rehearsed. But I marvel me much how he fell into such a heap of heresies.”

The Third Chapter

The author showeth by what occasion that Luther first fell to the devising of these heresies. And that the occasion was such as well declareth that he was pricked thereto by malice… and ever proceeded from evil to worse, not witting where to hold him; and that he refuseth to stand to the judgment of any folk earthly concerning the truth or falsehood of his opinions… save only himself.
“Now, that is,” quoth I, “somewhat worth to consider—how this lewd friar began to fall in these mischievous matters. Ye shall understand that there was a pardon obtained in Saxony… for which pardon, as the manner is there, Luther was the preacher… and preached to the people exhorting them thereto, and advancing the authority thereof, all that he possibly might—not without his great advantage therefor. So happed it then, soon after, that the setting forth of the pardon—with the advantage thereof—was taken from him and set to another.

For anger whereof he fell into such a fury… that forthwith he began to write against all pardons. Howbeit, because the matter was new and strange, he began first by way of doubts and questions only, submitting himself and his writing to the judgment of the pope… and desiring to be informed of the truth. Whereupon when he was by writing answered by the master of the pope’s palace… then waxed he more wood and fell to railing against him—and made also another book, against the power of the pope, affirming that his power upon the Church was never instituted of God, but ordained only by the common consent of Christian people, for avoiding of schisms. But yet he said that all Christian men were bound to stand and obey thereunto… and that the Bohemians were damnable heretics for doing the contrary. But soon after, when he was in such wise answered by good and cunning men… that he perceived himself unable to defend that he had affirmed—then fell he from reasoning to railing, and utterly denied that he had before affirmed. And then began to write that the pope had no power at all, neither by God nor man. And that the Bohemians, whom he had in his writings before called damnable heretics, were good Christian men, and all their opinions good and Catholic. Then, when he was cited by the Pope’s Holiness to appear, he appealed to the ‘next general council’ which should be ‘gathered in the Holy Ghost.’ So that whatsoever general council were after assembled, he might jest and rail thereon, and say it was not it that he appealed unto, for it was not assembled in the Holy Ghost.”

“He took,” quoth your friend, “a good wily way.”

“As wily as it was,” quoth I, “yet would he not stand thereby, but
fled from that to another. For now shall ye understand that yet soon after this, in the book by which he not answereth but raileth against that book wherein our sovereign lord the King, like a most faithful, virtuous, and most erudite prince, evidently and effectually revinced and confuted the most venomous and pestilent book of Luther, entitled *The Captivity of Babylon*, in which he laboreth to destroy the holy sacraments of Christ’s church—in that book, I say, Luther, which had before appealed to the ‘next general council,’ utterly denieth the authority of all general councils, and setteth them all at naught.”

“By my troth,” quoth your friend, “either was the man very negligent before… or very naught after, when he changeth so often and writeth ever the longer the more contrary… not to his adversary only, but also to himself. But I pray you, how excuseth he his inconstancy?”

“Marry,” quoth I, “he saith that he seeth further than he saw before. Whereunto the King’s Grace showeth him that it were unlikely that he should see better through a pair of evil spectacles, of ire and envy.”

“Very true,” quoth your friend, “by my troth! But yet I hear say that he hath offered to stand at the judgment of learned men in all his matters, if his offer had been taken in time.”

“Indeed,” quoth I, “once he promised to stand to the judgment of the University of Paris; and thereupon was there open dispicions kept, and the very words written by notaries sworn for both the parties. But when his opinions were after, at Paris, by the University, condemned, then he refused to stand to their judgment—and fell again to his old craft of railing.

“He appeared also at Worms, before the Emperor and the princes of the empire, by a safe-conduct. And there recognized and acknowledged as well the said pestilent book written against the sacraments… as many others of like sort… to be his own… and offered to abide by them. Which he might boldly do, being by the safe-conduct in good surety of himself that he could take no harm. Then was he moved to dispicions upon the articles… so that he should agree

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4 evidently: conclusively  
5 revinced: proved erroneous  
7 laboreth: strives  
11 by my troth: my word; goodness  
12 naught: bad  
14 pray: ask  
15 how . . . inconstancy: how does he defend his inconsistency  
16 marry: indeed  
17 sheweth: tells  
18 evil: bad  
20 by my troth: my word; I must say  
22 matters: theses  
23 stand to: abide by  
25 kept: held  
26 opinions: theses  
28 fell again: reverted  
33 them: i.e., the judgment of the Emperor and princes  
34 surety of: security about  
35 moved . . . should: invited to engage in debates on his tenets… provided that he would
upon some persons, virtuous and well-learned, that should be judges of that disputation, and that he should be content to stand to their judgment upon the same. Whereupon he agreed to come to dispicions; but he would in no wise agree to make any men living judges upon it, nor stand to no man’s judgment earthly.”

The Fourth Chapter

The author showeth how that Luther, in the book that himself made of his own acts at the city of Worms in Almaine, doth so madly oversee himself that he discloseth unawares certain follies of himself which a man will well laugh at, and marvel much to see it.

“And that these things be true… it well appeareth to all the world in the book that he made himself of his demeanor and his acts at the city called Worms, in Almaine. Which book whoso readeth… shall have a great pleasure to see therein both the frantic vainglory of that fond friar… and yet, therewith, to see him carried out with folly so far from himself… that in a line or twain he discovereth all that he went about to hide… in all the book beside. For ye shall understand that albeit he made that book himself, yet he made it so… that he would it should seem to have been of some other man’s making, and not of his own, to the intent that such worshipful words as he speaketh of himself might make him in the ears of the reader seem some honorable person. Which words else, he wist well, spoken of his own mouth… all the world would wonder on. Now, in this book—besides that he leaveth out some things there said and spoken where the words written in could do him no worship, and some things reciteth with advantage for his part, rehearsing the other side nakedly and barely, and some part pared off, too, to make it seem the more slender—one thing he observeth diligently: that, whereas, speaking of the Emperor, he calleth him never but singly and singly ‘Charles,’ he never speaketh of himself but he setteth forth his name in great capital letters and solemn titles—
‘The Man of God Luther.’ And whereas they that spoke against his errors, he writeth that they ‘burst out in virulent and venomous words,’ when he cometh to his own answer… then he writeth in this wise: ‘But then Doctor Martin, for his incredible humanity and bounty, answered in this wise, benignly.’ And sometimes with these words: ‘The most benign Father most mildly made answer.’

And, finally, he finisheth and endeth his book, as it were, with a Gloria Patri to the whole psalm, in this wise: ‘This holy, devout man, therefore, even born to teach and preserve the Gospel of God, our Lord long preserve for his Church, with his holy Word also. Amen.’

Now, who was there ever born so suspicious, that ever would have suspected that he which wrote such glorious words of Luther should be Luther himself? For where should a man find so very a vainglorious fool, that would not in himself be ashamed of himself to think such things? But, now”—ye that read this, I pray you, for God’s sake—“see how utterly this itch and tickling of vanity and vainglory had cast him clean beside his mind and memory. For whereas all the book beside was so devised and handled that it should seem some other to have made it, and not himself—suddenly the fond fellow bewrayed himself unawares. For in one place, forgetting himself, he speaketh in this wise: ‘When this was spoken, then the orator of the empire, in a chiding manner, said that I had not answered to the purpose, and that those things which had been damned and determined in general councils of old… ought not now, of new, to be brought again in question by me; and therefore I should give a plain answer whether I would revoke mine errors or not. Then, unto this, I answered in this wise: “Since that it is so [etc.]”’ Lo, here may ye see the incredible humility and lowly mind of this most benign Father… which under the visor of a strange herald… bloweth himself his own boast. Then may ye see therewith his marvelous, profound prudence… that had not the wit to beware that himself bewrayed not his own so foolish a device… in the vain vaunting of his own false boast and praise—that though the words had been true, yet would almost a very natural fool have been ashamed of himself to write them.”
“By my troth,” quoth your friend, “this device was madly minded of Luther, and madly handled, and madly overseen, to show himself so fond—but if pride, as the proverb is, must needs have a shame.”

The Fifth Chapter

The author showeth the perpetual inconstancy of Luther, and his contrariety and repugnance against himself.

“Now, as for his constancy, appeareth,” quoth I, “by that I have before rehearsed of his continual change in his heresies from day to day… from worse to worse… which course he kept not only in the matters above rehearsed, but almost in all the remnant. For as concerning purgatory, he wrote first that although it could not be proved by evident Scripture (as he affirmed), yet was there no doubt but that there is purgatory; and that thing, he said, was of all Christian men firmly to be believed. And then he wrote that he wondered of the madness of such false and foolish heretics as were born ‘within the Church believeth that one hundred years past’ and are not ashamed to deny purgatory, which ‘the whole church of Christ hath believed this fifteen hundred years.’ Now, what constancy is there in this friar… that wrote this of heretics that deny purgatory… and within a while after denieth it himself, saying, in the sermon that he wrote of the rich man and Lazarus, that all men’s souls ‘lie still and sleep till Doomsday’?”

“Marry,” quoth your friend, “then hath some man had a sleep of a fair length! They will, I ween, when they wake forget some of their dreams!”

“By my faith,” quoth I, “he that believeth Luther that his soul shall sleep so long… shall when he dieth sleep in shrewd rest.”

“I much marvel,” quoth your friend, “what evil ailed him, to find out this fond folly.”

“To this opinion,” quoth I—“or, rather, to the feigning of this opinion, for I verily think that himself thinketh not as he writeth—he

1 by my troth: my word; goodness // minded of: conceived by
2 overseen: forgotten about // fond: foolish // but if: unless // is: goes
3 repugnance: opposition // appeareth: i.e., this is shown // that: what
5 so: that // shrewd: poor // 30 marvel: wonder
6 what evil ailed him: what his problem was
7–31 to . . . folly: i.e., that induced him to come up with this foolish absurdity
fell for envy and hatred that he bore to priesthood; by the malice of which his ungracious mind, he rather were content that all the world lay in the fire of purgatory till Doomsday than that there were one penny given to a priest to pray for any soul.”

“This is,” quoth your friend, “very likely.”

“Like constancy,” quoth I, “hath he used in the matter of holy vows. For in his book of *The Captivity of Babylon*, he writeth that ‘neither man nor angel’ is able to dispense with the vow made by man to God. And soon after, he wrote that no vow could bind any man, but that every man may boldly break them of his own head. But it well appeareth that he wrote the first of anger and malice toward the pope…and then changed to the second of a lecherous lust to the nun that he minded to marry.”

*The Sixth Chapter*

The author showeth how that Luther hath been fain for the defense of his indefensible errors… to go back and forsake all the manner of proof and trial… which he first promised to stand to. And now, like a man shameful and shameless, hath no proof in the world but his own word… and calleth that the word of God.

“His inconstant wit and very devilish intent especially showed itself by this also which I shall now rehearse you. In the beginning the man had the mind that commonly such fools have: he reckoned all the world wild geese save himself, and all the wit and learning to stand in his own head. And then weening that he should find no match, but that he should as he list be able to prove the moon made of green cheese, he professed in his books that he would for the proof or reproof of his opinions… stand to natural reason, to the authority of the old holy fathers, the laws and canons of Christ’s church, and to the Holy Scripture of God, with the interpretations of the old holy doctors. But soon after, when he perceived himself in his opinion deceived…

and that he saw himself confuted and concluded evidently... both by Scripture, natural reason, the laws and determinations of the Church, and the whole consent of the holy fathers interpreters of Holy Scripture: then began he to sing another song. For then, as for reason, he refused to stand to, saying that the matters of our faith be things above reason, and that reason hindereth us in our faith, and is unto faith an enemy. And as for the laws of the Church... he (with other blasphemous heretics) burned up openly at Wittenberg, singing in derision a dirge about the fire for the law’s soul. And then would he stand to nothing but only Scripture; nor to that, neither, but if it were very plain and evident. But, now, if it were in question whether the Scripture were evident for him or against him: therein would he stand to no man’s judgment but his own. For as for the whole faith of Christ’s church, continued by so many hundred years—he set utterly at naught, calling it men’s devices. And in Scripture the interpretation of Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine, Saint Ambrose, and all the old holy fathers, of so many years past... he nothing would esteem, but with blasphemous words letted not to write, ‘I care not for Augustine, I care not for a hundred Cyprians, I care not for a thousand Jeromes, I care not but for Scripture alone—and that is plainly on my part!’ As though none of these old holy, cunning men had understood any Scripture till he came! Now was he by this unreasonable manner driven to another devilish device against saints. For to the intent that their authority should not by the devotion and reverence that all good men bear them... diminish his credence, he was forced to labor to bring men in that heresy that they should pray to no saints; but would have their images drawn down, all their pilgrimages left up, all their relics cast out, all their honor and men’s devotion toward them withdrawn; so far forth that he could neither abide the honor of our Blessed Lady... nor the Holy Cross... nor Christ’s Blessed Body—as plainly declareth his abominable books.”
The Seventh Chapter

The author showeth what things caused the people to fall into Luther's fond and furious sect. And he showeth also what mischief the followers of that sect have done in Almaine, Lombardy, and Rome.

"It is," quoth your friend, "a wonder to me that the people being before brought up in the right belief... could find in their hearts to give him audience in some such heresies as these be!"

"Ye must understand, and may perceive," quoth I, "that he did not set forth all at once; but as Tyndale hath begun here in England with the thing that had a good visage (though he had corrupted it and meant naught indeed), putting forth first the New Testament in such wise handled that unlearned folk were likely to take harm and conceive divers heresies in their hearts ere they could perceive his falsehood, and then hath since, by two other books, openly showed himself to lack nothing of Luther... but that he hath not yet married a nun: so did Luther also put forth in the beginning no more but the matter of pardons, as I told you; and therein nothing affirmed, neither, against the determination of the Church, but submitted himself thereto. Now, with this demeanor was there no man offended. But yet did he that time intend a further mischief... which he little and little pursued and brought to pass. And one special thing with which he spiced all the poison... was the liberty that he so highly commended unto the people, bringing them in belief that, having faith, they needed nothing else. For as for fasting, prayer, and such other things, he taught them to neglect and set at naught as vain and unfruitful 'ceremonies'; teaching them also that, being faithful Christians, they were so near cousins to Christ... that they be, in a full freedom and liberty, discharged of all governors and all manner laws, spiritual or temporal, except the Gospel only. And albeit he said that of a special perfection it should be well done to suffer and bear the rule and authority of popes, princes, and other governors—
Luther doth call the rule of lords "tyranny." which rule and authority he calleth but only tyranny—yet he saith that the people be so free, by faith, that they be no more bound thereto… than they be bound to suffer wrong. And this doctrine also teacheth Tyndale… as the special matter of his holy book of disobedience. Now was this doctrine, in Almaine, of the common, uplandish people so pleasantly heard that it blinded them in the looking upon the remnant, and could not suffer them to consider and see what end the same would in conclusion come to. The temporal lords were glad also to hear this gear against the clergy—and the people as glad to hear it against the clergy and against the lords too, and against all their governors of every good town and city. And finally so far went it forward… that at the last, it began to burst out and fall to open force and violence. For, intending to begin at the feeblest, there gathered them together for the setting forth of these ungracious heresies a boistous company of that unhappy sect… and first rebelled against an abbot, and after against a bishop; wherewith the temporal lords had good game and sport, and dissembled the matter, gaping after the lands of the spirituality… till they had almost played as Aesop telleth of the dog… which, to snatch at the shadow of the cheese in the water, let fall and lost the cheese that he bore in his mouth. For so was it shortly after that those uplandish Lutherans took so great boldness, and so began to grow strong, that they set also upon the temporal lords. Which, had they not set hand thereto the sooner, while they looked for other men’s lands… had been likely shortly to lose their own. But so acquitted they themselves… that they slew upon the point of seventy thousand Lutherans in one summer, and subdued the remnant in that part of Almaine to a right miserable servitude. Howbeit, in the meanwhile many mischievous deeds they did.

“And yet in divers other parts of Almaine and Switzerland, this ungracious sect, by the negligence of the governors in great cities, is so far forth grown… that finally the common people have compelled the rulers to follow them… whom if they had taken heed in time, they might have ruled and led.

2 but only: nothing but 4 suffer wrong: tolerate injustice 5 special matter: main theme
6, 29, 31 Almaine: Germany 6 of the: by the 7, 23 uplandish: rustic
7 so pleasantly heard: heard as being so delightful 8 upon the remnant: at the rest
8 suffer: permit 10 temporal: secular // gear: stuff
14 burst out and fall to: break out and turn into 15 at the feeblest: with the weakest
16 setting forth: propagating // ungracious: ungodly; wicked // boistous: rowdy
17 unhappy: sorry 18–19 good game and sport: great fun and entertainment
19 dissembled the matter: pretended not to be aware of what was going on
20 spirituality: clergy 26 had: would have 27 upon the point of: nearly
28 remnant: rest 30 mischievous: criminally evil 31 divers: several
32 ungracious: ungodly; wicked
“And now is it too piteous a sight, to see the despiteous despites done there, in many places, to God and all good men… with the marvelous change from all face and fashion of Christendom… into a very tyrannous persecution… not only of all good Christian people, quick and dead, but also of Christ himself. For there shall ye see now the goodly monasteries destroyed, the places burned up, the religious people put out and sent to seek their living—or, in many cities, the places yet standing… with more despite to God than if they were burned up in ashes. For the religious people—monks, friars, and nuns—be clean drawn and driven out… except such as would agree to forsake their vows of chastity and be ‘wedded’; and the places dedicated to cleanness and chastity… left only to these apostates and brothels, to live there in lechery. Now the parish churches, in many places, not only defaced (all ornaments withdrawn, the holy images pulled down… and either
Oh, what abomination was broken or burned), but also the Holy Sacrament cast out—and the abominable beasts (which abhorreth me to think on) not abhorred in despite to file in the pyxes… and use, in many places continually, the churches for a common siege. And that in so despiteful wise… that when a stranger of other places, where Christ is worshipped, resorteth to these cities, some of those unhappy, wretched citizens fail not, as it were for courtesy and kindness, to accompany them in walking abroad… to show them the pleasures and commodities of the town, and then bring them to no place, lightly, but only the churches… to show them in derision what uses the churches serve for.

