

## Thomas More Reader: Memorabilia: Personal Remembrances: Part Five

### 96. "The Miracle of the Woman in Walbrook Ward"

[From *A Dialogue concerning Heresies* ; Works, pp. 131a-132a]

"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 of 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 been myself that methinketh as great marvel, but I have no lust to tell you, because that ye be so circumspect and ware<sup>1</sup> 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 life:—"

"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,<sup>2</sup> and young were they both. The eldest I am sure passeth not twenty-three. It happened them (as doth among young folk) the one to cast the mind to the other. And after many lets<sup>3</sup> (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<sup>4</sup> it is somewhat sought unto and visited with folk's 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 afore)."

"No force,<sup>5</sup> 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 deadman."

## NOTES

(1) **St. Stephen's church** was located near the Stocks Market (a few lanes above the Steelyard on Thames River) in Walbrook Ward, near the site where More lived with his first wife, Jane (Colt), from 1505 until 1511, then with his second wife, Alice (Middleton), a widow seven years his senior whom he married one month after Jane's death. In 1523 he moved to the large manor (he had become quite wealthy by then). It was here in Walbrook at More's home that his friend Erasmus wrote in 1509 his *Moriae Encomium* while suffering from lumbago. The More family, along with their friends, the Leighs (to whose daughter, More dedicated a copy of his translation of *The Life of Pico* as a New Year's gift), worshipped at St. Stephens. The church was rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren after the disastrous fire of 1666.

(2) **Chelsea** is a borough in *present-day* London due west of Westminster on the river Thames. More purchased in 1520 a house and again in 1524 a garden and farm on the site that is now probably Danvers Street. The home included eventually a separate library, gallery and chapel. More entertained lavishly here his close friends and relatives, printers, playwrights and painters, such as the Rastells, the Heywoods, and Hans Holbein; and even on occasion, King Henry VIII. While Lord Chancellor (1529-1532) he also kept in house arrest certain indicted heretics, and examined them there for weeks at a time (see No. 85).

## 97. "Evil Days in London"

[From *The Apology of Sir Thomas More Knight* ; Works, pp. 920a-921a]

[ *IN MARGIN* : **Evil May Day** ]

I remember many times that even here in London, after the great business that was there on a May Day in the morning by a rising made against strangers, for which, divers of the prentices and journeymen suffered execution of treason, by an old statue made long before against all such as would violate the King's safe conduct.

I was appointed among others to search and inquire by diligent examination in what wise and by what persons that privy confederacy began. And in good faith after great time taken and much diligence used therein, we perfitly tried out at last that all that business of any rising to be made for the matter began only by the conspiracy of two young lads that were prentices in Cheap; which after the thing devised first and compassed between them twain, perused 'privily the journeymen first and after the prentices of many of the mean crafts in the city, bearing the first that they spake with in hand that they had secretly spoken with many other occupations already, and that they were all agreed thereunto; and that, besides them, there were two or three hundred of serving men of divers Lords' houses, and some of the King's too, which would not be named nor known, that would yet in the night be at hand and, when they were once up, would not fail to fall in with them and take their part.

Now this ungracious invention and these words of those two lewd lads (which yet in the business fled away themselves and never came again after) did put some other by their oversight and lightness in such a courage and boldness that they weened themselves able to avenge their displeasure in the night, and after, either never to be known or to be strong enough to bear it out and go further. (And the like ungracious policy devise now these heretics that call themselves evangelical brethren, some potheaded postles ' they have that wander about the realm into sundry shires of whom every one hath in every shire a divers name and some, peradventure, in corners here and there they bring into the brotherhood. But whether they get any or none, they let not to lie when they come home and say that more than half of every shire is of their own sect. And the same boast Bayfield, the Apostate, ' which was after burned in Smithfield, made unto mine own self. But blessed be [to] God when he came to the fire, he found none very ready to pull him from it!).

Howbeit there was in one place of the diocese of London but late a company that, by such means each encouraging other, took such heart and boldness, and openly by day they assembled themselves together to the number of an hundred or above to rescue a well-known open heretic out of the Ordinary's hands. Howbeit, as many as they were, they sped not, and some of them [were] punished after.

And in the same diocese also when there was a priest taken for heresy and in the Commissary's hands, word was brought him that except he delivered the priest and let him go, he should within two hours have two or three hundred come fet him that would pluck down his house or burn it over his head. Whereupon the Commissary, worse afraid than hurt, delivered out the priest, whom if he had kept still there would peradventure for all the cracks ' not one heretic of them all have been so bold to come fet him. But yet that could I not well have warranted " him.

And in some place of the same diocese also they have made a great face and said that though the King sent his commission under his great seal, therefore they would not suffer a sore suspected priest of theirs for heresy to be taken thence. Howbeit, when that after I sealed a commission and sent it upon the assay, " it made their hearts—God be thank!—faint, and were so well come down that they laid all the weight " to a few lewd fellows and women in the town.

NOTES

(1) **May Day** : Having smoldered angrily for many years for what they felt was excessive influence and monetary success by alien competitors, and then suddenly urged on to riot by haranguing ringleaders, about a thousand young workers, clerics, even some women, congregated in Cheapside about midnight on the eve of the first of May, 1517. It was in defiance of the recently appointed Lord Chancellor Wolsey's orders for all men to remain indoors on May-Day morning, there having been rumors of an imminent uprising. The crowd worked themselves up to a frenzy, cried havoc, and stormed the streets of London, throwing stones and sacking foreigners' homes, threatening the lives of the mayor, the aldermen and even of Cardinal Wolsey, who promptly shored up his London palace with an armed guard. But three hours later the mob was dispersed and no foreigner was killed. The following day hundreds of rioters were imprisoned and thirteen ringleaders were hanged, drawn and quartered, their bloodied parts stuck on poles in various parts of the City in grim mockery of the workers' festive May-poles. More's own account of the riot notes simply that he was appointed to examine the causes of the riot, and his findings are given in the passage quoted. John Stowe gives a brief factual account of the event ( *The Annals of England* [1592], pp. 847-848). Stowe's contemporaries romanticized More's part in the quelling of the mob in the play, *Sir Thomas More* , which Shakespeare and others wrote.

