

Thomas More Reader: Historical Tales and Commentaries: Part One

33. "Livy's Tale of the Capuan Senators"

[From *The Apology of Sir Thomas More Knight* ; Works, pp. 882b-884a]

I have been within these four or five years (for before I heard little talking of such manner of devices¹) but within this four or five years I have been at such devices in divers good merry companies, never earnestly talking thereof (for as yet, I thank God, that of this matter I never heard any such) but for pass-time by way of familiar talking have I heard divers, both in hand with prelates and secular priests and religious persons, and talked of their living and of their learning, and of their livelihood too, and whether themselves were such as it were better to have them or lack them; and then touching their livelihood, whether it might be lawfully taken from them or not, and it might, whether it were expedience so to be; and if it so were, then to what use.

And in many such merry talkings I have always remembered and, because our communication came sometimes to a much like point, sometimes have I told and rehearsed the story that Titus Livius telleth of one Pacuvius Calavius, in the third book of his third decade that treateth of the Romans' war with Hannibal and the city of Carthage. This Capua was of all Italy the chief city and of the greatest power save only the city of Rome. In which city so happened it that the communality were fallen in grudge and murmur², and at division with the Senate, as this Pacifier saith that the temporality is here at these days against the clergy.

Whereupon this Calavius, being a senator, and nevertheless learning all unto the people (because he saw them by sufferance and oversight of the senate grown into an unbridled liberty and, as they must be when they conspire whole together, waxen the more mighty part), studied and bethought himself what means he might invent first to bring the senate in [t]his danger, and then by some benefit win all their good wills and yet therewith all increase his favor with the people besides. Upon this (being as it happened the chief governor of the city for the time), he broke upon a day suddenly to the senate and told them that themselves wist well enough what grudge the people had to them, but the peril and danger that they then presently stood in, that, he said, wist they not. But he knew well that the people intended now after the great overthrow which the Romans had late had at Cannas to kill up all the senators and break their liege with the Romans and fall into the part of Hannibal.

"Howbeit," quoth he, "if ye dare put yourself in my hand, I have devised a way whereby ye shall see me shortly not only save all your lives but also preserve your state."

And when the senators in that sudden fear agreed to put him wholly in trust to order all the matter as he would, he commanded them all suddenly to be locked fast in their council chamber, and setting armed men at the gate to see that neither any other man should enter in unto them nor any of them come out, he called suddenly to an assembly the whole people of the city and there said in this wise unto them:

"The thing that ye have, dear friends, these many days much desired that ye might once be revenged upon this unhappy senate and amove them from the room that by their covetous and cruel dealings have well shewed themselves full unmeet to bear the name of fathers unto the people. This thing have I now by policy for your sakes peacebly brought unto your hands, and that in such wise as ye shall not need to fight therefore or assault particularly their houses. In expugnation whereof, being as they would be fenced with their servants and their friends, yourselves might stand in peril. But I have shut them up yonder together alone by themselves, clean out of armor without aid or any manner defence, where you shall have them all without any man's death or stroke."

At this word, glad was all the people and, giving him high thanks, would forthwith fain have been upon them.

"Sirs, there needeth in this point none haste," quoth he, "but one thing is there that if ye thought thereon ye would, I dare say, do first. For they be the while safe enough there, as they escape not from you. But I have ever known you so wise that ye will not, I wot well, set your short present pleasure before your perpetual wealth, which ye see well ye should do, if ye should live lawless and without a rule; nor no law can serve except there be some governors. And therefore two things must ye do at once, that is, to wit, both remove these and also set of yourselves some better men in their places. Wherefore, I have brought here their names in a pot. Let them be drawn out, and as they come unto hand determine your pleasure of their persons, and substitute therewith their successors."

This motion of Calavius was such that either of reason they could not mislike it, or else for shame they would not refuse it. And thereupon, out was there drawn a name, at the hearing whereof they cried out, all the company: "An evil and a naughty man"—and bade away with him.

"Very well," quoth Calavius, "whom will you now name to put in his place?"

At that they paused a little and began to bethink them. But shortly some named one and some named another. But with perusing after this fashion of a few, there was none that one man named and advanced for good but five forth at once rejected him as either very naughty or at the least more unmeet to take in then he whom they would put out. So that long ere they had perused half as much as they misliked many of their old, yet found they it so hard a thing to find out the better new that they waxed weary of the seeking. So that Calavius perceiving them being in that matter somewhat to stacker and stay, persuaded them easily to concord with those that they had before.

And thereupon they left off their election and let the new chosen pass, and kept their old senate still.