“Of this sect was the great part of those ungracious people also… which lately entered into Rome with the Duke of Bourbon—not only robbing and despoiling the city (as well their own friends as the contrary part), but, like very beasts, did also violate the wives in the sight of their husbands, slew the children in the sight of the fathers. And to extort the discovering of more money… when men had brought out all that ever they had, to save themselves from death or further pain, and were at pacts and promises of rest without further business—then the wretched tyrants and cruel tormentors, as though all that stood for nothing, ceased not to put them eftsoons to intolerable torments. And old, ancient, honorable men… those fierce heretics letted not to hang up by the privy members; and
Oh, what cruelty! from many they pulled them off and cast them in the street. And some brought out naked, with his hands bound behind him... and a cord tied fast unto his privy members. Then would they set before him, in his way, others of those tyrants with their Moorish pikes, the points toward the breasts of these poor naked men. And then one or two of those wretches would stand behind those Moorish pikes... and draw the poor souls by the members toward them. Now, then was all their cruel sport and laughter either to see the seely naked men, in shrinking from the pikes, to tear off their members... or, for pain of that pulling, to run their naked bodies in deep upon the pikes. Too piteous and too abominable were it to rehearse the villainous pain and torments that they devised on the seely women—to whom, after that they had beastly abused them (wives in the sight of their husbands, and the maidens in the sight of their fathers), they were reckoned for piteous that did no more but cut their throats. And very certain is it that not in Rome only, but also in the country of Milan that they kept and oppressed, after torments used and money fetched out that way... then some calling himself a gentleman in Almaine or Spain... would feign himself fallen in love of his host’s daughter, and that he would marry her in any wise... and then make much earnest business for to have some money with her. And whether he got aught or got naught by that device, he letted not soon after to put the father, the mother, the fair daughter, and all the whole house to new torments, to make them tell where any more money were—were there any or none. And some failed not to take the child and bind it to a broach... and lay it to the fire to roast—the father and mother looking on. And then begin to commune of a price for the sparing of the child, asking first a hundred ducats... then fifty... then forty... then twenty... then ten... then five... then twain, when the seely father had not one left... but these tyrants had all before. Then would they let the child roast to death. And yet in derision, as though they pitied the child, they would say to the father and the mother, ‘Ah, fie, fie, for shame! What marvel is it though God sent a vengeance among you! What unnatural people be you, that can find in your hearts to see your own child roasted before
your face… rather than ye would out with one ducat to deliver it from death!

“Thus devised these accursed wretches so many diverse fashions of exquisite cruelties… that I ween they have taught the devil new torments in hell, that he never knew before—and will not fail to prove himself a good scholar and surely render him his lesson when they come there; where it is to be feared that many of them be by this. For soon after that they had in Rome exercised a while this fierce and cruel tyranny… and entered into the holy churches, despoiled the holy relics, cast out the Blessed Sacrament, pulled the chalice from the altar at Mass, slain priests in the church—left no kind of cruelty or despite undone, but from hour to hour imbruing their hands in blood… and that in such wise as any Turk or Saracen would have pitied or abhorred—our Lord sent, soon after, such a pestilence among them that he left not of them the third part alive. For this purpose I rehearse you this their heavy, mischievous dealing: that ye may perceive by their deeds… what good cometh of their sect. For as our Savior saith, ye shall know the tree by the fruit.”

The Eighth Chapter

The messenger saith that the malice of the men is not to be imputed to the sect, since that of every sect, some be naught. And the author showeth that in the Lutherans, the sect itself is the cause of the malice that the men fall to.

“Sir,” quoth your friend, “in good faith, I neither can nor will defend that sect. But yet reason it is to take everything as it is. And if it be naught… it hath the less need to be made worse. But as for the malicious, cruel dealing of men of war—is not, in my mind, to be imputed to the sect of Luther. For there is no sect so saintly but they fall in cruelty when they fall to war. And of every sect, also, be some bad. And therefore the malice of the men is not, as me seemeth, to be imputed unto the sect.”
“It is not,” quoth I, “all one to be some naught and all naught. But they that fall in this sect… wax naught, all the whole meinie. For forthwith upon this sect once begun, the whole flocks of such as were infected therewith fell unto those mischievous deeds that I before rehearsed you. And also, though men in war wax furious and cruel, yet was there never none that went therein so far—and especially in such kind of cruelty as hath been among Christian men in their wars always forborne, as is the despites done to the Blessed Sacrament. Wherein these beasts were more hot and more busy than would the great Turk—and that because their sect is yet, in manner, worse than his. Moreover, the unhappy deeds of that sect must needs be imputed to the sect itself… while the doctrine thereof teacheth and giveth occasion to their evil deeds. A Christian man’s evil living… cannot be imputed to his Christendom. For his living is contrary to the doctrine and living of Christ. But as for the doctrine of this unhappy sect, and the living, also, of the beginners of the same, is such as every wise man well perceiveth doth teach and give occasion of their evil deeds. For what good deed shall he study or labor to do… that believeth Luther that he hath no free will of his own… by which he can with help of grace either work or pray? Shall he not say to himself that he may sit still and let God alone?

“What harm shall they care to forbear… that believe Luther… that God alone, without their will, worketh all the mischief that they do themselves?

“What shall he care how long he live in sin… that believeth Luther… that he shall after this life neither feel well nor ill in body nor soul till the Day of Doom? Will not he, trow you, say as the Welshman said? ‘If thou give her that day—by God, Davy will have thy coat too!’ And this thing I say but for an example. For look his opinions through, and ye shall find that they plainly set forth all the world to wretched living. If they would say that we misconstrue their words—their books be open, and the words plain, and inculcated again and again, so often and so openly that men cannot err therein, nor they by any cloak or color defend them.
“And besides that, not only the commonalty of their sect show the effect and fruit of their doctrine by their abominable dealing, as I have rehearsed you, but also the doctors and the archheretics themselves… well declare the holiness of their doctrine by their own living. For as they live they teach, and as they teach they live.”

The Ninth Chapter

The author showeth that it is a great token that the world is near at an end… while we see the people so far fallen from God that they can abide it to be content with this pestilent frantic sect… which no people, Christian or heathen, could have suffered before our days.

“If the world were not near at an end, and the fervor of devotion so sore cooled that it were almost quenched among Christian people, it could never have come to pass that so many people should fall to the following of such a beastly sect. For albeit that the Muhammadans, being a sensual and filthy sect, did in few years draw the great part Wherewith the Lutherans of the world unto it… by the selfsame draw men to their sect ways which now the Lutherans use—that is to wit, voluptuous living and violence, offering delight unto the receivers…and death to the refusers—yet was there before this abominable sect never any sect so shameless… that would still avow themselves for Christian folk granting the Scripture to be true…and therewith so enemiously blaspheme and oppugn the church of Christ, the sacraments of Christ, the saints of Christ, the cross of Christ, the mother of Christ, and the Holy Body of Christ; so shamefully living, and openly professing, a bestial manner of living… clean contrary to the doctrine and life of Christ. The Arians, the Pelagians, the Manichaeans, and so forth—every sort of heretics—began of such as, though they wickedly erred in substantial articles of the faith, yet was their outward fashion of living so honest and spiritual in appearance… that men thought themselves bound the better to believe their doctrine as Christian… for some spiritual form and

fashion of their Christian living. But, now, the chieftains of these execrable heresies both teach and use more sensual and licentious living... than ever did Muhammad! Which, though he license men to many wives—yet he never taught nor suffered his folk to break their chastity promised once, and solemnly dedicated, to God.

Whereas Luther not only teacheth monks, friars, and nuns to ‘marriage,’ but also, being a friar, hath ‘married’ a nun himself... and with her liveth, under the name of wedlock, in open, incestuous lechery, without care or shame... because he hath procured and gotten so many shameful and shameless companions.

“Who could have abided to look any man in the face that should have done thus in Saint Jerome’s and Saint Augustine’s days—what speak we of Saint Jerome and Saint Augustine? Who durst have done it for shame any time since Christ’s birth until our wretched days? Or who since Adam’s time, among the chosen people of God—what speak we of the chosen people of God? The very paynims and pagans—idolaters—kept their chastity vowed once to their false gods... and rather chose to cut off the members with which they might break it

A vestal virgin than to stand in the jeopardy to break it.

And in Rome of old time, when they were pagans, if any vestal virgin (for so called they their nuns) were violated, they not only beat the man to death with rods, in the marketplace... and buried the woman quick... but also reckoned it for a wonderful monster, and a token of wrath and indignation of their gods toward their city and empire—putting thereupon themselves in devoir with open processions and prayers and sacrifice...

Promised chastity hath always been highly esteemed. to procure the recovery of their gods’ favor. Is it not, then, now a wondrous case to see, since that the chastity promised once to God... and also to the false idols under the name of God... hath always been, since the world began, among Christian and heathen so highly esteemed... that the breakers thereof have always been, by the common consent of the whole world, as a thing taught by God unto good men... and by nature to all men, taken, reputed, and punished as abominable, wicked wretches; is it not, I say, now a wondrous thing to see... that in the flock of Christian people, which by
Christ himself, by all his apostles, by all his holy martyrs, confessors, and doctors—by all his whole Church, all the whole time of these fifteen hundred years past, chastity hath been more highly praised and esteemed than ever it was of any other sect since the world began—we should see now a lewd friar so bold and so shameless to ‘marry’ a nun and abide thereby... and be taken still for a Christian man? And, over that, for a man meet to be the beginner of a sect... whom any honest man should vouchsafe to follow? If our Lord God—whose wisdom is infinite—should have sat and studied to devise a way whereby he might cast in our face the confusion of our folly, how might he have found a more effectual... openly to show us the shame of our sin... than to suffer us that call ourselves Christian folk to see such a rabble spring up among us... as, professing the faith and religion of Christ, let not to set at naught all the doctors of Christ’s church and lean to the only authority of Friar Tuck and Mad Marian?"

The Tenth Chapter

The author inveigheth against this detestable article of this ungracious sect whereby they take away the liberty of man’s free will and ascribe allthing to destiny.

“Surely, as I say, this world is either, after the words of Saint John, ‘totus positus in maligno’ (‘all set in malice’), that we be so prone wittingly to take so wrong a way, or else is it in a marvelous blindness, if we can neither perceive by the naughty living of the persons that their sect is naught... nor can perceive by their doctrine that their sect must make their persons naught, their doctrine being such as ye have heard. Whereby every man that any faith hath and any manner knowledge of Christian belief... may well and surely perceive that Luther and all his offspring, with all those that favor and set forth his sect, be very limbs of the devil and open enemies to the faith of Christ. And not only to the faith and manhood of our Savior Christ, but also against the Holy Ghost and the Father himself—and utterly against all goodness of the
Godhead—as those that wretchedly lay all the weight and blame of our sin to the necessity and constraint of God’s ordinance, affirming that we do no sin of ourselves, by any power of our own will, but by the compulsion and handiwork of God. And that we do not the sin ourselves, but that God doth the sin in us himself. And thus these wretched heretics, with this blasphemous heresy alone, lay more villainous rebuke to the great majesty of God than ever any one ribald misdeeds to God.

Laid unto another. For who was there ever that laid unto another all the particular evil deeds of any one other man?—whereas these ribalds lay to the charge and blame of God all the malice and mischief, from the first fault to the last, that ever was wrought or thought by man, woman, or devil! And by this give they wretches great boldness to follow their foul affections… as things, after their opinion, more verily wrought in them by God… than the best minds be in good men. And that it were therefore in vain for them to resist their sinful appetites. And if they shall be damned—yet they say it shall be long ere they feel it. For Luther saith that all souls shall sleep and feel neither good nor bad after this life till Doomsday. And then they that shall be damned… shall be damned, he saith, for no deserving of their own deeds, but for such evil deeds as God, only, forced and constrained them unto, and wrought in them himself—using them, in all those evil deeds, but as a dead instrument, as a man heweth with a hatchet. And that God shall damn all that shall be damned… for his own deeds only, which himself shall have done in them; and finally for his only pleasure—because it liked him not to choose them as he did his chosen people. Whom they say that he chose in such wise, before the beginning of the world, that they can never sin.”

The Eleventh Chapter

The messenger saith that howsoever Luther and his followers in Almaine believe, yet he cannot think that such as be Lutherans in England—of whom some, he saith, have seemed good and honest—be so mad and unhappy to believe that all

1 as those that: i.e., in that they 7 lay . . . to: cast a more scurrilous aspersion on
8, 11 ribald(s): scoundrel(s) 9 laid unto: i.e., cast on
10 laid unto another: blamed on someone else 11, 23, 24 evil: bad
12 mischief: evildoing 13 fault: sin 14 give they: i.e., they give
15 affections: inclinations 16 opinion: contention; professed belief 17 minds: dispositions
18 appetites: desires 20 neither: i.e., nothing either 21 Doomsday: Judgment Day
25 dead: inanimate; i.e., completely passive 27 finally: ultimately
28 only: mere 29 such wise: such a way 33 Almaine: Germany
35 good and honest: quite 35 honest: decent 35 mad: insane 35 unhappy: wretched 35 to: as to 35 all: everything
hangeth upon destiny. Whereupon the author showeth the contrary… and that they be naught in deed, seem they never so good. And for proof that howsoever they color their words, they mean that all dependeth upon only destiny, he rehearseth a certain dispicion had with a heretic detected to the bishop and examined—the author being present—where the heretic, being learned and a preacher, made many shifts to make it seem that in his evil words he meant but well.

When your friend had heard all this, he said at last that albeit the words of Luther seemed very plain toward the affirming of such opinions, yet were the things so far out of all frame that it gave him occasion to doubt lest Luther meant not allthing so evil as his words seem to weigh to. And if he so meant himself, with others of his flock and affinity in Almaine, yet thought your friend that “such as here favor and follow his sect, in England—of whom some seem right honest, and far from his manner of living—do not so take his words, nor understand them that way, but construe them to some better sense.”

“Forsooth,” quoth I, “they cannot but know his open living in lechery with his lewd leman the nun. And that all the captains of that sort—some late Carthusians, some Observants, some of other religions, and all now apostates and ‘wedded’—live in like manner and teach others the same. And by this can they not doubt but that their doctrine is naught, except themselves allow that way for good. Now, as for their own goodness, ye find few that fall to that sect but that soon after, they fall into the contempt of prayer and fasting, and of all good works, under the name of ‘ceremonies.’ And if any do otherwise, it is for some purpose for the while to blind the people and keep themselves in favor, till they may find the time, by leisure, to fashion and frame them better to their purpose… which in the beginning if they showed themselves plainly… could haply not abide to hear them. Of which their demeanor, and that in these heresies they mean here no better than Luther doth himself, I have had good experience, and among other things, this that I shall show you. It happped me to be lately present… where one in the Lutheran
books deeply learned—and, of truth, neither in Holy Scripture nor in secular literature unlearned (as I perceive not only by the testimony of other men, and the degrees that he had taken in the university, but also by his words and his writing)—was, in the presence of right honorable, virtuous, and very cunning persons, examined. For he was at that time in ward for heresy, because that being learned, and using to hear confessions, and among many folk meetly well allowed in preaching, and thereby growing in good opinion and favor of many good simple people—abused all these open and apparent good things… to the secret sowing and setting forth of Luther’s heresies. And had for that intent not only taught and written and covertly corrupted divers light and lewd persons, but also had bought great number of the books of Luther… and Wycliffe, Hus, and Zwingli, and such other heretics… and of many one sort, divers books… to be delivered, as he could find occasion, unto young scholars of the universities—such as he thought of youth and lightness most likely to be soon corrupted. This man, I say, being examined, and long keeping himself close from disclosing of the matter… and more ready to go straight to the devil with lying and false forswearing than to be acknown of his evil demeanor and confess the truth—at the last, perceiving the matters… partly by the confession of other folk, partly by his own handwriting… so far forth come to light that they could in no wise be cloaked, then began he somewhat plainly to confess and declare… not only what he had done for the setting forth of that sect, but also, partly, what opinions he and others, his fellows, had held and were of. Setting, nevertheless, all the colors he could to make it seem that though the words which they spoke or wrote were strange and contrary to right belief, yet the effect of their meaning was not much discrepant from the true faith of Christ’s church. Howbeit, when he was reasoned with, and saw that he could not so shift it off but that, for any color he could find, one part of his tale ever contraried another, at last he showed plainly their opinions… and laid forth as in part for his own excuse, as things inducing him thereto, all the texts of Scripture by which they pretend to prove their opinions true. Among which opinions when he came to the opinion by
which they hold that only ‘faith alone’ is sufficient, without good works—unto that, he said in the beginning that they meant nothing else thereby but that men should put their faith in God’s promises and hope to be saved thereby, and that they should not put their trust in their works, for that would turn them to pride.

“They then answered him that he and his fellows could not mean so. For if they did—then could they not blame the Church as they do, making as though the Church had all this while hid the true faith from the people, and that themselves were now shent for preaching the Gospel truly. For if this were their meaning, they then meant none other than every common preacher of the Church hath always preached before Luther’s days. For what preacher hath not told the people

the parable of the poor publican ashamed of his sins… and the proud

Pharisee boasting of his virtues? Who hath not bidden them do well… and, albeit that God will reward them for their good deeds, yet put not their trust in themselves and their own deeds, but in God’s goodness? Who hath not told them that they should, as God biddeth them in the Gospel—that when they have done all they can do, yet say to themselves, ‘We be but unprofitable servants; we have done but our duty’? These things and such others the Church hath always taught

Men cannot surely judge in our own deeds, because that we cannot always surely judge our own deeds, for the blind favor that we bear toward ourselves. And therefore was it said to him, ‘If ye meant but thus, as the Church meaneth, then would ye preach but as the Church preacheth… and not blaspheme the Church in your sermons… as though ye began true preaching of the Gospel, and that the Church had hitherto preached false. And also ye must needs mean some other thing… for Luther, whose sect ye confess that ye have leaned unto, writeth in this matter far otherwise. For he saith plainly that faith alone, without any good works, doth justify us and sufficeth for our salvation.’ Then answered he that therein they meant none other but that faith is sufficient alone… if one happen after he have faith and Baptism to die ere he have time to do any

6 fellows: cohorts 7 so: that 9 shent: (being) punished
16 do well: to do good (things); to act rightly 26 surely: accurately
32 sect: belief system 33 leaned unto: subscribed to
36 none other but: nothing other than 37 have faith: receives faith // ere: before
good works. Then it was said unto him... if they should teach this opinion, under such words, for a great, secret mystery newly found out, and thereby blame the Church for misteaching the people—as though the Church taught them to put less trust in God and in faith of Christ than they should do, and induced them to put their trust in themselves and their own good works—they used themselves marvelously, considering that if they meant none other, the Church and they meant all one thing. But they could not mean so. For then why should they blame the Church, that saith not the contrary? And also, if they meant none other thing, few words would serve them. They should not need so often to speak thereof. 'For then that tale can do little good here or anywhere else where folk be christened in their cradles. For either they die ere they have time to do good works... and then they be too young to hear that sermon... or else they live and have time to do good works. And then that sermon were not wholesome for them—that good works need not, but “only faith” is sufficient, without them. And when the people take it as ye speak it—that faith alone is enough for them—then is it now a bare gloss for you to say that ye meant not so, but only that faith alone had been enough for them if they had died in their swaddling clothes.'

“To this he said that they thought also that faith alone doth justify a man without any good works... not only in children, but also in every age. ‘For whensoever a man that hath been a sinner doth repent and amend in his mind with a full faith in the promises of God... he is justified ere ever he do any of these good works—alms, fasting, or any such other. For he cannot work well till he be good already. For as Christ saith, “Arbor mala non potest bonum fructum facere”—“An evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit”—and therefore, since good works be good fruit, an evil man cannot work them. Whereby it appeareth well that the man is justified before by his faith alone, without the works, and then out of that faith growth the good fruit of good works. But faith did justify the man before, and the man was as good before the works as he is after. For his faith did justify him. And as for the works, be but things that the faith in the man, or the man by the faith, bringeth forth...
as the tree bringeth forth his leaves and can do none other… faith being
in the heart.’

“Then was it said unto him that in this tale he seemed to make the
good works to be much like a shadow that the body maketh of
necessity while it standeth in the sun… and is never the better
therefor. And then was it asked him whether a man must not, if his
faith shall serve him, have charity therewith, and a purpose to do
good works. ‘Yes,’ quoth he, ‘that he must, if he have age and discretion
thereto.’ Then was it answered him that then was all gone that

Faith alone doth not justify himself had said before. For then did not
faith alone justify the man; but the charity, with the purpose of good works,

must, by his own granting, needs go therewith, or else would his
faith justify nothing at all. For if he had never so great a faith,
and never so sure a belief, in God’s ‘promises’—yet if he purposed to
do no good deeds therewith… but peradventure harm, he should
have little justification by his ‘only faith.’ And therefore it was
false that he had said—‘a man is never the better for his good works’—
while his good works be so taken and reputed with God… that the
purpose of them, yet undone, so far forth worketh to his justification…
that without that purpose he cannot be justified. And that it is also
false that he said—that ‘faith alone justifies a man’—when himself is
fain to grant that faith without charity and purpose of good
works cannot justify; which is as much to say as faith alone cannot

justify.

“To this he answered that he had said that ‘faith only’ was sufficient,
and that ‘faith alone’ doth justify, because that if a man
had faith… it could not be but that he should work good works.
For faith, he said, could never be idle—‘as the fire must needs burn
and give heat. And therefore as a man may say “The fire is enough
to burn a tree,” though he speak nothing of heat… and yet the fire
doeth it by heat; and a man may say “The fire maketh me see by
night,” and yet the fire doeth it but by the light: so may a man
say that “faith doth save us” though faith do it not without
hope and charity and other virtuous works… because that faith

1 his: its // can do none other: cannot do otherwise 3 tale: account
6 therefore: i.e., for 7, 21 purpose: intention
8–9 have… thereto: is old enough and has enough reasoning capacity for that
10, 22 himself: he himself 14, 15 never so: no matter how
15 purposed: intended 19 while: since // reputed: regarded // with: by
20, 23 purpose of: i.e., intention of doing
20 yet undone: i.e., when they are not yet done 23 fain: forced
26 faith only: faith alone 29, 30 as: just as
31 though: even if // speak nothing of: makes no mention of
hath always good hope and charity with it, and cannot but work well—no more than the fire can be without heat and light and burn all combustible things that it may touch and tarry with.’

“Then was it said unto him that albeit a man might so speak by the fire... yet would not this thing serve their sect. 'For he that saith fire alone is enough to burn... would not say nay to him that would say the fire could not burn but if it had heat. But your sect scorneth and blameth the Church... because the Church saith that faith will not suffice but if it have charity and good works. For else ye had no cause in this matter to preach contrary to the Church. Moreover, whereas ye say that faith hath always good hope with it—that seemeth not always true. For he that hopeth that by “faith alone” he shall be saved without any good works—as Lutherans do believe indeed—he hath an evil hope, and a damnable. Now, whereas ye say that ye preach “faith alone” to be sufficient because that faith hath always charity joined therewith: if this were true, why preach ye not as well that “charity alone” is sufficient?—which were as near the truth as the other. Now, whereas ye make all the ground upon this, that “faith hath ever charity therewith,” and that it cannot be but that charity (which is in deed the thing that specially bringeth forth good works, much more properly than faith; for faith bringeth them forth by charity when it is joined therewith, as the Apostle saith: “Fides quae per dilectionem operatur”; “Faith worketh by charity”)—whereas ye say it cannot be but that this charity is always joined unto faith—this ground will fail you... and make your foundation false, and all your building fall. The apostle Paul in many places of his epistles saith the contrary thereof. For he saith that if a man have so great faith that he might by the force of his faith work miracles—and also such fervent affection to the faith that he would give his body to the fire for the defense thereof—yet if he lacked charity, all his faith sufficed not.”

“In good faith,” quoth your friend, “he was well and properly answered. But yet methinketh he might have replied a little again to those

3 may: can // tarry: linger 5 by: about 6 say nay to: disagree with; contradict 7, 9 but if: unless 8 blameth: castigates 14 evil: bad 17 were: would be 21 in deed: in reality; actually // specially: predominantly 24 the Apostle: Saint Paul 28 all your: your whole 30 might: could 32 affection: attachment; devotedness 35 in good faith: in all honesty 35 well and properly: quite excellently 36 might have replied a little again: could have said a little something back, in reply
words of Saint Paul… and might have avoided them well with
other words of his own. For where he writeth also, to the Galatians,
that if ‘any angel’ would ‘come down from heaven’ and preach a contrary gospel to that
that he had preached already, ‘accursed should he be,’ and not to be
believed… he did not in these words affirm nor intend thereby that
ever it should so be, or could so be, that any angel so should do indeed.
For he knew right well it was impossible that any angel of
heaven should come down and tell a false tale. But he said it
only by a manner of speaking which is among learned men called
Hyperbole ‘hyperbole’—for the more vehement expressing
of a matter—nothing meaning
else but that the gospel which he had preached was the plain,
sure, and undoubtable truth, against which no man were to be
believed. And in like wise methinketh the man that ye speak of
might have said that though Saint Paul said if he ‘had so great
faith’ that he were ‘able thereby to remove hills,’ except he ‘had charity
therewith’ it would not serve him, he meant thereby no more but to
show the great need that men have to charity… and not that it were
possible that faith could be without charity—no more than he meant
that an angel may come down from heaven to preach a false faith.
And therefore might it yet stand right well with all those words of
Saint Paul… that faith cannot fail of salvation, since it cannot
fail of charity. And of truth, meseemeth as that man said: that
faith cannot be idle, but it must needs work well.”

“Forsooth,” quoth I, “the man lacked you there; for he found not
that gloss. Which though he had… yet would it not have served him.
For between those two places of Saint Paul is there great difference.
For in the one is there an impossible excess and hyperbole; in the
other is there not so. For angels of heaven never can come down and
teach a false faith; but faith may be severed from charity. And in
the one place he none other thing intended than, as ye say, to
show by that great, exceeding word… the undoubted truth of the
faith which himself had preached. But in the other place his
special purpose was to teach the Corinthians that they should

1 might have avoided them well: could have well gotten around them
2 of his own: i.e., of Saint Paul’s
9 tell a false tale: say something false
11–12 more vehement expressing of a matter: more forceful making of a point
16 might: could 17 remove hills: move mountains  // except: unless
19 to: for 21 may: could 22 stand right well: be quite consistent
26 lacked: fell short of  // found not: did not come up with 27 though: even if
28, 34 place(s): text(s) 28 of: from 29 excess: overstatement
31 may: can 33 great, exceeding word: extreme, out-of-bounds statement
33 undoubted: undoubtable 34 himself: he himself 35 special: precise
No good work availeth without charity. neither trust that any gift of nature, or gift of God above nature... or any manner virtue—almsdeed, faith, or other—were able to stand them in stead without charity. And this did he specially... for that he would that no man should be in such error... as to reckon that either excellent gift of cunning, great labor spent in preaching, great alms spent on poor people, or a very fervent faith... might suffice to their salvation if charity lacked. Against which error he doth in such wise exhort them to charity in avoiding the rancor which by occasion of schisms did arise among them... that he showed them—precisely—that without charity they lost clearly the merit of all their other virtues and graces that God had given them (cunning, almsdeed, faith, and all), putting the example by his own self; which though he were a chosen servant and apostle, yet if he were in language equal with all the whole world and with angels too, and had all the cunning that possibly could be had, and the spirit of all prophecy therewith, and would give all his goods in alms, and had also all the full faith so great that it sufficed to work wonders with, and so fervent that he would abide to be burned for it: yet if he lacked charity, all this would not serve him. So that ye may see now that your gloss would not have relieved this man. For though none angel could come down and teach an untruth... and therefore the words that ye allege can be none otherwise taken than, as ye say, by way of excess and hyperbole to declare the vehemence of his mind in the matter of faith which he then spoke of: yet this other place of Saint Paul, that was laid against that heretic that I speak of, as great and vehement as the words be... yet do they plainly prove that the Apostle showeth that faith may be without charity—and that both so great that it may suffice to the doing of great wonders... and so fervent that it may suffer a painful death... and yet, for fault of charity, not sufficient to salvation—and that this may hap as well in faith as in almsdeed, which the Apostle putteth in the same case. And therefore, whereas that man said, and ye seem to confirm the same, that faith cannot be idle
from the working of good works: the Apostle, to show the contrary...
and that all the works of faith, though they seem never so good, be yet
naught in deed if they be not wrought with charity, commendeth
only that faith that worketh by charity—signifying that all other works
of faith be not available. And surely faith alone, without charity, may
be, besides this, not only idle, without the busyness of good works,
but also for lack of good works it may be utterly dead. And therefore,

Jas 2:14–26
as it was there objected unto that man, the
holy apostle James saith to them that reckon
faith sufficient for salvation without good works… that they be worse
than devils. For he saith that the devils do believe, and 'tremble' for the
fear of God; and that men which by the hope and boldness of their
belief think their faith without good works sufficient be worse
than devils… because they stand out of dread of God, that menaceth
unto them the pains of hell except they do good works! Without
which Saint James, for a final conclusion, saith that the faith is
but dead.

“But here was it also said unto him, yet again, that though Saint
James do say that 'faith without good works is dead'—he should not
thereby run to his old gloss and say that therefore he and other
Lutherans meant that faith sufficeth to salvation… because they
think it cannot be but that it shall needs bring forth good works;
and that therefore, on the contrary side, if one have no good works he
hath no faith… because a dead faith is no faith, as a dead man is no
man. It was told him that this gloss would not serve him, ‘for Saint
James meant not that the faith that he calleth dead for lack of good
works is no faith—no more than Saint Paul meant that a widow living in
delight and pleasure is no woman, though he said that she ‘is dead
even as she goeth alive’”—but Saint James meant only that such faith
A dead faith is a faith,
but unprofitable.
shall not stand them in stead. For Saint
James denieth not but that such a dead
faith as he calleth dead because it is
unprofitable… is yet a very faith indeed, though it be not quick

2 never so: no matter how
3 naught in deed: actually bad
5 available: efficacious // surely: certainly
5, 7 may: can
14 stand out of dread: are devoid of fear
14–15 that menaceth unto them: who threatens them with their having to suffer
15 except: unless
31 stand them in stead: benefit them; do them any good
34 quick: alive
in good works. And therefore he resembleth such a faith in a man unto the unprofitable faith that is in a devil. For he saith that whereas such a man is bold of his faith, the devil hath faith as well as he—
for the devil doth believe such things as we believe.’ To this the man answered that some ‘right well-learned men’ were of the mind that without a man wrought good works—it was a good proof that he had no faith at all; for very faith could not but work; and that the devil had no faith ‘but by equivocation of this word “faith.” For the very faith, indeed, is a faith in the promises of God. And the devil is
desperate, and hath not nor cannot have faith and trust in God’s promises.’

“Then was it answered him that those ‘right well-learned men’ were Luther and Tyndale, and their fellows, ‘that take themselves for better learned than Christ’s blessed apostles Saint Paul or Saint James—which in their holy writings affirm fully the contrary. And where they say that the devil hath no faith, but hath the knowledge of the things that we believe, and so he hath not faith… they affirm therein more than they may make good. For Saint James saith they “believe,” and saith not they “know.” And he, when he wrote it, knew much better than Luther and Tyndale too… what manner perceiving the devils have in the articles of our faith. In which as there be some whereof the devils have, peradventure, not a belief, but a certain and sure knowledge—as of Christ’s descent into hell, and despoiling of their possession—so are they, of likelihood, in any other articles of our faith whereof they have only belief and persuasion, without the very knowledge and science. And where those “well-learned men” Luther and Tyndale say that the devil hath not faith but by the equivocation of the word “faith”—being in deed (as ye say) a faith in the “promises of God”… whereby Christian men hope to come to heaven, whereas the devils “be desperate and can have no such faith in God’s promises, nor hope or look for heaven”—these “well-learned men” that so say go about to set Saint James to school. For they would we should ween that Saint James did speak of faith like one that wist not what “faith” meant… but were deceived by equivocation of the word, calling “faith” the thing that is not faith in deed; whereas in deed, Saint James speaketh of it as he should… and useth the word in its right signification, and these Lutherans abuse the

1 resembleth: likens 3 is bold of: presumes upon 5, 12 right: very
5, 12 well-learned: well-educated 6 without: unless
6 it: i.e., that; the fact that he did not do good works 10, 30 desperate: in despair
13 fellows: cohorts 14 better learned: better educated; more learned
18 may make good: can prove 20 manner: kind of 22 as: just as 23 as: such as
24 of likelihood: probably // in: with regard to
26 very: actual // science: cognizance 28 being in deed: it being actually
28–29 as ye say: so you say; according to you 30 come: get
32 go . . . school: are trying to set Saint James straight
33 would we should ween: would have us think 34 one: someone // wist: knew
34–35 were . . . word: made a mistake by using the word in an equivocal way
35 not faith in deed: not in fact faith 36 deed: fact 37 abuse: misuse
The Lutherans deceive the word—of a malicious mind to deceive unlearned people with equivocation. For whereas “faith” signifieth the belief and firm credence given… not only to such things as God promiseth… but also to every truth that he telleth his Church, by writing or without, which thing he will have us bound to believe; and whereas of truth, the devils, as Saint James saith, do believe such things and have them in a reverent dread: now would these heretics blind us with their equivocation by which they not only restrain the faith unto the “promises” alone, from all other articles of the faith—of which many be no promises (as to believe that there is a God, and that there be three Persons; and many such other articles)—but also abuse the word “faith” altogether, turning it slyly from belief into trust, confidence, and hope… and would have it seem as though our faith were nothing else but a sure trust and a faithful hope that we have in God’s promises. And this sophistic handling of “faith” is the thing that, as appeareth by Tyndale in his book of Obedience, these Lutherans ween to deceive all the world with, and to make men ween that “faith” betokeneth not belief, but hope and trust; and, so, to make men ween that Saint James wist not what “faith” meant when he laid against them that put their trust, as these Lutherans teach us, in their “only faith”… the comparison between them and devils, which believe as surely as they. And therefore, to reprove Saint James, they would make us believe that our faith were nothing but hope; whereas every man wotteth that faith and hope be two distinct virtues, and that hope is not faith, but followeth faith, in him that hath hope. For no man can hope for heaven if he believe it not. But, on the other side, he may, as the devil doth, though he believe it and know it too… yet fall far from all hope thereof. And if these Lutherans will defend their heresy by that sophistic gloss… they must then change their article and say no more that faith alone is sufficient, but they must say that hope alone is sufficient. And yet shall they then lie as loudly as they do now. For hope without charity will but beguile them.’

“After such reasoning, the man said that he and the other Lutherans, when they spoke that ‘only faith’ was sufficient, they ‘mean
not of a dead faith, that is without charity and good works, but a very faith, that is quick and worketh by charity; and that such faith, he thought, was sufficient. But then was it answered that neither they nor he could mean so. For how could they call that thing ‘faith only’ that is joined with charity and good works? Or how can it stand that they mean that faith which ‘by charity worketh good works,’ when they say that it is sufficient alone without good works? And that it is, as Luther saith, ‘great sin and sacrilege’ to go about to please God by good works, and not by only faith? How could they say that ‘only faith’ sufficeth… if they should mean that without charity and good works, no faith sufficeth? For it were a mad thing to say that ‘faith alone suffices, without good works,’ and therewith to say that ‘without good works, faith sufficeth nothing.’ And so was it said unto him that therefore, though they color their matters when they be examined, yet it cannot be but that he and other Lutherans, where they sow their heresy, mean plainly as they speak: that folk need no more but believe, and then howsoever they live shall make no matter. For nothing, as Luther saith, ‘can damn a Christian man, save only lack of belief.’

For all other sins—if belief and faith stand fast—be quite absorbed and ‘supped up,’ he saith, in that faith.

“When this man was, with such reasoning and much better than I do or can rehearse you, somewhat sore pressed upon, then brought he forth another gloss… and said that they meant not but that faith if it should suffice for salvation… must needs have with it charity and good works, or else it were no very faith, as a dead man is no very man. Howbeit, he said that though it be nothing without good works, yet when it is joined with good works… all the merit cometh of our faith only, and no part thereof for our works. So that God giveth us heaven for our faith only, and nothing for our works. For though he give it not for our faith if we lack good works, yet if we have both… he regardeth not in his reward our works anything, but only our faith. And he said that for this cause they say that only faith causeth our salvation.

“To this it was answered that if this opinion were true… yet it well
appeareth that this is not the thing that they mean. For the words of Luther and Pomeranus and all the archheretics of that sect be very plain. For they say that it is sacrilege to go about to please God by any good works but faith only. And then why should good works be joined to faith? Or why should God exact good works of us? Whereof they serve... if they be nothing pleasant to God? And when Luther saith that ‘nothing can damn any Christian man but only lack of belief,’ he showeth manifestly that we not only need no good works with our faith, but also that, so we have faith, none evil works can hurt us. And so he meaneth plainly that faith only—without any good works joined thereto, and also with all kind of evil works joined thereto—is sufficient to save us. ‘And therefore, if ye be of his sect,’ was it said to the man, ‘ye cannot avoid but that this is your very doctrine, howsoever ye color it.’

“Then was it further asked him, if their meaning should be such as he had said, what should move him and others, his fellows, so to think—that in faith and good works joined together, the good works were nothing worth, but that all the merit should be in the faith, and all the thank and reward should be given to the faith, and right naught to the good works.