And surely somewhat like but not all after this fashion hath it fared in such good company as it hath happened me to be at communication upon these matters of the clergy. For, in conclusion, after many faults laid against the spirituality that is now, and many new devices for their lands,

when we came at last unto Calavius's pageant ' and those that found the faults in the body at large in such a large fashion laid forth by them, as though there were not one good man among them, when they had the names of this prelate and that prelate recited and rehearsed unto them by row ' , and were asked, "What say you by him and what by him," albeit that they did by some of them say they were naughty, and if, like as the Capuans, should have changed a senator for a commoner, so if they should for everyone of the spirituality take into his place by choice and election some good temporal man, they might for this prelate or that, concerning some of them, shortly make a good change. For some of them thought they such as for one point or other they could not lightly * find a worse! Yet on the other side again, at some of them they stayed and stackered, and with much work brought forth some at last, with whom they might, as they thought, match them: and yet by their own confession no more than match them, and in my mind not so much neither, but like as in some they and I somewhat varied, so in divers others we were agreed both that for to make the change neither could they find their better nor their match neither.

NOTES

(1) Livy's *Tale of the Capuan Senators* appears in Book XIII,ii-iii of his *History of Rome* . The event described by More occurred in 216 B.C. Livy thought Calavius "a bad man, but not utterly abandoned [who] preferred to dominate a state still intact rather than one that had been wrecked" (ed., F.G. Moore, p.7). Considering King Henry's sensitivity to the subject of absolute authority, More prudently here *omits* a portion of Livy's original text which reads: "For it is these senators that you hate, I think; it is not your wish to have no senate at all. In fact you must either have a king—save the mark!—or else a senate, the only deliberative body in a free state" (Moore, p. 9).

34. "Heretics in the Time of Henry IV and Henry V"

[From *The Apology of Sir Thomas More Knight* ; Works, p. 923a)

And therefore the parliament in the second year of King Henry the IV both being informed by the clergy and also by themselves perceiving that those heretics increased still, and would at length do some great mischief, but if they were better repressed, did among other good things provide that the Ordinaries might arrest the heretics and imprison them themselves. And yet was all that too little, too. For in some places the heretics waxed too strong and would not be arrested by them.

And therefore at last it came to that point that men long had looked for. For those heresies begun by Wycliffe in the time of the noble prince King Richard the II, and being then by some folk maintained, and by many men winked at, and almost by all folk forsleuthed ' , the peril was so long neglected that the heretics were grown into such number, courage and boldness that afterwards in the time of the said famous prince King Henry the Fifth they conspired among them not only the abolition of the faith and spoiling of the spirituality but also the destruction of the King and all his nobility, with a plain subversion and overturning of the state of his whole realm. Upon which their false conspiracy disclosed when they were by the policy of that noble prince and his Council disappointed and secretly prevented and the field taken up before, in

which they had intended to gather together by night and from thence to have made their invasion; then after due punishment done upon many of them, it was well-perceived what great need it was ever after to repress and subdue such seditious heresies forthwith at the first springing. And therefore was there by and by thereupon by the full parliament not only that law confirmed, which law this Pacifier here speaketh of in this chapter, but also more made thereunto, as they that were delivered to the secular hands should forfeit both goods and lands, and that the great officers of the realm should be solemnly sworn to repress heretics and assist the Ordinaries.

NOTES

(1) Although at one time in favor with the powerful Duke of Lancaster for his opinions relating to both temporal and spiritual power, **John Wycliffe** was nevertheless charged with heresy and was tried under King Richard II on two occasions (1377 and 1378) for having rejected transubstantiation and for having condemned monasticism. He died in 1384. His body was disinterred in 1428 and thrown into the river Swift.

(2) By **King Henry IV's act De Haeretico Comburendo** of 1401 (2^o Hen.IV.c.15) the church obtained statutory authority for capital punishment of Lollards (from 1387, the so-called followers of John Wycliffe), whose doctrines anticipated those of sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers. Many Lollards were examined and asked to recant. William Sawtrey became their first martyr with his refusal to recant. He was burned at St. Paul's Cross in March 1401.

(3) During his reign (1413-1422) **Henry V** was converted by his confessor from any sympathy whatever for Lollard doctrines. Even on the first day of his reign he gave order to stop all riots, insurrections and extraordinary meetings under any pretext, thus attempting to forestall Lollards assembling in public. (J.H. Wylie and W.T. Waugh, I, 238). Henry helped check the spread of Lollard influence among the aristocracy with the famous trial and eventual execution for heresy of his former friend and ally, Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham, whom Sir Thomas More refers to as "sometime a captain of heretics in England in the day of King Henry the fifth" (*Works*, p. 305) who "would have been the captain of heretics in a sudden traitorous insurrection" (*Works*, p. 978). Archbishop Arundel produced damning evidence against the knight. Oldcastle was arrested and imprisoned in the Tower and his trial begun at St. Paul's on September 23, 1413. He escaped from the Tower, however, and remained at large, probably helping to organize an insurrection by a huge army of Lollards in January 1414. In 1417, some four years after his trial and escape, Oldcastle was finally discovered and overpowered. He was brought before Parliament and promptly excommunicated. He was then executed by hanging and then (before dying) by burning, after having been tied to a hurdle and drawn through the streets. His body was hung over the fire to roast slowly, swinging (in what a contemporary chronicle called) "torture intolerable" (Wylie and Waugh, III, 93-94).