“Whereunto he answered that many texts of Scripture induced them thereto, and especially texts of Saint Paul: ‘Fides iustificat’ (‘Faith justifies’); and ‘Credidit Abraham Deo, et reputatum est ei ad iustitiam’ (‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted in him for justice’); ‘Si ex operibus, habet quidem gloriam, sed non apud Deum’ (‘If he were justified by the works, then had he glory, but not with God’); ‘Si ex operibus . . . , Christus pro nobis gratis mortuus est’ (‘If we be justified by the works, then did Christ die for us for naught’); ‘Gratis redempti estis’ (‘Ye be redeemed freely’). ‘And thereby may we see that our works were no part of the cause.’ And yet especially these words of our Savior Christ, he said, much moved them to be of that mind... where he saith, ‘Qui crediderit et baptizatus fuerit salvus erit’ (‘He

3 go about: attempt; try 4, 5, etc. works: acts 6 nothing pleasant: not at all pleasing
8 showeth manifestly: is manifestly stating 9 so: so long as; provided that
10, 12 evil: bad 10 meaneth plainly: clearly means 11 only: alone
14 avoid but: escape the fact // very: actual // color: disguise 16 fellows: cohorts
19 thank: credit 19, 20 to: for 20 right naught: absolutely nothing
26–27 accounted in him for justice: credited to him as righteousness.
28 were . . . had: i.e., had been . . . would have had 31 for naught: for nothing; to no avail
that believeth and is baptized shall be saved’) — where ‘Christ requireth nothing but only faith.’

“By all these texts, he said, it plainly appeared that all our salvation came of faith, as Abraham was justified by faith and not by his works. And that if our good works should be the cause of our salvation — ‘then, as Saint Paul saith, Christ died for naught. For he needed not to die for us… if our own works might save us. Nor we were not redeemed freely… if we should redeem ourselves with the payment of our own works.’

“To this was it answered that ‘those texts, and all others alleged for that purpose, signify none other but that after the faith of Christ brought into the world by the Incarnation and Passion of our Blessed Savior… men are no longer bound to the observance of Moses’ law. Nor that all the law of Moses… nor all the good works of man… were not able to save one man of themselves… nor without faith; and that Christ freely redeemed us. For neither had he, or ever shall have, any reward of us for the bitter pains taken in his blessed Passion for us… nor never deserved we unto him that he should so much do for us. Nor the first faith, nor the preaching thereof, nor the first justification of man thereby, nor the sacrament and fruit of our baptism… was not given to the world for any good works that ever the world had wrought, but only of God’s mere Faith without good works cannot save us. liberal goodness. But yet there is never a text of them, nor any other in all Scripture, so meant… that after the baptism, the “faith only” shall save us without good works… if we live, and have reason, to do them. For though it be said by the mouth of our Savior, “He that believeth shall be saved,” where he nothing speaketh of any good works, yet meaneth he not that “he that believeth” shall be saved… without good works if he live to do them. For else why should ye not as well say that men shall be saved for keeping of the commandments without faith, since Christ saith, “If thou wilt enter into the kingdom of heaven, keep the commandments”? And saith also, “Do that and thou shalt have life.” At which time he spoke no word of any faith. He saith also in Holy Scripture, “Date elemosinam,
et omnia munda sunt vobis” (“Give alms, and all is clean in you”).
Which words if men should as largely construe for the preeminence
of almsdeed as ye that are of Luther’s sect construe the texts
that speak of faith—they might take a false gloss and color to
say that without faith or penance either, or any other virtue,
almseade alone sufficeth for salvation, how wretchedly soever
we lead our life beside. But if we should so say of almsdeed,
we should say wrong, as ye do when ye say so of faith. For likewise
as it is understood that faith must needs go with good works
if they shall be fruitful… though it be not spoken of in those texts
that speak of good works: so is it understood that in them
which after baptism have time and reason to work well, good
works must walk with faith… and sorrow at heart for fault of
good works… if the faith shall aught avail them. For if both good
works and final repentance of the lack of good works do
fail us having time and reason to them, we be likely to fare much
the worse for our faith. And that this is thus… we may well know
by the texts of Holy Scripture if we set them together… and take
not one text for our part and set another at naught.’
“To this answered he that albeit that these texts set together do prove
that faith alone doth not suffice without good works (which
thing he said that himself denied not), yet he said that none of
those texts prove anything the contrary but that when faith and
good works be joined together, all the merit cometh, yet, of our
faith only, and nothing of our works.
“Whereunto he was answered that ‘though it so were indeed that
no texts of Scripture proved the contrary, yet since there is none that
saith so… and the whole Church saith and believeth the contrary,
what reason have ye to say so, and to give the whole merit unto
faith… and no part of the reward to good works? And now have
ye much less reason so to do… when the plain words of Holy Writ

=Gn 4:7
Lk 6:38

be, openly, to the contrary. For did not
God say to Cain, “If thou do well, thou
shalt have well”? Saith not Christ of
them that doth alms, “A good measure shaken together, heaped,
and running over shall they give into your bosom”? Doth not our

2 largely: liberally  3, 6, 7 almsdeed: almsgiving
4–5 might . . . say: i.e., could be given a false interpretation and guise of saying
7 beside: otherwise  // so say of: say that about  9 go with: accompany
12 reason: the requisite intelligence  // work: act  13 walk with: accompany
13 fault: lack  14 shall aught avail them: is to be of any benefit to them
16 us . . . them: i.e., those of us having the time and intelligence necessary for doing them
19 part: side  // set another at naught: disregard another
25 nothing: in no way  26 though: even if
Mt 25:34–36

Lord show that in the Day of Judgment he will give the kingdom of heaven to them that have done alms... in meat, drink, clothes, and lodging... because of their charity used in those deeds? Which deeds though he will not reward with heaven except faith went with them—yet if they were wrought in faith, he promiseth to reward those works, and not their faith only. And that so far forth... that it appeareth by the words of our Savior in the same places, and by his words in which he said he would in the Day of Judgment speak to them that had by faith wrought wonders in his name without good works and charity... whom he would then bid walk workers of wickedness, and tell them that he knoweth them not—by these things, I say, it well appeareth... that, be a man's faith never so great, yet if those good works fail him, his faith shall fail of heaven.'

"Then said he yet again that faith can never be without good works, 'but and if a man have faith, his faith shall not fail nor cease to bring forth the fruit of good works, as the tree bringeth forth his leaves.'"

"Then was it answered him that he was driven from that point before... as well by the authority of Saint Paul as of Saint James. And also that he wist well that faith, or belief, is not contrary to every sin, but only to infidelity and lack of belief; so that with other sins it may stand. Then said he that if men believed 'surely,' he thought they would not sin. 'For who would sin,' said he, 'if he believed verily and surely that sin should bring him to hell?' Whereunto it was answered, 'Whoso believed after your Lutheran faith... should never let to sin, since Lutherans believe that no sin could damn them but only lack of belief, and that no good work needeth them... but that they shall be saved howsoever they live, for their only faith. Whereby it well appeareth that ye Lutherans have but half a faith. For ye believe God only in his "promises," and in his threats ye believe him not at all. Howbeit, if one believed indeed surely... as ye would now seem to believe: truth is it that it would let many a man from sin... but yet not every man. For albeit that many men there be... either the more bold in sin or the more negligent...
in good virtues... because their faith is very faint and feeble, which would if they had a sure and an undoubted faith be in such dread of God—and love, also—that it would withdraw them from sin and set them in the way of virtue: yet many men be there, on the other side, that, were their faith never so strong, yet should it not master the frowardness of their malicious appetites. And this would happen sometimes—and daily doth—in men not deeply drowned in malice... nor folk out of the faith, neither... which yet fall into the breach of God's commandment by the subtle suggestion of the devil, or by the frailty of their own flesh. Whereof it seemeth that the holy Apostle was himself so sore afraid—for all his faith—that he thrice prayed God to take the temptation away. I cannot see but that Adam believed the words of God... and yet he broke his commandment. And I think that King David fell not from his faith, though he fell first in adultery and eft in manslaughter. And some examples have we seen of them that have sought the revenging of their own malicious minds... by such ways as they saw when they went about it their own undoubted death before their eyes. And therefore it is but a tale to say that faith draweth always good works with it, and that ye Lutherans, in that ye say that faith is sufficient "alone, without good works," should say so because it bringeth always good works with it. For this were a very vain doctrine—that faith is alone sufficient to save them that have the use of reason, without good works—if in such as have the use of reason, faith be never without good works.'

"After such objections, then fell he to another point, and said that if our good works and faith be joined, yet might it well appear by Scripture that all the merit was in our faith, and nothing in man's works. 'For all the works of man,' he said, 'be stark naught, as things all spotted with sin.' And for that he laid divers texts of Scripture, but especially, as the most plain proof, the words of the prophet 'Omnis iustitia nostra velut menstruate': See Isaiah 64:5–6.
pannus menstruate.' 'And since that *all* our works,' he said, 'be spotted and
sinful and naught how good soever they seem, it must needs follow
that all the merit cometh of our faith.'

"To this was answered him, 'Lo—now, by this, ye have somewhat
opened yourself unawares… and declared your opinion in this matter
to be far other than ye said before. For in the glosses that ye have
used before, ye have always said that ye—and *all* the sect of Luther,
as far as ye knew and thought—believed that faith could not
save us (if we had reason) without good works, but ye said that
faith was enough "alone" because it brought of necessity good works
with it. And yet all the merit and reward due to the faith only,
and not to the good works that it bringeth forth. And now ye say
that there be *no* good works at all, but all our works be stark
naught. Now, if ye think that there be *no* good works, how can
ye say as ye said before—that ye think that faith always bringeth
forth good works? Moreover, the words of the prophet, though
it be generally spoken, may be well understood to be verified in
far the most part of mankind though not of all—or of the justice of
man… if it were compared with the sovereign justice of God. Or that
justice of right good men is yet sore spotted with sin, for that the
frailty of our nature seldom constantly standeth any while together
in good works… but that the perseverance is interrupted,
often spotted, and besprent with sin. And thereof is it said,

_Prv 24:16_  
"Septies in die cadit iustus, et resurget"

("Seven times in the day falleth the righteous
man, and riseth again"). It may be also understood of all the
righteousness of a man… alone wrought of himself and his pure
_All our only justice is all_ natural powers, without the aid and help
_spotted._ of special grace. For surely all such
justice of ours as is _only_ ours… _is_ all
spotted, and in effect all one foul spot, for any beauty that it hath
in the glorious eye of God. But surely the holy prophet never meant
as Luther and his fellows would have seem… that the grace of God is in all
his people so feeble of itself, and of so little force and effect, that
no man may with the help thereof be able to do one good, virtuous
deed. For Luther saith plainly that no man, though he have the

2 _naught_: wicked  5 _opened yourself_: given yourself away // _declared_: shown
5 _opinion_: stance  9 _reason_: i.e., the use of reason
10 _brought of necessity_: necessarily brought  13–14 _stark naught_: utterly wicked
15 _as_: i.e., what  17 _generally spoken_: said of everyone in general
18 _far the most part_: the vast majority  18, 19, _etc._ _justice_: righteousness
19 _that_: i.e., that the  20 _sore_: badly // _for that_: because
21 _seldom… together_: i.e., is such that we seldom consistently continue for any length of time
23 _besprent_: besprinkled  27 _pure_: mere  29 _special_: actual  29, 32 _surely_: assuredly
35 _may_: can  36 _though_: even if
help of God’s grace thereto, is able to keep and observe the commandments of God. Which blasphemous words seem to signify that both Saint John the Baptist and our Blessed Lady also… were sinners; and, over all this, that God were not able by the aid and help of his grace to make a man keep his commandments, and keep him out of sin, though he would.

“All the old fathers that wrote against Pelagius (which held opinion that man is of nature, or, at the leastwise, with the general influence of grace, able and sufficient to do good and meritorious works, without help of any special grace toward every good deed itself) disliked and condemned his doctrine… for that it diminished the necessity of man’s recourse unto God, for calling help of his grace. But ye that hold all men’s deeds for utterly naught though grace wrought with them… be double and treble more enemies to grace than they. For whereas they said we might do good sometimes without it, ye say we can at no time do no good with it! And then were grace, by your tale, a very void thing! Was, then, all the labor and the pain that the apostles took in preaching… all naught and sinful? All the torments that the martyrs suffered in their passion… altogether sin? All the deeds of charity that Christ shall (as himself saith!) reward with everlasting life at the general judgment—be they sin altogether? Saint Paul reckoned it otherwise. For he said boldly of himself, “Bonum certamen certavi, cursum consummavi… et nunc super est mihi corona iustitiae”—“I have labored and striven a good strife, I have performed my course…; now lacketh me no more for me but the crown of justice.”’

“Thereunto he answered that Saint Paul would not say that our deeds were sufficient of themselves, but that all our sufficiency is of God. Whereunto it was answered that this was little to the matter, ‘for no more is our faith sufficient of itself, but the sufficiency thereof is also of God, in that our Lord, with our endeavor, giveth us grace to believe—and in that it liketh our Lord, of his goodness, so highly to reward it. For surely, as it is very true that Saint Paul

\[2\text{ Tm 4:7–8}\] otherwise. For he said boldly of himself, “Bonum certamen certavi, cursum consommavi,… et nunc super est mihi corona iustitiae”—“I have labored and striven a good strife, I have performed my course…; now lacketh me no more for me but the crown of justice.”’

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\[The sufficiency of our faith is of God.\]

\[Rom 8:18\] of his goodness, so highly to reward it. For surely, as it is very true that Saint Paul

\[4\text{ over: besides; on top of }//\text{ were not: would not be}\n\[6\text{ though he would: even if he wanted to }//\text{ old: early }//\text{ which: who }//\text{ of: by}\n\[10–11\text{ every good deed itself: each respective good deed }//\text{ disliked: disapproved of}\n\[11\text{ for that: because }//\text{ diminished: sold short }//\text{ calling: asking (the) }\n\[13, 19\text{ naught: wicked }//\text{ though: even if }//\text{ wrought: worked}\n\[14\text{ double and treble: i.e., two or three times }//\text{ might: could }//\text{ tale: account}\n\[17\text{ very void: really worthless }//\text{ pain: trouble }//\text{ himself: he himself}\n\[21\text{ saith: See, e.g., Matthew 25:34–36. }//\text{ striven a good strife: fought a good fight}\n\[26\text{ performed: completed }//\text{ is: comes }//\text{ of: from }//\text{ matter: point}\n\[34\text{ liketh: pleases }//\text{ surely: assuredly }//\text{ as: just as }//\text{ that: what}\n
saith, that “non sunt condignae passiones huius vitae ad futuram gloriam quae revelabitur in nobis” ("all that ever we can suffer in this world… is not worthy the glory to come, that shall be showed in us")—

for what thing could a seely, wretched creature do or suffer for God in the brief time of this short life… that might of right require to be rewarded everlastingl… with such inestimable joy as neither eye hath seen nor tongue can express, nor heart can imagine or conceive?—so is it also as true that all the faith we have or can have… can of his own nature as little, or much less, deserve heaven… as our other good deeds. For what great thing do we to God, or what great thing could we ask him of right, because we believe him? As though he were much beholden unto us… in that we vouchsafe to trust him! As though his worship hung in our hands—and his estimation lost if he were out of credence with us! And therefore, among many foolish words of Luther… as foolish as ever heretic spoke, he never spoke a more frantic… than in that he saith that God hath need of our faith. For he saith that God “hath no need of our good works, but he hath need of our faith, and hath need that we should believe him”! Truth is it that he needeth neither our faith nor our works. But since that he hath determined that he will not save us without both if we be of discretion to have both—therefore have we need of both. And yet neither is there the one nor the other, nor they both together between them, that be of their own nature worthy the reward of heaven. But as we see that one ounce of gold, whereof ten pounds’ weight were not of his own nature toward man worth one ounce of wheat, nor one hundred pounds’ weight thereof… of the nature itself worth one seely sheep, is yet among men, by a price appointed and agreed, worth many whole sheep, and many a pound’s weight of bread: so hath it liked the liberal goodness of God to set as well our faith as our deeds—

\[
\text{Faith and good works of which were else, both twain, of their own nature, right little in value—at so high a price… as none is able to buy them and pay for them but himself… because}
\]

we should work them only to him, and have none other paymaster, nor none other chapman to sell our ware and work unto, but only him. Except we would be so mad, and towards

3, 24 worthy: deserving of 4 seely: poor 5 might: could 5, 11 of right: by right 5–6 require to be: call for being 9, 25 his: its 9 deserve: earn (us) 12 vouchsafe: deign 13 worship: honor 14 estimation: reputation (would be) // out of credence with: i.e., not given credence by 15 words: statements 16 spoke a more frantic: i.e., made a more wildly insane one 19 truth is it: the truth is 21 be of discretion: possess enough reasoning ability 24 as: just as 26 toward man worth: worth to man 27 seely: measly / frail 29 whole: robust 30 liked the liberal goodness of God to: pleased God, in his liberal goodness, to 33 none: no one 34 because: in order that; so that 35 to: for 36 chapman: purchaser 37 except: unless // mad: crazy
him so unkind, that we would sell it to another for less… rather
than to him for more. As some do that had liefer travel far off and
sell for less… than they would for more sell to their neighbors at
home. And as do these foolish hypocrites… which rather than they
would sell their work to God for everlasting joy of heaven… sell it all
to the world for the peevish pleasure of the vain praise puffed out
of poor mortal men’s mouths with a blast of wind.’

“Unto this he said that very true it was that all our works took
their value and price after the acceptation of God, and as he list to
allow them. But he said that God rejected, disallowed, and set at

\[\text{Heb 11:6}\]

naught all the works of infidels, wrought
without faith; for ‘sine fide impossibile
est placere Deo’ (‘without faith it is impossible to please God’).

“And that of his faithful chosen people, that believe and trust in
him, he accepteth and alloweth all the deeds. ‘And that is,’ said he,
‘well proved by the words of Saint Paul “Nihil damnationis est
\[\text{Rom 8:1}\]
is qui sunt in Christo Iesu.”’ And albeit
that in the rehearsing of the communication
had with this man, it may well be that my remembrance
may partly miss the order; partly, peradventure, add or diminish
in some part of the matter—yet in this point, I assure you
faithfully, there is no manner change or variance from his
opinion, but that, after many shifts, he brought it plainly to this
point at last… that he and his fellows that were of Luther’s sect
were firmly of this opinion: that they believed that only God worketh
all in every man, good works and bad; howbeit, such as he foreknoweth
to be damned, no manner works be profitable to them,
for God taketh them for naught be they never so good; but, on the
other side, in those he hath chosen from the beginning and predestined
to glory, all works be good enough, for God accepteth and
taketh them well a-worth be they never so bad.

“It was asked him then whether that the forsaking of Christ
by Peter was allowed and well approved by Christ. And
whether the adultery and manslaughter was by God well allowed
in David.
Whereunto he said that because they were chosen and predestined, therefore those sins were not… nor the sins of any such men be not… ‘imputed’ unto them; but God, because he hath from the beginning chosen them to everlasting bliss, therefore he arrecteth no blame of their deeds unto them, but all the works of a ‘just man’—‘that is to say,’ quoth he, ‘of a person by God predestined to glory’—turn him to good, how evil soever they be. And this for conclusion he declared to be their very plain mind and opinion… for all the cloaks that he had set upon the matter before, to make it seem that they meant in their words no harm. And there it clearly appeared… that he and his fellows which in their preaching do covertly and craftily set out the damnable sect of Luther… hope and gape always for some other time… in which they trust openly and boldly to play the ravenous wolves and devour the sheep and mar the whole flock. And in the mean season be content to play the wily foxes and worry simple souls and poor lambs… as they may catch them straggling from the fold—or, rather, like a false shepherd’s-dog that would but bark in sight, and seem to fetch in the sheep… and yet kill a lamb in a corner. Men speak of some that bear two The Lutheran preachers bear faces in one hood. I never saw any that more verily play that pageant… than do this kind of such preachers. For in preaching to the people, they make a visage as though they came straight from heaven to teach them a new, better way, and more true, than the Church teacheth, or hath taught this many hundred years. And then to the Church, in examination, they show themselves as poor men of middle earth… and as though they taught none other wise than the Church doth. But in conclusion, when they be well examined… and, with much work, that falsehood of their cloaked collusion is pulled off: then appeareth there all the malicious treachery, and what poison they put forth under the cloak of honey. As this man that I tell you of… laboring all that he might, by many means, to make it seem that in preaching that faith alone was sufficient for our salvation, and that good works were nothing worth, had nothing intended but well and according to the doctrine

of the Church… and that he and his fellows never meant otherwise than the Church meaneth, yet in conclusion he plainly showed himself… that he and his fellows intend thereby to bring the people to this point at last: that all thing hangeth only upon destiny, and that the liberty of man’s will should serve of right naught; nor men’s deeds, good or bad, made no difference before God; but that in his chosen people, nothing misliketh him, be it never so bad… and in the other sort, nothing pleaseth him, be it never so good—the very worst and most mischievous heresy that ever was thought upon, and thereto the most mad! For, as it was said unto him, if this were true, whereto preach they at all? And counsel any man one thing or other? What fruit could come of their exhortation, if all should hang upon destiny? There were showed unto him many things for the reproof of that unreasonable and detestable heresy… and that the texts which he alleged nothing made for his purpose. For as for that he alleged of Saint Paul, that ‘there is no damnation to them that be in Christ Jesus’—was meant of good-faithful folk that live virtuously; and therefore where he saith that ‘there is no damnation to them that be in Christ Jesus,’ it followeth forthwith in the text, ‘those that walk not after the flesh.’ Meaning, plainly, that there is no man so planted in Christ Jesus… but and if he follow the fleshly ways of his sensual appetites, he shall be damned, for all his faith in Christ. For else it should follow, upon this false opinion—if God accept well all the works of them that are predestinated—then is sin no sin in them, but in the other sort only, whom God hath not predestinated. And then is it as much to say as no man may lawfully be naught, no man lawfully do theft or adultery, nor lawfully be a manqueller, nor lawfully forswear himself… but God’s good sons and his specially chosen children.

Rom 8:28

“Now, where he alleged the words of Saint Paul ‘Quod iustis omnia cooperantur in bonum’ (‘To a just man all things work together to his weal’), it was said that it meant that all the evils that men did unto them… turn them to good, and be to good men occasion of
their merit—as was to Job all the torments by which the devil assaulted his patience; and all the pains that pagan tyrants did unto the holy martyrs. And sometimes the sin in which a good man is by God’s sufferance permitted to fall… is an occasion to him of a greater good… or of the avoiding of a greater sin. As the eschewing of a high spiritual pride… into which, peradventure, the continual course of his virtuous life might, by the devil’s subtle suggestion, have brought him; whereas one foul act of lechery hath showed him his frailty, and instead of pride brought him into penance and humility—and make him run the faster forward in virtue… because he hath letted and sat still a while in sin, and therefore will he run forth to win again in his way that he before cast himself behind. But it was not meant that ever their sins so turned them to good… that they were accepted the more, and rewarded the better, for their evil deeds. Nor God remitteth not the sins of his chosen people, nor forbeareth not to impute the blame thereof unto God accepteth men for their merits. people—for he accepteth not folk for their persons, but for their merits—but whereas they have sinned, he punisheth as well them as others; and sometimes more, because their former good living somewhat of congruence deserved that they should by punishment be called again to grace, and not be for their fault so soon cast clean away; as some others, obdurate in malice and evil custom of sin, deserve to have the grace of God and his calling-on nevermore offered unto offense. Christ looked on Peter after he had forsaken and forsworn him… and Peter therewith took repentance. God looked on Judas, and kissed him, too… and he turned to none amendment. Now, God from the beginning, before the world was created, foreseeing in his divine prescience—or, rather, in the eternity of his Godhead presently

2 assaulted: tested // pains: tortures 3 did unto: inflicted on
5 sufferance: refraining from preventing this 8 peradventure: perhaps
9 subtle suggestion: insidiously sly prompting 13 letted: stopped
14, 24 again: back 14 in his way: on his track // that: what
16 accepted the more: received with the more favor 22 whereas: inasmuch as
23 living: conduct; way of living 23–24 of congruence: by propriety
24 deserved: merited; made them deserve 25 fault: transgression
26 malice: wickedness // evil custom: bad habit 29 receive: accept
31, 33 on: at 36 Godhead: divine nature
401/36—402/1 presently beholding: beholding in the present
beholding—that Peter would repent and Judas would despair, and that the one would take hold of his grace and the other would reject it, accepted and chose the one and not the other; as he would have made the contrary choice if he had foreseen in them the contrary chance.”

The Twelfth Chapter

The author inveigheth against the most pestilent sect of these Lutherans, which ascribe our salvation and damnation, and all our deeds, to destiny.

“But, now, for to say (as that heretic said after all his shifts, at last) that all that shall be saved shall be saved only because that God from the beginning hath chosen them, and because of that choice all their deeds be good… or, if they be evil, yet God, for cause of his eternal choice, taketh them well in worth and imputeth no blame unto them; and that all other people whom God hath created shall be damned only because he would not choose them, and that all their deeds either be naught or not well accepted… because God list not in the beginning to choose them; and that he worketh both in the one sort and in the other… all their deeds himself alone, and they do nothing therein themselves; and, so, that God, “whose goodness is inestimable,” doth damn so huge a number of people to intolerable and interminable torments only for his pleasure, and for his own deeds wrought in them only by himself—this false opinion is, as the King’s Highness most virtuously writeth in his epistle to Luther, the most abominable heresy that ever was. And surely it is so far against all Holy Scripture well understood, so far against all natural reason, so utterly subverting all virtue and all good order in the world, so highly blaspheming the goodness and majesty of Almighty God in heaven… that it is more than wonder how any man earthly that hath either one spark of wit in his head or toward God or man one drop of good will in his heart should not abhor to hear it. For this execrable heresy maketh God the cause of
all evil; and such cruel appetite as never tyrant and tormentor
had… ascribe they to the benign nature of Almighty God!
For whereas our Savior Christ took upon himself all our sins…
and of his endless pity bore the pain of them for our sake, this
damnable heresy holdeth that God should be, first, so untrue
that he should lay unto us the weight and blame of his own faults—
that is to wit, the evil works which (as they say) be not wrought by
us, but in us by God—and thereunto they make him so despiteous
and cruel… that for his own deeds so done he shall have a perpetual
delight and pleasure to torment us. Now turn they the treacle of
Holy Scripture quite into poison. For this false error once taken
for truth, whereof should all Scripture serve? Whereof should serve
the exhortations to good works, if men neither any do nor any
can do, neither of themselves nor with help of grace? Or, if any be
done by them which be not chosen… their deeds be not accepted
of God, because he hath not chosen their persons—whereof shall serve
the preachings and exhortations to the faith, if the hearers have no
liberty of their own will… by which they may, together with
God’s grace, labor to submit, and subdue the rebellion of, their
reason to the obedience of faith and credence of the word of God?
Whereof shall serve all the dehortations and comminations and
threats in Scripture… by which God calleth men from sin and
evil works, if the world were once of mind that they believed
after Luther… that no man doth any evil deed himself, but God
doth them all himself? And that every man is either chosen or
unchosen, and if we be of the chosen sort, none evil deed can
dann us, and if we be of the unchosen sort, no good deed can
avail us—he that thus believeth, what careth he what he doth…
except for the fear of temporal laws of this world? And yet if his
false faith be strong, he forceth little of them also. For he shall
think dying in his bed or on the gallows… cometh not after his
deserving, but hangeth all upon destiny. And therefore all
laws they set at naught. And they hold that no man is bound to
obey any… but would be at liberty to believe what they list, and
do what they list—as they say that God doth with us not what
we deserve, but what himself list.
“Whereof shall reason serve if man had no power of himself toward the direction of his own works, but that all our works were brought forth of us without our will?—worse than the works be, indeed, out of a brute beast by the appetite of his sensual motion!

For ours should be, by this opinion, brought forth... as the leaves come out of the tree, or as a stone falleth downward, and the smoke upward, by the power of nature—so should, I say, all our deeds, good or bad, ascend or descend by the violent hand of God, maugre our minds. And thus the beasts be not ashamed to say... when they prove hourly by their own experience in themselves... that when they will do a thing, they do it, and when they list, they leave it. I say not

The assistance of God is always at hand.

by themselves alone, without God. But his assistance is always at hand... if we be willing to work therewith; as the light is present with the sun... if we list not willfully to shut our eyes and wink.

“Whereof should serve all laws, and where were become all good order among men, if every misordered wretch might allege that his mischievous deed was his destiny?

“If free will serve for naught, and every man’s deed is his destiny, why do these men complain upon any man? Except they will say they do it because it is their destiny to do so? And why will they then be angry with them that punish heretics... except they will say because it is their destiny to be so? For if they will hold them to their own sect, and say men do them wrong to burn them for their heresies because it was their destiny to be heretics, they may be then well answered with their own words... as one of their sect was served in a good town in Almaine. Which when he had robbed a man and was brought before the judges, he could not deny the deed, but he said it was his destiny to do it and therefore they might not blame him—they answered him after his own doctrine, that if it were his destiny to steal... and that therefore they must hold him excused, then it was also their destiny to hang him... and therefore he must as well hold them excused again. And undoubtedly

2, 3 works: actions; deeds  of: from 4 appetite: inclination  // his: its
4 motion: impulse  5 by: according to  // opinion: thesis; contention
8 violent: forceful  8–9 maugre our minds: regardless of our intentions
11 will: will to  // list: choose to  // leave it: i.e., leave it not done
15 list not willfully: do not willfully choose  16 wink: play blind
18 misordered: law-breaking  18, 31 might: could  18 allege: claim
19 mischievous: criminal  21 complain upon: cry out against  21, 23 except: unless
24–25 hold them to their own sect: stick to their own sectarian tenet
27–28 as one of their sect was served: as was done to a member of their sect
29 Almaine: Germany  32 after: in accord with  35 again: right back
among men these takers-away of the will may never avoid that answer by reason. But then fall the wretches to the desperate ways of devils and damned souls. Then fall they to railing and reproving the justice of God, and say that himself hath wrought their evil works… and wrongfully punished them… and cruelly created them to wretchedness. Our mother Eve laid the weight of her sin to the serpent… and God was offended that she took not her own part to herself. But these wretches excuse themselves and the devils and all… and lay both their own faults and the devils’ too… to the blame of Almighty God. But surely, whatso they say, they little care in deed of hell or of heaven… but would in this world live in lewd liberty, and have all run to riot. And since they see that they cannot so be suffered, nor their sect allowed, in judgment: they devise by all the ways they can to get so many to fall into their sort… that they may be able to turn the world upside down, and defend their folly and false heresy, by force. And this What the Lutherans call “the liberty of the Gospel”: to be discharged of all order, and of all laws, and do what they list—which, be it good, be it bad, is (as they say) nothing but the works of God wrought in them. But they hope that by this means God shall for the while work in them many merry pastimes. Wherein if their heresy were once received… and the world changed thereby, they should find themselves sore deceived. For, the laws and orders among men with fear of punishment once taken away, there were no man so strong that could keep his pleasure long… but that he should find a stronger take it from him. But after that it were once come to that point, and the world once ruffled and fallen in a wildness, how long would it be… and what heaps of heavy mischiefs would there fall… ere that way were found to set the world in order and peace again?"

**The Thirteenth Chapter**

The author showeth his opinion concerning the burning of heretics… and that it is lawful, necessary, and

1 may: can // avoid: refute 4 reproving: impugning
5 evil works: bad deeds 6 laid the weight of: attributed the responsibility for
7–8 her own part to herself: on herself her own share
9–10 lay... God: blame on Almighty God both their own wrongdoings and the devils’ too
10–11 little... heaven: actually are little concerned about either hell or heaven
11 would: (just) want to 12 lewd: base; (a) bad // all run to riot: everyone run wild
13 so be suffered: get themselves allowed to do that // allowed: approved
13 in judgment: by judicial means 14 fall into: join 15 sort: band; pack
19 list: please 20 as they say: according to them 21 the while: the time being
22 merry: enjoyable; fun 22–23 once received: once and for all accepted
24 sore deceived: badly mistaken 28 ruffled: thrown into confusion
29 heavy mischiefs: terrible calamities 30 fall: befall 33 showeth: states
34 lawful: licit
well done; and showeth also that the clergy doth not procure it... but only the good and politic provision of the temporalty.

“T

The fear of these outrages and mischiefs to follow upon such sects and heresies... with the proof that men have had in some countries thereof... have been the cause that princes and people have been constrained to punish heresies by terrible death; whereas else, more easy ways had been taken with them. And therefore here will I somewhat,” said I to your friend, “answer the points which ye moved at our first meeting, when ye said that many men thought it a hard and an uncharitable way taken by the clergy to put men convicted of heresy sometimes to shame, sometimes to death, and that Christ so far abhorred all such violence that he would not any of his flock should fight in any wise, neither in the defense of themselves or any others—not so much as in the defense of Christ himself...

Jn 18:10–11 for which he blamed Saint Peter— but that we should all live after him, in sufferance and patience; so far forth that folk thought, as ye said, that we should not fight in defense of ourselves against the Turks and infidels.

These objections be soon answered. For neither doth the clergy therein any such thing as is laid and imputed unto them... nor the temporalty, neither. For albeit with good reason they might... yet had they never in deed fallen so sore to force and violence against heretics if the violent cruelty first used by the heretics themselves against good Catholic folk had not driven good princes thereto... for preservation not of the faith only, but also of the peace among their people. For albeit it that forthwith upon the death of Christ, in the beginning of the Church, many sects and heresies began (as well appeareth by the Apocalypse, of Saint John the Evangelist, and the epistles of the apostle Paul), and after, almost continually, divers heresies sprang in divers places (as we plainly see by the story of the Church, by the books of Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine, Saint Eusebius, Saint Basil, Saint Ambrose, Saint

1 well: rightly // showeth also: also points out
3, 22 temporalty: laity; i.e., secular authorities 4 mischiefs: calamities
5 proof: experience 8 easy: moderate // had: would have
9 moved: brought up 11 hard: harsh
13–14 any... should: have any member of his flock 14 wise: way
17 after: like // sufferance: endurance 18 patience: forbearance
21 laid: (being) attributed 22 might: could (have done this anyway)
23 had... to: they in fact never would have resorted so heavily to
29 well appeareth: is well evidenced by // Apocalypse: Book of Revelation
29 of: (written) by 30 after: afterward 31 divers: various
32 story: historical records
Gregory Nazianzen, Saint Chrysostom, and many other doctors of the Church)—yet in all this time, by a long space of many years, was there never other punishment done upon them, in effect, but only redargution and reproving by dispicions (either in words or writing), or condemnations of their opinions in synods and councils, or, finally, excommunications and putting out of Christ’s flock; saving that they were put sometimes to silence upon pain of forfeiture of certain money. But, as I said before, if the heretics had never begun with violence; though they had used all the ways they could to allect the people by preaching; though they had therewith done as Luther doth now, and as Muhammad did before—bring up opinions pleasant to the people, giving them liberty to lewdness—yet if they had set violence aside, good Christian people had peradventure yet unto this day used less violence toward them than they do now. And yet were heresy well worthy to be as sore punished as any other fault, since there is no fault that more offendeth God than heresy. Howbeit, while they forbore violence… there was little violence done to them. And surely though God be able against all persecution to preserve and increase his faith among the people—as he did in the beginning for all the persecution of the paynims and the Jews—yet is it no reason to look that Christian princes should suffer the Catholic, Christian people to be oppressed by Turks… or by heretics worse than Turks.”

“By my soul,” quoth your friend, “I would all the world were all agreed to take all violence and compulsion away upon all sides, Christian and heathen, and that no man were constrained to believe but as he could be by grace, wisdom, and good words induced, and then he that would go to God, go on a God’s-name, and he that will go to the devil, the devil go with him.”

“Forsooth,” quoth I, “and if it so were, yet would I little doubt but that the good seed being sown among the people… should as well come up, and be as strong to save itself, as the cockle… and God should always be stronger than the devil. But yet be heretics and heathen men in two diverse cases. For in case the Turks, Saracens, and
paynims would suffer the faith of Christ to be peaceably preached among them... and that we Christian men should therefore suffer, in like wise, all their sects to be preached among us... and violence taken away by assent on both the sides: I nothing mistrust that the faith of Christ should much more increase than decay. And albeit that we should find among us... that would, for the lewd liberty of these sects, draw to the devil—yet so should we find, I doubt not, among them... also many a thousand that should be content to leave that beastly pleasure and come to the faith of Christ; as came in the beginning to Christendom out of the paynims, that lived as voluptuously as the Turks do now. But since violence is used on that part, and Christ's faith not there suffered to be preached and taken, he that would now suffer that sect to be preached or taught among Christian men, and not punish and destroy the doers, were a plain enemy to Christ, as he that were content to suffer Christ lose his worship in many souls on this side... without any one won in their stead on the other side. But, now, if violence were withdrawn on that side, then this way that ye speak of were, peradventure, between Christendom and Turkey or pagans, if the world were assented thereunto and could hold it, none evil way. For since we should nothing so much regard

What things we ought most to regard

as the honor of God... and increasing of the Christian faith... and winning of men's souls to heaven—we should seem to dishonor God if we mistrusted that his faith preached among others indifferently, without disturbance, should not be able to prosper. And believing that it were, we should hinder the profit if we would refuse the condition... where there be many more to be won to Christ on that side... than to be lost from him on this side. But yet, as for heretics rising among ourselves, and springing of ourselves—be in no wise to be suffered, but to be oppressed and overwhelmed in the beginning. For by any covenant with them... Christendom can nothing win. For as many as we suffer to fall to them, we lose from Christ; and by all them we cannot win to Christ one the more, though we won them all home again; for they were our own before. And yet, as I said, for all that, in the beginning—
never were they by any temporal punishment of their bodies anything sharply handled... till that they began to be violent themselves.