35. "Duke Humphrey's Tale"

[From *A Dialogue of Heresies*, Works, p.134a]

"This is," quoth I, "very true that such things may be, and sometimes so be indeed. As I

remember me that I have heard my father tell of a beggar that in King Henry his 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 ¹⁰, where he said he had ever dwelled, to seek Saint Alban, and that he had been at his shrine, and had not been holpen. 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 ¹¹, 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 shew shrined. 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 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 shewing himself joyous of God's glory so shewed 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 unto his eyes and asked whither 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 you can not see well yet.' Yes, sir,' quoth he, 'I thank God and his holy martyr I can see now as well as any man.' 'You 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 shewed him. And when my lord saw that, he bad him walk faitour ¹², and made him be set openly in the stocks. For though he could have seen suddenly by miracle the difference between divers 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 that king's father's ¹³ 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 ¹⁴, where it was believed she lived without any meat or drink, only by angel's food. And divers times she was houseled ¹⁵ in sight of the people with an 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 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 ¹⁶ saint, and daily sought so thick to see here, 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 prease ¹⁷.

"Now lay the prior with Holy Maiden Elizabeth nightly in the rood-loft till she was after taken out and tried in the keeping ¹⁸ 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 ¹⁹ [that] the prior and she had been burned together at

one stake! What came of the prior?"

Quod he, "that can I not tell, but I ween he was put to such punishment as the poor nun was, that had given here in penance to say this verse: *Miserere mei deus quoniam conculcavit me homo* , with a great threat that and ²⁸ she did so any more, 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 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 ²⁹ , 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 ³⁰ in the one side, and great folly in the other side. And as that noble Duke Humphrey wisely found out the falsehood of that blissom beggar, so did that noble lady, the king's mother, prudently decipher and found 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 shrined quick ³¹ in a monastery among a meinie ³² of monks. And yet, in conclusion, because no such feigned wonders should infame God's very ³³ miracles, his goodness shortly brought them both to knowledge ³⁴ . And so doth his especial cure and providence bring ever shortly such falsehood and faitery ³⁵ to light to their shame and confusion. And as He did in Berne, a great city in Almaine ³⁶ , 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."

NOTES

(1) **Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester** , the youngest son of Henry IV, was regent of England in 1420-1421. He is best known for his patronage of men of letters, such as Lydgate and Capgrave, and for his gift of books (later dispersed) to the University of Oxford. In his own day he was better known for his constant quarrels with his uncle, Henry Beaufort, and for his persecution of the Lollards. He died while in custody and was buried at St. Albans in 1447. The Duke of Gloucester's tale was retold by Shakespeare in an early play, *The Second Part of King Henry the Sixth* , Act II, scene i, lines 59-160. "See G.Marc'hadour, 'Une dette de Shakespeare envers le père de Thomas More,' in *Moreana* , 4 (1964), 76-87. The liberties taken with the comic interlude make it impossible to determine whether Shakespeare took the tale from More, from Grafton, or from Foxe," (CW, 6, p. 626).

(2) **Miserere...homo** : (*Psalms* , 56:1): "Have pity on me, O God, for men trample upon me"

(New American Bible).

¹ Schemes

² *Grudge and murmur* : ill-will and complaint

³ Defended

⁴ Wicked

⁵ *Stacker and stay* : waver and hesitate

⁶ Trick, deception

⁷ *By row* : one after the other

⁸ Readily

⁹ For-slothed, i.e., neglected

¹⁰ I.e., County Berwick, Scotland

¹¹ Cologne was famous in the Middle Ages for its Shrine of the Wise Men of the

East

¹² *Walk faitour* : i.e., bid the imposter be gone (These words, via French, come from Latin *factor* and share the root of 'feign'. See *Moreana* , 4 (1964), 82.)

¹³ I.e., Henry V

¹⁴ Gallery above screen separating nave from choir

¹⁵ Given Eucharist

¹⁶ Living

¹⁷ *For prease* : because of crowding

¹⁸ Prison

¹⁹ (Ironic) service to God

²⁰ If

²¹ *Letted to swear* : refrained from swearing

²² Deception

²³ *Shrined quick* : venerated while alive

²⁴ (Disparaging) assemblage, "bunch"

²⁵ True

²⁶ Exposure

²⁷ Deception

²⁸ Germany (for Switzerland)