“We read that in the time of Saint Augustine, the great doctor of the Church, the heretics of Africa called the Donatists fell to force and violence, robbing, beating, tormenting, and killing such as they took of the true Christian flock... as the Lutherans have done in Almaine. For avoiding whereof, that holy man Saint Augustine, which long had with great patience borne and suffered their malice, only writing and preaching in the reproof of their errors—and had not only done them no temporal harm, but also had letted and resisted others that would have done it—did yet at the last, for the peace of good people, both suffer and exhort the Count Boniface and others to repress them with force and fear them with bodily punishment. Which manner of doing holy Saint Jerome and other virtuous fathers have in other places allowed. And since that time hath there upon necessity... perceived by great outrages committed against the peace and quiet of the people, in sundry places of Christendom, by heretics rising of a small beginning to a high and unruly multitude... many sore punishments been devised for them, and especially by fire—not only in Italy and Almaine, but also in Spain, and in effect in every part of Christendom. Among which... in England, as a good Catholic realm, it hath been long punished by death in the fire. And especially forasmuch in the time of that noble prince of most famous memory Lord Cobham King Henry V, while the Lord Cobham maintained certain heresies... and that by the means thereof, the number so grew and increased... that within a while, though himself was fled into Wales, yet they assembled themselves together in a field near unto London in such wise and such number that the king with his nobles were fain to put harness on their backs for the repression of them; whereupon they were distressed and many put to execution; and after that, the Lord Cobham taken in Wales and burned in London—the king, his nobles, and his people, thereupon considering the great peril and
jeopardy that the realm was likely to have fallen in by those heresies, made at a parliament very good and substantial provisions, beside all such as were made before, as well for the withstanding as the repressing and grievous punishment of any such as should be found faulty thereof... and by the clergy left unto the secular hands.

“For here ye shall understand that it is not the clergy that laboreth to have them punished by death. Well may it be that, as we be all men and not angels, some of them may have sometimes either over-fervent mind or indiscreet zeal... or, percase, an angry and a cruel heart, by which they may offend God in the selfsame deed whereof they should else greatly merit. But surely the order of the spiritual law therein is both good, reasonable, piteous, and charitable... and nothing desiring the death of any man therein.

For at the first fault, he is abjured, forswareth all heresies, doth The order of the ecclesiastical laws against heretics such penance for his fault as the bishop assigneth him... and is, in such wise, graciously received again into the favor and suffrages of Christ’s church. But and if he be taken eftsoons with the same crime again... then is he put out of the Christian flock by excommunication. And because that being such, his conversation were perilous among Christian men, the Church refuseth him... and thereof the clergy giveth knowledge to the temporality—not exhorting the prince, or any man else, either to kill him or punish him; but only in the presence of the temporal officer, the spirituality not delivereth him but leaveth him to the secular hand... and forsaketh him as one excommunicated and removed out of the Christian flock. And though the Church be not light and sudden in receiving him again, yet at the time of his death, upon his request with tokens of repentance, he is absolved and received again.”

The Fourteenth Chapter

The author somewhat showeth that the clergy doth no wrong in leaving heretics to secular hand... though their death follow thereon. And he showeth also that it is lawful to resist the Turk and such other infidels—and that princes be bound thereto.

3 beside: additional to // withstanding: counteracting 4 grievous: severe 5 faulty: guilty
6, 26 hand(s): authorities 10 over-fervent mind: too hot a head // indiscreet: injudicious
12 surely: certainly // order: procedure 13 spiritual: Church // piteous: merciful
15 at... fault: after a first offense 16 fault: offense 18, 30–31 received again: taken back
19 suffrages: intercessory prayers // but... with: but if afterward he is caught committing
21 conversation: intermingling 22 were: would be // refuseth: washes its hands of
23 temporality: civil authorities 25 spirituality: clergy 28 sudden: hasty 30 tokens: signs
33 showeth: explains how it is 34 secular hand: the civil authorities 35 lawful: licit
36–37 princes... thereto: rulers are obligated to do so
“Marry,” quoth your friend, “but as me thinketh, the bishop doth as much as though he killeth him… when he leaveth him to the secular hand in such time and place… as he wotteth well he shall soon be burned.”

“I will not here enter into the question,” quoth I, “whether a priest might for any cause—and if for any, whether, then, for heresy—without blame of irregularity put or command any man to death… either by express words or under the general name of right and justice. In which matter I could not lack both reason, authority, and example of holy men. But in this matter that we have in hand, it is sufficient that the bishop neither doth it nor commandeth it. For I think there will no reason bear it that when the heretic if he went abroad would with the spreading of his error infect other folk… the bishop should have such pity upon him… that he should, rather than other men should punish his body, suffer him to kill other men’s souls.

“Indeed,” quoth I, “there be some, as ye say, that, either of high pretended pity or of a feigned observance of the counsels of Christ, would that no man should punish any heretic, or infidel either— not though they invaded us and did us all the harm they possibly could. And in this opinion is Luther, and his followers; which among their other heresies hold for a plain conclusion… that it is not lawful to any Christian man to fight against the Turk, or to make against him any resistance, though he come into Christendom with a great army and labor to destroy all. For they say that all Christian men are bound to the counsels of Christ, by which they say that we be forbidden to defend ourselves; and that Saint Peter was, as ye rehearsed, reproved of our Savior when he struck off Malchus’s ear, albeit that he did it in the defense of his own master… and the most innocent man that ever was. And unto this they lay, as ye said in the beginning, that since the time that Christian men first fell to fighting… it hath never increased, but always diminished and decayed; so that at this day the Turk hath estraited us very near… and brought it in within a right narrow compass; and narrower shall do, say they, as long as we go about to defend Christendom by

1 marry: indeed // as me thinketh: as I see it  
2 wotteth: knows  
3 hand: authorities  
4.14  
5 might: could  
6 blame: being guilty  
7 no reason bear it: no right thinking have it  
8 went abroad: went out there; was at large  
9 high: (a) lofty // pretended: professed  
10 though: even if  
11 lawful to: licit for  
12 labor: try // all: everyone  
13 estraited . . . near: very tightly restricted us  
14 See John 18:10–11.  
15 suffer: allow  
16 laid: mention // of: by  
17 most innocent man that ever was. And unto this they lay, as ye said in the beginning, that since the time that Christian men first fell to fighting… it hath never increased, but always diminished and decayed; so that at this day the Turk hath estraited us very near… and brought it in within a right narrow compass; and narrower shall do, say they, as long as we go about to defend Christendom by
the sword. Which they say should be, as it was in the beginning increased, so be continued and preserved—only by patience and martyrdom. Thus holy speak these godly fathers of Luther’s sect, laboring to procure that no man should withstand the Turk, but let him win all. And when it should come to that—then would they, as it seemeth, win all again by their patience, high virtues, and martyrdom… by which now they cannot suffer to resist their beastly voluptuousness, but break their vows, and take them harlots under the name of wives; and whereas they may not fight against the Turk, arise up in great plumps to fight against their even Christian. It is, I trow, no great mastery to perceive whom they labor to please, that have that opinion. And if the Turk happen to come in, it is little doubt whose part they will take; and that Christian people be likely to find none so cruel Turks as them. It is a gentle holiness to abstain for devotion from resisting the Turk… and in the meanwhile to rise up in routs and fight against Christian men, and destroy, as that sect hath done, many a good religious house; despoiled, maimed, and slain many a good, virtuous man; robbed, polluted, and pulled down many a goodly church of Christ.

“And now, where they lay for a proof that God were not contented with battle made against infidels… the losses and diminishment of Christendom since that guise began, they fare as did once an old, A consultation about sandwich haven diverse men of worship assembled old folk of the country to commune and devise about the amendment of Sandwich Haven. At which time as they began first to ensearch by reason, and by the report of old men thereabout, what thing had been the occasion that so good a haven was in so few years so sore decayed, and such sands risen, and such shallow flats made therewith, that right small vessels had now much work to come in at divers tides… where great ships were within few years past accustomed to ride without difficulty; and some laying the fault to Goodwin Sands, some to the lands inned by divers owners in the Isle of Thanet out of the Channel, ‘in which the sea was wont to compass the Isle and bring

2, 6 patience: forbearance // laboring: endeavoring // withstand: resist
5, 6 all: everything // again: back // suffer: manage
8 voluptuousness: sensuality // them: to themselves // great plumps: large bands
11 even: fellow // trow: trust // mastery: difficult achievement
12 labor: are trying // have that opinion: take that stance // part: side
15 gentle: noble // for devotion: out of piety // routes: rabbles; mobs
18 religious house: i.e., monastery or convent // polluted: desecrated
19 pulled down: demolished // lay: put forth
21 were not contented: would not be pleased // guise: practice
23 fare: act; behave // divers: several // worship: distinction // country: area
27 devise: confer // amendment: restoration // haven: harbor
28 ensearch: investigate // reason: discussion // sore decayed: badly deteriorated
31 flats: sandbars // divers tides: i.e., any kind of tide // inned: reclaimed
35 divers: various // in: into
the vessels round about it’; ‘whose course at the ebb was wont to
scour the haven; which now, the sea excluded thence, for lack of
such course and scouring is choked up with sand’—as they thus
alleged, diverse men, diverse causes, there started up one good old father
and said, ‘Ye masters, say every man what he will, ch’a marked
this matter well as some other; and by God, I wot how it waxed
naught well enough. For I knew it good… and have marked,
so ch’ave, when it began to wax worse.’ ‘And what hath hurt it, good
father?’ quoth these gentlemen. ‘By my faith, masters,’ quoth he,
yonder same Tenterden steeple, and nothing else! That, by the Mass,
ch’ould ’twere a fair fish pole!’

“‘Why hath the steeple hurt the haven, good father?’ quoth they.
‘Nay, by our Lady, masters,’ quoth he, ‘ich cannot tell you well why; but
ch’ot well it hath. For by God, I knew it a good haven till that steeple
was built. And by the Mary Mass—ch’a marked it well—it never
throve since!’

“And thus wisely speak these holy Lutherans, which, sowing
schisms and seditions among Christian people, lay the loss thereof
to the withstanding of the Turk’s invasion, and the resisting of
his malice; whereas they should, rather, if they had any reason in their
heads… lay it to the contrary. For when Christian princes did
dtheir devoir against miscreants and infidels—there be stories
and monuments enough that witness the manifest aid and

The cause why the Turk 
doth prosper against
Christendom

help of God in great victories given to
good Christian princes by his almighty
hand. But, on the other side, since that the
ambition of Christian rulers desiring each other’s dominion… have
set them at war and deadly dissension among themselves; whereby,
while each hath aspired to the enhancing of his own, they
have little forced what came of the common corps of Christendom: God,
for the revenging of their inordinate appetites, hath withdrawn
his help and showed that he careth as little; suffering, while each
of them laboreth to eat up other, the Turk to prosper and so
far forth to proceed… that if their blind affections look not thereto
the sooner, he shall not fail (which our Lord forbid!) within short process to swallow them all.

And albeit Christ forbade Saint Peter (being a priest... and, under himself, prince of his priests) to fight with the temporal sword... toward the impeachment and resistance of his fruitful Passion, whereupon depended the salvation of mankind; which affection our Savior had before that time so sore reproved and rebuked in him... that he called him therefor Satan: yet is it nothing to the purpose to allege that by that example temporal princes should, without the let of such spiritual profit and the sufferance of much spiritual harm, suffer their people to be invaded and oppressed by infidels... to their utter undoing not only temporal, but also, of a great part, perpetual... which were likely of their frailty, for fear of worldly grief and incommodity, to fall from the faith and renay their baptism.

"In which peril since our Lord would not that any man should willfully put himself (and for that cause advised his disciples that if they were pursued in one city, they should not come forth and foolishly put themselves in peril of renaying Christ by impatience of some intolerable torments, but rather, flee thence into some other place where they might serve him in quiet... till he should suffer them to fall in such point that there were no way to escape; and then would he have them abide by their tackling like mighty champions, Christ's exhortation to every man wherein they shall not, in such case, fail of his help)—now, albeit so that Christ and his holy apostles exhort every man to patience and sufferance... without requiting of an evil deed, or making any defense, but using further sufferance... and doing also good for evil—yet neither doth this counsel bind a man that he shall of necessity, against the common nature, suffer another man causeless to kill him... nor letteth not any man from the defense of another... whom he seeth innocent and invaded and oppressed by malice. In which case both nature, reason, and  

2 short process: a short amount of time  // swallow: do away with  6 impeachment: hindrance  
7 affection: propensity  8 sore: severely  9 therefor Satan: Satan for it  
10 nothing to the purpose: not at all on-target  11 by: in accord with  // temporal princes: civil rulers  
11–12 without... harm: i.e., not with an eye to such spiritual profit but with an allowing of much spiritual harm  
13, 24, 33 suffer: allow  13–15 to their... were: i.e., to the... of those who would be  
14 of a great part: for a great many  15 worldly: earthly  16 grief: hardship  
16 incommodity: discomfort  // fall: fall away  // renay: renounce  
18 would... should: would not have anyone  19 willfully: deliberately  20 pursued: persecuted  
20 forth: forward  22 renaying: denying  // by... of: because of inability to endure  
23 torments: tortures  // flee thence: should flee from there  24 might: could  // quiet: peace  
25 fall... that: get into a spot from which  26 abide by their tackling: stand their ground  
30 patience: forbearance  // sufferance: endurance  
31 using... sufferance: i.e., taking endurance even further  32 doing also: i.e., even returning  
33 the common nature: i.e., human nature  34 letteth not: i.e., is meant to deter
God’s behest bindeth… first, the prince, to the safeguard of his people with the peril of himself (as he taught Moses to know himself bound to kill the Egyptians in the defense of Hebrews), and after, he bindeth every man to the help and defense of his good and harmless neighbor against the malice and cruelty of the wrongdoer. For as the Holy Scripture saith, ‘Unicuique dedit Deus curam de proximo suo’; ‘God hath given every man charge of his neighbor’… to keep him from harm of body and soul, as much as may lie in his power.

“And by this reason is not only excusable but also commendable… the common war which every people taketh in the defense of their country against enemies that would invade it, since that every man fighteth not for the defense of himself of a private affection to himself, but of a Christian charity… for the safeguard and preservation of all others. Which reason, as it hath place in all battle of defense, so hath it most especially in the battle by which we defend the Christian countries against the Turks, in that we defend each other from far the more peril and loss… both of worldly substance, bodily hurt, and perdition of men’s souls. And, now, if this be lawful and enjoined also to every private person, how much more belongeth it to princes and rulers? Which if they may not, upon the peril of their souls, wittingly suffer among the people whom they have in governance any one to take away another’s horse, how may they without eternal damnation suffer other people, and especially infidels, to come in, spoil and rob… and captivate them all? And if they be bound to the defense and may not do it alone, what madness were it to say that the people may not help them!”

The Fifteenth Chapter

That princes be bound to punish heretics… and that fair handling helpeth little with many of them.

“...And surely as the princes be bound that they shall not suffer their people by infidels to be invaded, so be they as deeply bound that

2 with the peril: (even) at the risk 5 harmless: innocent 11 by: for
12 common: communal
14 of a private affection to: out of a personal regard for; just out of a concern for
16 reason: consideration 20 lawful . . . to: i.e., licit and obligatory also for
21 private person: i.e., private citizen 23 wittingly: knowingly
23–24 suffer among . . . any one to take: allow it to happen . . . that any one of them takes
24 may: can 25 without: i.e., without calling down on themselves
25, 32 suffer: allow 26 spoil: kill // captivate: enslave 27 may not: cannot
27 alone: by themselves 28 were it: would it be 30, 32, 33 bound: obligated
31 fair handling: nice treatment
they shall not suffer their people to be seduced and corrupted by heretics, since the peril shall in short while grow to as great—both with men’s souls withdrawn from God…and their goods lost…and their bodies destroyed, by common sedition, insurrection, and open war, within the bowels of their own land. All which may in the beginning be right easily avoided…by punishment of those few that be the first. Which few well repressed…or, if need so require, utterly pulled up…there shall far the fewer have lust to follow. For if they were handled in a contrary manner…and, as ye seemed to mean in the beginning of our matter, instead of punishment…entreated, favored, and by fair words and rewards brought home again, I fear me then that you should find little fruit in that fashion. For, first, whereas they fall into heresy by pride—that way should make them prouder…and set the more by themselves. And then would many more fall thereto…of purpose to be hired again therefrom. So that as Mamluks and Janissaries about the Turk and sultan have used to christen their children of purpose that by the renaying of their faith after, they might be made Mamluks or Janissaries as their fathers were…and may be had the more in estimation and favor about the great Turk: even likewise, within a while, if we take that way with heretics, we shall have young fresh fellows first become heretics…that they may be prayed and hired after to come to Christ’s faith again. I would not they were over-hastily handled, but little rigor and much mercy showed where simpleness appeared, and not high heart or malice. For of such as be proud and malicious…much proof hath been made already. For of some sort, many full fair handled…little change themselves or come to good amendment. I told you myself, and very true it was, of twain that were detected of heresy unto the most honorable prelate of this realm, and in what benign, fatherly manner, and liberal also, he dealt with them. And yet what amendment made his genteel and courteous entreaty in their stubborn stomach? Were they not after worse than they were before? And so used themselves that after much harm done by them…they came in short space after to their open conviction? They be,
ye wot well, at the first, customably, received to grace; and verily, for such merits… forgiveness is reward enough. And if they cannot by that warning be warned—surely, as Saint Paul saith, he is not to be trusted often, but rather of all good Christian people to be eschewed and avoided from the flock. For they be so far ‘waxen crooked’ that seldom can they be righted again.”

“Forsooth,” quoth your friend. “Yet, as I said at my first coming to you, were I worthy to be of counsel with the clergy when there were a man found faulty therein… whom the people have in good estimation for some great opinion of learning and virtue—they should be secretly and soberly admonished, and not the matter published among the people. And finally if they so should needs be openly convicted and corrected in face of the world—then would I not, yet, have them called ‘Lutherans,’ lest the people which had good opinion of them… may peradventure like Luther the better for them; or, if they happen to perceive them for naught, and so take them, then shall they peradventure give the less credence to all good men, and set the less by all good preachers, after.”

“Surely,” quoth I, “certain rule that were always best… were hard to give in such case. Sometimes there may, peradventure, such honesty be joined with such repentance… that it would not be much amiss to preserve the man’s estimation among the people, to whom his perfect change may, percase, more than recompense his former error and oversight. But whereas the contrary shall seem

An old usage convenient—there can I not see why we should forbear to call them ‘Lutherans,’ since it is both an old usage to call heretics after the name of him whom they follow in their heresy… and also, as Luther’s sect is, in effect, the whole heap of all heresies gathered together, it is now all one to call him a ‘Lutheran’ or to call him a ‘heretic,’ those two words being in manner equivalent, Luther teaching almost nothing but heresies… nor no heresies found anywhere, almost, that the Lutherans have not among them. And since it so is, reason doth, in my mind, require that the name of ‘Lutherans’

1 wot: know // at the first: i.e., after a first offense // customably: ordinarily
3 be warned: take warning 3–6: See Titus 3:10–11. 5 avoided: banished
6 waxen: become // crooked: twisted; warped 8 of counsel with: consulted by
9 faulty therein: i.e., guilty of heresy
9–10 have in good estimation: hold in high regard
10 for some great opinion of: because of some great reputation for
11 secretly: privately 12 published: publicized 13 openly: publicly
13 corrected: punished // face: front 15, 17, 20 peradventure: perhaps
16 for them: on account of them // for naught: as wicked
18 set the less by: think the less of // after: thereafter
19 surely: to be sure; of course // were: would be 20 honesty: honorableness
22 estimation: reputation 23 percase: perchance // recompense: make up for
24 oversight: mistake // whereas: wherever 25 convenient: appropriate
27 usage: custom 28 as: since 30 all one: one and the same
31 in manner: practically; just about 34 mind: opinion
417/34—418/1 require that… should: call for… to
should be customably brought in men’s ears as odious as the name of ‘heretics.’ Nor I see not so great fear that either folk shall for opinion of any man’s virtue in whom they see themselves deceived… withdraw their favor and affection from such as are good indeed… or fall into the favor of Luther’s sect for the estimation of the man whom they now see proved naught. For this will no man do but such as either be so foolish that they would hate all Christ’s apostles for the falsehood of Judas… or so naughty that they would fain have all the world fall to the same sect and be of their own suit.”

The Sixteenth Chapter

Of simple, unlearned folk that are deceived by the great good opinion that they have, percase, in the learning and living of some that teach them errors.

“Forsooth,” quoth your friend. “Yet would there, methinketh, be much pity used in those matters among. For many a man unlearned, when he heareth one that he taketh for cunning… and seeth such a man as he taketh for virtuous… commend Luther’s way, he is, of simpleness and good mind, moved to follow the same.”

“Surely,” quoth I, “therein I say not nay, but that these things being such, great pity it is to see many good simple souls deceived and led out of the right way by the authority of such as they reckon for good men and cunning… whom they have, either by open sermons or secret communication, perceived to be favorers of that ungracious sect; thinking that men of such cunning and knowledge in Scripture… being therewith of such virtuous behavior as they seem to be… would never lean to that way but if they knew it for good. And surely where it so happeneth that any simple soul is by the good opinion that he hath in his master led out of the right belief of the faith, weening that were the very faith… which he seeth his master (whom he reckoneth good and cunning) follow and lean unto—it is a very piteous thing. And as that person is less in blame, and more easily cured—so is that master doubly damned, as the cause both of his own sin and his that followeth.
God for our sin doth suffer him; and very hard is he to mend. Howbeit, sometimes we deserve with our sin that God for the punishment thereof… suffereth us to have lewd leaders and evil teachers. And surely, for the more part, such as be led out of the right way… do rather fall thereto of a lewd lightness of their own mind… than for any great thing that moveth them in their master that teacheth them. For we see them as ready to believe a purser, a glover, or a weaver, that nothing can do but scantly read English, as they would be to believe the wisest and the best-learned doctor in a realm. Howbeit, be a man never so well-learned, and seem he never so virtuous, yet can we with no reason excuse ourselves… if we leave the right belief for the trust that we have in any man earthly. For our belief is taught us by God surely planted in the church of Christ; and the articles thereof not newly begun, but now continued many a hundred years in the great congregation of Christian people, as things certain, sure, and stable, and out of all question—which no heretic doth or can deny—and in the hearts of this congregation be they written by the holy handwork of God. And therefore accursed is he that through his trust put in any man… believeth the contrary of any point that the church of Christ is taught to believe by God. “This faith was taught by Christ, preached by his apostles; of this wrote his evangelists; and many more things were taught than are written. And this faith should have been taught and firmly stood… although nothing had been written. And the articles of this faith had in men’s hearts… be the just and sure rules of construction by which we construe and understand the Holy Scripture that is written. The sure rules whereby Holy Scripture is understood For very sure are we that whoso would construe any text of Holy Scripture in such wise as he would make it seem contrary to any point of this Catholic faith which God hath taught his Church, he giveth the Scripture a wrong sentence… and thereby teacheth a wrong belief. And, as Saint Paul saith, accursed be he and though he were an angel of heaven. And therefore be we not excusable if we

4 suffereth: allows // lewd: sorry // evil: bad 5 more: most 6 lewd: bad
8 purser: pursemaker // glover: glovemaker 9 scantly: barely
10 wisest: most intelligent // best-learned: best-educated // doctor: scholar
11 never so: no matter how // well-learned: well-educated 12 reason: rationality
17 out of: beyond 24 should: would // firmly: i.e., have firmly
25 although: even if // nothing had been written: i.e., none of it had been put in writing
26 construction: interpretation 32 sentence: meaning 34 and though: even if
believe any man to the contrary of the faith, how good or how cunning soever he seem, while we see that he teacheth us a wrong way; which we may soon know if we be good Christians and know the belief already.

“And we may have also a great guess thereat… if he teach us secretly, as a privy mystery, the doctrine that he would not were uttered and showed openly. For such things be they, commonly, that these heretics teach in hugger-mugger—against the faith that all the Church believeth. Now would I give this counsel to every unlearned man:

When any man so teacheth thee whom thou hast in great estimation for virtue or cunning, then consider in thyself that he neither hath more virtue nor more cunning… than had Saint Augustine, Saint Jerome, Saint Ambrose, Saint Gregory, Saint Cyprian, Saint Chrysostom, with many old fathers and holy doctors, which believed all their days, and died in, the belief that thou believest already, whereof he teacheth the contrary. And so say boldly to him. But then if he would beguile thee… and say that those holy doctors believed not as thou dost, but as he saith: bring him to the reckoning before some other good and well-learned men. And I dare be bold to warrant that thou shalt find him doubly false. For neither shalt thou find it true that he told thee… and, besides that, he shall not let to belie thee, saying—and swearing, too—that thou sayest wrong on him… and that he never told thee so.”

“Marry, sir,” quoth your friend, “he will haply say that he were peradventure in that point to be pardoned… because of the jeopardy that he might fall into by the maintenance of his opinion.”

“Pardon him if ye will,” quoth I. “But yet is he not then so good as were those good fathers. For either is his way naught—and then doth he naught to teach it—or, if it be good, then is he naught… that for any fear forsaketh it. For he that forsaketh any truth of Christ’s faith…
forsaketh Christ. And then saith our Savior that whoso doth... shall be forsaken of him. And he that so doth is not to be believed like those holy fathers which have taught us far the contrary. For they did abide by the right faith that they taught—which is, as by their books appeareth, the selfsame faith that we believe. And so far forth abide they thereby... that divers of them sustained great persecution therefor—and some of them death and martyrdom. So that we were more than mad if we had not liefer send our souls to the souls of those holy fathers... of whose cunning, virtue, and salvation we be sure... than to cast them away with these folk which, how holy soever they seem, yet show themselves naught... in that they teach the contrary of such things as those undoubted holy doctors taught.”

“I marvel, then,” quoth your friend, “why they live so virtuously—fasting, and giving their good in alms, with other virtuous exercises... both in forbearing the pleasure of the world... and also taking pain in their bodies.”

“To this matter,” quoth I, “our Savior himself answereth where he saith (in the Gospel of Matthew), ‘Attendite a falsis prophetis, qui veniunt ad vos in vestimentis ovium, intrinsecus autem sunt lupi rapaces’ (‘Beware of the false prophets, that come to you in the clothing of sheep... and yet withinforth be ravenous wolves’). For since that they by false doctrine labor to devour and destroy men’s souls, we be sure enough that wolves they be indeed, how sheepishly soever they look. And hypocrites must they needs be... since they be so denounced by God’s own mouth. And well may we perceive that he meaneth not well... when he teacheth evil. And that evil he teacheth we may well wit... when we see him teach the contrary of that which God hath already taught his whole Church. In which hath been so many holy fathers, so many cunning doctors, and so many blessed martyrs... that so have abided by the faith to the death... that it were
a frenzy if we would now, against so many such, believe any false heretic and feigning hypocrite… teaching us the contrary.

“Of those holy fathers of our faith, whom their books showeth to have believed as we believe, we have seen and known their virtuous life well proved by their blessed end; in which our Lord hath testified by many a miracle… that their faith and their lives hath liked him. But never have we yet seen any such thing by any of these heretics. Nor yet so much as any constancy in their doctrine; but and if they were once found out and examined, we see them always, first, ready to lie and forswear themselves if that will serve. And when that will not help, but their falsehood and perjury proved in their faces: then ready be they to abjure and forsake it, as long as that may save their lives. Nor never yet found I any one but he would once abjure though he never intended to keep his oath.

So holy would he be, and so wise therewith, that he would with perjury kill his soul forever… to save his body for a while. For commonly, soon after, such as so do… show themselves again, God of his righteousness not suffering that their false forswearing should stand them long in stead.”

The Seventeenth Chapter

The author showeth that some which be Lutherans and seem to live holily, and therefore be believed and had in estimation, intend a further purpose than they pretend… which they will well show if they may once find their time.

“And as for their living, the good appearance whereof is the thing that most blindeth us: as much surety as we have of the godly life of our old holy fathers—whereof the world hath written, and God hath borne witness by many great miracles showed for their sakes—as uncertain be we of these men, with whom we neither be always present… and little also can tell what abominations they may do too, some of them, secretly. Nor yet can know their intent

1 frenzy: mental derangement             2 false: sorry; lousy    7 liked: pleased
7 by: with  9 and if: if 10 forswear: perjure 12, 14 abjure: recant
12 forsake: renounce 13 any one: i.e., a one of them
14 but he would: i.e., who would not // once: at some point // though: even if
14 never intended to keep: had no intention of keeping
17 themselves: i.e., their true colors 18 suffering: permitting
18 false: dishonest // forswearing: renouncing under oath
21 showeth: points out 22–23 had in estimation: held in high regard
23 intend . . . pretend: have a further objective than they claim to have
24 may once: can ever 25 time: opportunity 27 surety: sureness; certainty
28 old: early 29 showed: performed
and purpose that they appoint upon, and the cause for which they
be for the while content to take all the pain.

“Very certain is it that pride is one cause wherefore they take the
pain. For pride is, as Saint Augustine saith, the very mother of all

Pride, the mother of all

heresies. For of a high mind to be in
the liking of the people… hath come
into many men so mad a mind, and
so frantic, that they have not rought what pain they took without
any other recompense or reward but only the fond pleasure and
delight that themselves conceive in their heart… when they think
what worship that people talketh of them. And they be the devil’s

Heretics the devil’s martyrs  martyr’s, taking much pain for his
pleasure; and his very apes, whom he
maketh to tumble through the hoop of that ‘holiness’ that putteth
them to pain without fruit. And yet oftentimes maketh them
miss of the vain praise whereof only they be so proud! For
while they delight to think how they be taken for holy… they be many
times well perceived and taken for hypocrites, as they be.

“But such is this accursed affection of pride, and so deep setteth in
the claws where it catcheth, that hard it is to pull them out. This
pride hath ere this made some learned men to devise new fantasies
in our faith because they would be singular among the people; as
did Arius, Faustus, Pelagius, and divers other old heretics. Whose
false opinions have been, long time past, openly condemned
by many holy synods and general councils; and now, God be
thanked, not only their opinions quenched, but also all their
books clean gone and vanished quite away… ere ever any law was
made for such books’ burning. So that it well appeareth to have been
the only work of God that hath destroyed those works, which
wrought in their times much harm in his Church. This affection
of pride hath not only made some learned men to bring forth new
fantasies, but maketh also many men of much less than mean
learning so sorely to long to seem far better learned than they be… that
to make the people have them in authority, they devise new sects
and schisms to the pleasure of new-fangled folk; sparing no pain,
for the while, to set forth their sect with; rewarding their labor with only delight of beholding what pleasure the people have in their preaching.

“And albeit that this frantic pleasure with which the devil inwardly feedeth them… be the only thing that satisfieth and contenteth some, yet many are there, of those that evil teach and appear holy, which are both secretly more loose and voluptuous than they seem… and some also which warily keep themselves for the while… intend toward more liberal lewdness at length. Will ye see example thereof? Look on Tyndale, that translated the New Testament. Which was indeed (as ye said in the beginning), before his going over, taken for a man of sober and honest living, and looked and preached holily… saving that yet sometimes it savored so shrewdly… that he was once or twice examined thereof. But yet, because he glossed then his words with a better sense, and said and swore that he meant no harm, folk were glad to take all to the best. But yet ye see that though he dissembled himself to be a Lutheran, or to bear any favor to his sect, while he was here—yet as soon as he got him hence, he got him to Luther, straight. And whereas in the translation of the New Testament he covered and dissembled himself as much as he could, yet when he perceived his cloaked heresies espied and destroyed… then showed he shortly himself in his own likeness, sending forth first his wicked book of Mammona, and after, his malicious book of Obedience. In which books he showeth himself so puffed up with the poison of pride, malice, and envy… that it is more than marvel that the skin can hold together! For he hath not only sucked out the most poison that he could find through all Luther’s books or take of him by mouth, and all that hath spit out in these books; but hath also in many things far passed his master, running forth so mad for malice… that he fareth as though he heard not his own voice. He barketh against the sacraments much more than Luther. For whereas Luther left Confession yet some confession, and reckoned his secret confession necessary and profitable though he set a lewd liberty therein, Tyndale taketh it away quite…
and raileth thereon, and saith it was begun by the devil. Which thing had undoubtedly never been obtained among the people—if God had not brought it up himself. Nor never could it have continued so many hundred years without great harm grown by disclosing of many men’s offenses… if the Holy Spirit of God had not assisted his holy sacrament, as the King’s Highness most prudently writeth. Luther also sometimes affirmeth purgatory, sometimes doubteth, and sometimes denieth. But Tyndale putteth no doubt at all, but denieth it as utterly as foolishly, without ground, cause, or color laid wherefore. Concerning the Holy Mass, Luther, as mad as he is, was never yet as mad as Tyndale is, which, like himself, so raileth thereupon in his frantic book of Obedience that any good Christian man would abhor to read it; and yet, writing as he doth, he is not ashamed to say that the Church will not believe holy Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine, and such others—as though these holy doctors were on his side. Among all whom he shall scant read one leaf wherein he shall not find one or other of his abominable heresies reproved! Luther himself was never so shameless to say… that these holy fathers held on his side; but because they were against him… he rejected the authority of them all. But what conscience hath this Tyndale, that thus can write to blind unlearned people with, when himself well knoweth that they do all, with one voice, prove that shrift requisite to our salvation and confession is of necessity requisite to our salvation? And that they lay for them the Holy Scripture plenteously for the further proof of this part—which Tyndale would wickedly, with only railing and jesting against all their wholesome doctrine, drive away clean and he could!

He knoweth also himself that all they with one voice teach, and prove by Scripture, too, that there is the fire of purgatory; which I marvel why Tyndale feareth so little… but if he be at a plain point with himself to go straight to hell. They teach also all with one voice the great profit of the Mass, and honor that ought to be done thereto—which Tyndale teacheth to dishonor.

“They teach all… the worshipping of images and relics, and
praying to saints, going on pilgrimages, and credence to be given to miracles; of all which Tyndale teacheth the contrary.

“All they teach also chastity, and preach high preeminence of virginity and widowhood above wedding, and ever have had in abomination the breach of any vow of chastity; whereas Tyndale, against them all teaching the contrary, is therein so shameless, and so little respect hath of his own conscience, that—seeing all them to write against him and himself against them all, and that every man that learned is must needs perceive his shameless boldness therein—letteth not, yet, both to rail against Christ’s church for saying as these old holy saints said before… and also to say that the Church will not hear them; whereas himself seeth that the Church and they say all one thing, and as well they as the Church abhor and condemn his deadly, damnable heresies.

“Now ween I that we need little to doubt how he liveth… that thus writeth. He liveth, of likelihood, as evil as he teacheth—and worse he cannot. But, as I began to say, this Tyndale in the beginning bore forth a fair face, and seemed unto the people, peradventure, an honest man; as some others haply do now whom ye speak of… which, when they see their time, shall, if they may be suffered, cast off their visors of hypocrisy and show themselves at length in their own likeness, as he doth now.

“I pray you look on Luther himself. If he should in the beginning have said all that he hath said since, who could have suffered him? If he should in the beginning have married a nun, would not the people have burned him? And yet now, by little and little, he hath brought them to be content therewith. And let us not think the contrary but that of those heretics that here seem so good (if there be any such), we see not yet their stomachs, but shall if they be upheld a while see them follow their author in lewd living, Doctor Luther with his leman—and shall by the devil’s help induce good and simple souls so far into wrong ways… that they shall at length well like and commend the things which now their uncorrupted conscience abhorreth. And therefore let all
good Christian people knock and break, as Holy Scripture counseleth, the young children’s heads of Babylon against the stone; that is to say, let good Christian folk suspect, abhor, and pursue in the beginning all such evil doctrine as is contrary to the faith and teaching of Christ’s Catholic Church… which God and his Holy Spirit, both by writing and without writing, hath taught his Church, and which hath in his Church continued from Christ’s days hitherto—as it well appeareth by the good and godly books of all our forefathers holy doctors of Christ’s Church Militant here in earth, and now glorious saints in his Church Triumphant in heaven. From whose firm faith joined with good works (which, as two wings, carried them up to heaven) there shall, but we be more than mad, no fond heretic lead us, seem he never so saintish, with any new construction of Christ’s holy Gospel or other part of Holy Scripture; which no wise man will doubt but that those holy, cunning men illumined with the grace of God… much better understood

The Lutherans are the worst heretics that ever sprang in Christ’s church. than all the rabble of these lewd

opinions and their lewd living showeth. And let us never doubt but all that be of that sect, if any seem good (as very few do), yet will they in conclusion decline to the like lewd living as their master and their fellows do, if they might once (as by God’s grace they never shall) frame the people to their own frantic fantasy. Which dissolute living they be driven to dissemble… because their audience is not yet brought to the point to bear it; which they surely trust to bring about, and to frame this realm after the fashion of Switzerland or Saxony, and some other parts of Germany… where their sect hath already fordone the faith, pulled down the churches, polluted the temples, put out and despoiled all good religious folk, joined friars and nuns together in lechery, despited all saints, blasphemed our Blessed Lady, cast down Christ’s cross, thrown out the Blessed Sacrament; refused all good laws, abhorred all good governance, rebelled against all rulers; fallen to fight among themselves (and so many thousands slain… that the land lieth, in many places, in
manner deserted and desolate); and finally—that most abominable is of all!—of all their own ungracious deeds lay the fault in God, taking away the liberty of man’s will, ascribing all our deeds to destiny… with all reward or punishment pursuing upon all our doings. Whereby they take away all diligence and good endeavor to virtue, all withstanding and striving against vice, all care of heaven, all fear of hell, all cause of prayer, all desire of devotion, all exhortation to good, all dehoration from evil, all praise of well-doing, all rebuke of sin, all the laws of the world, all reason among men; set all wretchedness abroach, no man at liberty… and yet every man do what he will, calling it not his will but his destiny; laying their sin to God’s ordinance… and their punishment to God’s cruelty; and finally turning the nature of man into worse than a beast, and the goodness of God into worse than the devil. And all this good fruit would a few mischievous persons—some for desire of a large liberty to an unbridled lewdness, and some of a high devilish pride cloaked under pretext of good zeal and simpleness—undoubtedly bring into this realm… if the prince and prelates, and the good-faithful people, did not in the beginning meet with their malice.”

The Eighteenth Chapter

The author showeth that in the condemnation of heretics, the clergy might lawfully do much more sharply than they do; and that in deed the clergy doth now no more against heretics… than the Apostle counseleth… and the old holy doctors did.

“For as for the clergy, whom they labor to bring in hatred under the false accusation of cruelty—do no more therein than Saint Augustine, Saint Jerome, and other holy fathers have been wont to do before; nor no further than the Apostle adviseth himself. For they do no more but when one heretic, after warning, will not amend, but waxeth worse… eschew him then, and avoid him out of Christ’s flock.

2 of: for // ungracious: ungodly; wicked // lay the fault in: put the blame on
4 all . . . pursuing: i.e., all the . . . pursuant // 5 withstanding: putting up of resistance
6 care of: concern about // 7 devotion: piety // 8 dehoration: dissuasion
10 abroach: astir; free to run rampant // 15 mischievous: dangerous; destructive
16 lewdness: wickedness // 18 good-faithful: right-believing // 19 meet with: combat
22 might lawfully do much more sharply: could legitimately act much more harshly
26 labor: strive // bring in hatred under: make hated by means of
27 do: i.e., they do // 30 warning: i.e., being warned
31 waxeth: becomes // avoid: drive
Which is the very thing that Saint Paul counselleth where he writeth to Titus, ‘Haereticum hominem post primam et secundam corrigitionem devita.’

And this is much less, that the clergy doth to heretics, than Saint Peter did unto Ananias and Sapphira for a far smaller matter; that is to wit, for their untrue saying, and keeping aside a portion of their own money when they made semblance as though they brought to the apostles altogether. For though they were not killed by his own hand, yet appeareth it well that God killed them, both twain, by Saint Peter, his means as governor of his Church, to the fearful example of all such as would after that break their promise and vow to God willingly made, of themselves or their own good. Which thing Luther and Tyndale would have all men do now. Did not Saint Paul write unto the Corinthians… that they should deliver to the devil him that had defiled his father’s wife, to the punishment of his body, ‘that the spirit might be saved in the day of judgment’? What say we of Hymenaeus and Alexander, of whom he writeth (unto the Corinthians also), ‘Hymenaeum et Alexandrum tradidi Satanae, ut discant non blasphemare’? ‘I have,’ quoth he, ‘betaken Hymeneus and Alexander to the devil, to teach them to leave their blasphemy.’ In which words we may well learn… that Saint Paul, as apostle and spiritual governor in that country, finding them twain fallen from the faith of Christ into the blasphemy of that they were bound to worship, did cause the devil to torment and punish their bodies; which every man may well wit was no small pain… and peradventure not without death also. For we find nothing of their amendment. And this bodily punishment did Saint Paul, as it appeareth, upon heretics. So that if the clergy did unto much more blasphemous heretics than I ween they twain were… much more sorrow than Saint Paul did to them, they should neither do it without good cause nor without great authority and evident example of Christ’s blessed apostles.

And surely when our Savior himself calleth such heretics ‘wolves cloaked in sheep’s skins,’ and would that his shepherds, the governors of his flock, should in such
My Lord of Rochester

wise avoid them as very shepherds
would avoid very wolves, there is little
doubt but (as an honorable prelate of this realm, in his most erudite
book, anwereth unto Luther) the prelates of Christ’s church rather
ought temporally to destroy those ravenous wolves… than suffer them
to worry and devour everlastinglly the flock that Christ hath committed
unto their cure… and the flock that himself died for to save it from the
wolf’s mouth. But, now, though it well appear (as methinketh it doth)
that the clergy might in this case right sore procure against heretics,
yet do they indeed no further than the old holy fathers did in their
time… and the blessed Apostle counselleth them to do; but all the sore

The causes of the punishment of heretics

punishment of heretics wherewith such
folk as favor them would fain defame
the clergy… is and hath been—for the great outrages

and temporal harms that such heretics have been always wont
to do, and seditious commotions that they be wont to make, besides the
far passing spiritual hurts that they do to men’s souls—devised
and executed against them, of necessity, by good Christian princes and
politic rulers of the temporality, forasmuch as their wisdoms well
perceived that the people should not fail to fall into many sore and
intolerable troubles… if such seditious sects of heretics were not
by grievous punishment repressed in the beginning, and the
spark well quenched ere it were suffered to grow to over-great a
fire.”

“Forsooth,” quoth your friend, “it appeareth well that the clergy is not in
this matter to be blamed, as many men reckon. For it seemeth that the
sore punishment of heretics is devised not by the clergy, but by
temporal princes and good lay people—and not without great cause.”

“Well,” quoth I, “and to the intent that ye shall perceive it much the
better—and, over that, believe your own eyes, and not my words,
in many things that ye have heard of my mouth—we will not part
this night but I shall deliver into your hands here more books than
ye will read over till tomorrow. But for that ye shall neither need to
read all… nor lose time in seeking for that ye should see, I have laid
you the places ready with rushes between the leaves, and notes marked
in the margins, where the matter is touched.”

1, 2 avoid: drive out // very: actual 3–4 as . . . Luther: More is referring to Saint
John Fisher’s Assertionis Lutheranae Confutatio (1523). 5 suffer: allow
7 cure: care 8 though it well appear: even if it is quite evident // doth: i.e., is
9 might: could rightly // right sore procure: take very aggressive measures
10 old holy fathers: early fathers of the Church 11 the blessed Apostle: Saint Paul
11, 27 sore: severe 13 would fain defame: would like to render infamous
17 passing: surpassing 19 politic: prudent // temporality: secular sphere
20 sore: terrible 22 repressed: suppressed 23 suffered: allowed
25 appeareth well: is now quite evident 28 temporality: secular
30 over that: moreover 31 in: regarding // of: from
32 but I shall deliver: without my having put 33 read over till: (be able to) read through before
33 for: so 34 all: everything // seeking: looking // that: what
34 laid: gotten 35 rushes: Plant stems similar to reeds. 36 touched: discussed
So caused I to be borne into his chamber a book of decrees, and certain works of Saint Cyprian, Saint Augustine, and some other holy doctors; and therewith, a work or twain of Luther, and as many of Tyndale. And in this wise went we to supper; and on the morrow forbore I to speak with him till near dinnertime. At which our meeting, he showed me that in the decrees, where the rushes lay, namely in Causa XXII: Quaestione quinta and divers others of the questions consequently following, he had seen at full that the clergy doth at this day no further for the punishment of heretics than did the old fathers and holy doctors and saints in time past—as by their own words there alleged doth openly and plainly appear. And that as well the clergy in the persecution of heretics lawfully may do… as the temporal princes in war against infidels be deeply bound to do… much more than they now do, or of long time have done, or yet, as it seemeth, go about to do. And, over this, he said that he had seen of Luther’s own words worse than he had ever heard rehearsed; and in Tyndale worse yet, in many things, than he saw in Luther himself. And in Tyndale’s book of Obedience he said that he had found what things Tyndale saith against miracles and against the praying to saints.

“Marry,” quoth I, “and these two matters made us two much business before your going to the university! I would it had happed you and me to have read over that book of his before! Howbeit, in good faith, if ye will… we shall yet peruse over his reasons in those points, and consider what weight is in them.”

“Nay, by my troth,” quoth your friend, “we shall need now to lose no time therein. For as for miracles, he saith nothing, in effect, but that which I laid against them before: that the miracles were the works of the devil. Saving that whereas I said that it might peradventure be said so, he saith that indeed it is so—and proveth it yet less than I did. And therefore, as for that word of his—without better proof, is of little weight.”

“Forsooth,” quoth I, “Tyndale’s word alone ascribing all the miracles to the devil… ought not to weigh much among Christian men… against the writing of holy Saint Augustine, Saint Jerome, Saint Ambrose,
Saint Chrysostom, Saint Gregory, and many another holy doctor... writing many a great miracle done at holy pilgrimages and saints’ relics—done in open presence of many substantial folk, and divers done in their own sight—all which miracles all those blessed saints do ascribe unto the work of God, and to the honor of those holy saints that were worshipped at those pilgrimages. Against all whom when Tyndale ascribeth them all to the devil, he plainly showeth himself as faithful as he would seem—

*Lk 11:15* very near sib to the infidelity of those Jews that ascribed Christ’s miracles to the devil, saying that he did cast out devils by the power of Beelzebub, prince of devils.”

“Surely!” quoth your friend. “And as for that he reasoneth against praying to saints, is very bare.”

“It must needs,” quoth I, “be bare... except he well avoid the miracles. Whereto when he hath nothing to say but to ascribe God’s works to the devil, he showeth himself driven to a narrow strait. For he and his fellows, as touching miracles, neither have God willing... nor the devil able... to show any for the proof of their part; nor, I trust in God, never they shall.”

“In faith,” quoth your friend, “as for reasoning the matter of praying to saints, he is not worth the reading now. For all the substance, in effect, that ye prove it by... is by him clean untouched.”

“That is,” quoth I, “no marvel; for he hath not heard it.”

“In faith,” quoth your friend. “And of his own making he layeth arguments for it, such as he list... which he layeth forth faintly... and then doth answer them so slenderly—and all his whole matter, in those points and others, so plainly confuted by the old holy fathers—that if I had seen so much before, it had been likely to have shortened much part of our long communication.

“For by my troth,” quoth he, “when I consider both the parts well, and read Luther’s words and Tyndale’s in some places where ye laid me the rushes, I cannot but wonder that either any Almain could like the one... or any Englishman the other.”

“I cannot much marvel,” quoth I, “though many like them well.
For since there is no country wherein there lacketh plenty of such as be naught, what wonder is it that vicious folk fall to the favor of their like? And then, as for such, when their hearts are once fixed upon their blind affections, a man may with as much fruit preach to a post as reason with them to the contrary. For they nothing ponder what is reasonably spoken to them, but whereto their fond affection inclineth, that thing they lean to, and that they believe; or, at the leastwise, that way they walk and say they believe it. For in good faith, that they so believe indeed… their matters be so mad that I believe it not. And yet make they semblance as though they believed that no man were able to confute Luther or Tyndale; whereas methinketh, for these matters of their heresies that they so set forth, if the audience were indifferent… there were not in this world a man more meet to match them both twain in dispicions than were mad Collins alone, if he were not of the same sect. For he lasheth out Scripture in Bedlam as fast as they both in Almaine. And, in good faith, they both expound it as madly as he. And so help me God as methinketh that man is as mad as any of all three… which when he seeth the right faith of Christ continued in his Catholic Church so many hundred years, and on that side so many glorious martyrs, so many blessed confessors, so many godly virgins; and in all that time, virtue had in honor… fasting, prayer, and alms had in price… God and his saints worshipped… his sacraments had in reverence… Christian souls tenderly prayed for… holy vows kept and observed… virginity preached and praised… pilgrimages devoutly visited… every kind of good works commended; and seeth now suddenly start up a new sect setting forth clean the contrary, destroying Christ’s holy sacraments… pulling down Christ’s cross… blaspheming his blessed saints… destroying all devotion… forbidding men to pray for their fathers’ souls…

The devout deeds of heretics contemning fasting days… setting at naught the holy days… pulling down the churches… railing against the Mass… villainously demeaning the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, the Sacred Body of our Savior Christ;

2 naught: wicked // vicious folk: immoral people; people given over to vice
5, 8 affection(s): feeling(s) 5 may: can 7 nothing: do not at all
7 reasonably: rationally; in line with reason 8 fond: foolish // lean to: go along with
10, 18 in good faith: in all honesty 10–11 matters be so mad: contentions are so crazy
13 matters: points 14 indifferent: impartial; unbiased // were not: would not be
15 dispicions: debate 16 were: would be 17 lasheth out: spouts
17 fast: quickly / constantly / zealously // Almaine: Germany
22 confessors: male saints who gave heroic witness to the faith but were not martyred
23, 24, 25 had: held 24 price: esteem // worshipped: venerated
27 pilgrimages: pilgrimage sites; shrines 29 clean the contrary: the exact opposite
29, 30 destroying: doing away with 31 fathers’: parents’
32 contemning: flouting; treating with contemptuous disregard
and seeth the one side, and the continuance thereof, so clearly proved by
many a thousand miracles... so clearly testified by the virtuous and
erudite books of all the old holy doctors from the apostles’ time to our
days; and seeth on the other side a fond friar and his fellows
without wit or grace bear us in hand that all those holy fathers never
understood the Scripture... but only these beasts that teach us vice as
fast as ever the others taught us virtue; and that seeth on the one side
Saint Cyprian, Saint Jerome, Saint Ambrose, Saint Augustine,
Saint Basil, Saint Chrysostom, Saint Gregory, and all the virtuous
and cunning doctors, by row, from the death of Christ and the time of his
apostles till now, and seeth among all these neither priest, monk, nor
Friar that ever did, after his profession made, marry and take a wife... or
any suffered to break their vowed chastity, in all their time; and seeth
on the other side none other doctors of this new sect but Friar
Luther and his wife... priest Pomeranus and his wife... Friar Huessgens and
his wife... priest Karlstadt and his wife... Dom Otho (monk) and his
wife... Friar Lambert and his wife... frantic Collins, and more frantic
Tyndale, that saith all priests, monks, and friars must needs have wives—
that man were, I say, as frantic as they both... that would rather send his
soul with such a sort as these be... than with all those holy saints
that ever since Christ’s days have testified by their holy handwriting...
that they died in the same faith that the Church believeth yet, and
all these fifteen hundred years hath done, and shall do till the world’s end. Go
there never so many heretics out thereof... and leave it never so little,
yet shall it remain and be well known always by the profession of that
faith, and those holy sacraments, that have continued therein from
the beginning thereof, and the holy doctors thereof ever had in
honour and reverence—and their acceptation with God incessantly
testified by miracles; which never one sort of so many sects of
heretics could yet allege for any doctor of theirs. Nor
ever shall, I think, till the great indignation of God provoked by

Antichrist, the head of all heretics
our sin and wretchedness... shall suffer
the head of all heretics, Antichrist (of whom
these folk be the forewalkers), to come

into this wretched world... and therein to work such wonders that

2, 21, 29 testified: attested   3, 10, etc. doctor(s): theologian(s)   4 fond: foolish
4 fellows: cohorts   5 wit: intelligence   // bear us in hand: try to make us believe
7 fast: steadfastly / zealously   10 cunning: learned   // by row: one after the other
13 suffered: allowed   // vowed chastity: i.e., vow of celibacy
17, 19 frantic: delirious; insane   19 were: would be
19 they both: i.e., both Collins and Tyndale   27 had: held
29 never one sort: not one variety   32 suffer: allow   34 forewalkers: forerunners
the sight thereof shall be able to put right wise men, and good men, in great doubt of the truth, seeing false Antichrist proving his preaching by miracles; whereas now, neither good man nor wise man can have any color of excuse… if men were so mad to believe these mad masters of whom they see the principal archheretics, and first authors of the sect, neither show miracle for the proof of their doctrine… and yet their teaching and their living all set upon sin and beastly concupiscence—and so, clean contrary to the doctrine of all the old holy doctors… for whom God hath and doth show so many miracles in his Church. Which, as I said, shall not fail to be conserved, and his right faith therein to be preserved, in spite of all the heretics that ever shall spring—Antichrist and all—and in spite of the devil, the great master of them all; whom Christ shall at the last restrain, and destroy his idol Antichrist, with the spirit of his holy mouth, repairing and dilating his Church again; and, gathering thereinto as well the remnant of the Jews… as all other sects abroad about the world, shall make all folk one flock under himself the Shepherd… and shall deliver a glorious kingdom to his Father, of all the saved people… from our former father Adam to the last day… from thenceforth to reign in heaven, in joy and bliss incogitable, one everlasting day with his Father, himself, and the Holy Ghost: which send these seditious sects the grace to cease, and the favorers of those factions to amend; and us the grace that, stopping our ears from the false enchantments of all these heretics, we may by the very faith, of Christ’s Catholic Church, so walk with charity in the way of good works in this wretched world… that we may be partners of the heavenly bliss… which the blood of God’s own Son hath bought us unto. And this prayer,” quoth I, “serving us for grace, let us now sit down to dinner.” Which we did.

And after dinner departed he home toward you, and I to the Court.

Finis

Cum privilegio regali,
Anno Domini MDXXXI, mensis Maii