Although the play departs from historical fact, Wegemer (p. 60) believes that "Shakespeare presents faithfully those qualities for which More was best known—his quick wit, his commitment to justice, his unquestioned integrity, his compassion for others, and his deep understanding of the human heart."

But the play does not consider the basic reasons for the worker's discontent, which had been growing for many years. As early as the reign of Richard III aliens were by law required to be treated amicably by the citizens of London, which law suggests that some discontent was already brewing. The *Patent Rolls* for the period 1485-1509 reveal that an ever-increasing number of foreign artisans and others were pouring into England. Naturalization privileges were granted to Wynkyn de Worde, John Baptist (nephew of Pope Innocent VIII), John Baptiste Maffea, "clerk, Italian," William Roy and numerous others. The Hanseatic League maintained a foreign conclave at the Steelyard (or Still-yard) which later provided a comparatively safe central point for the dissemination of Lutheran books in England. More uses the incident of the May-Day workers' riot to illustrate the spreading disease of heresy, associating the leaders of the 1517 riot with the later "evangelical brethren" and "potheaded postles," that is, Protestant followers of Tyndale and Luther. (Luther's *95 Theses* were issued in October of 1517, and Tyndale's *New Testament* reached England in 1525). Although More was Judge in the Court of Requests as well as a temporary member of Privy Council in 1517, he presumably did not attempt to understand, much less to sympathize with, the cause of the disgruntled artisans of London, and we can presume that he was not then chagrined on seeing the mutilated remains of their leaders anymore than he was later unhappy to see the "Apostate" Richard Bayfield burning with excruciating pain in the flames at Smithfield: "blessed be [to] God," More cries, "when he [Bayfield] came to the fire--he found none very ready to pull him from it!" ( *Works* , p. 920).

See Marius (pp. 193-198) for a fuller discussion of the riot, based on Edward Hall's [or Halle's] sixteenth-century account. More's "Apology" shows only contempt for the rioters and "heretics,"

he notes, and considers that, quite rightly, the play of *Sir Thomas More*, in which Shakespeare had a hand, is "of no historical value."

(2) **Cheap** : I.e., Cheapside, the great market place along West Cheap Street between Paternoster Row (at St. Paul's Cathedral) and the Stocks Market (near Milk Street and Bucklersbury), the site of some public executions, including that of the Duke of Buckingham in 1483. It was close to More's first home near St. Stephen's church.

(3) **Bayfield** : The "Apostate " Richard Bayfield, once a Benedictine monk, was accused of heresy, but escaped overseas. He returned with Lutheran books, was arrested and examined. He abjured, but then later relapsed and was ultimately sentenced and burned, November 1531. Butterworth and Chester claim that "it is practically certain that Bayfield's arrest resulted from information which Sir Thomas More succeeded in extracting from George Constantine" (see No. 85).

(4) An **Ordinary** is a judge in his own right, representing the bishop usually, though often he was the bishop himself. The **Commissary** was a deputy officer who had power of arrest, acting on behalf of the bishop, especially during the bishop's absence.

## 98. "Sir Thomas More and the Oath of Obedience"

[From *Letter to Margaret Roper* (ca. 17 Apr., 1534); Works, pp. 1428b-1429b]

When I was before the Lords at Lambeth I was the first that was called in, albeit that Master Doctor the Vicar of Croydon was come before me, and divers others. After the cause of my sending for declared unto me (whereof I somewhat marvelled in my mind, considering that they sent for no more temporal men but me), I desired the sight of the Oath, which they shewed me under the great seal. Then desired I the sight of the Act of the Succession, which was delivered me in a printed roll. After which read secretly <sup>ⁱ</sup>by myself, and the Oath considered with the Act, I shewed unto them that my purpose was not to put any fault either in the Act or any man that made it, or in the Oath or any man that swore it, nor to condemn the conscience of any other man. But as for myself, in good faith my conscience so moved me in the matter that, though I would not deny to swear to the Succession, yet unto that Oath that there was offered me I could not swear without the imbarding <sup>ⁱ</sup>of my soul to perpetual damnation. And that, if they doubted whether I did refuse the Oath only for the grudge of my conscience, or for any other fantasy, I was ready therein to satisfy them by mine oath. Which if they trusted not, what should they be that better to give me any Oath? And if they trusted that I would therein swear true, then trusted I that of their goodness they would not move me to swear the Oath that they offered me, perceiving that for to swear it was against my conscience.

Unto this my Lord Chancellor said that they all were very sorry to hear me say thus and see me thus refuse the Oath. And they said all that on their faith I was the very first that ever refused it, which would cause the King's Highness to conceive great suspicion of me and great indignation toward me. And therewith they shewed me the roll and let me see the names of the Lords and the Commons which had sworn and subscribed their names already. Which, notwithstanding, when

they saw that I refused to swear the same myself, not blaming any other man that had sworn, I was in conclusion commanded to go down into the garden. And thereupon I tarried in the old burned chamber that looketh into the garden and would not go down because of the heat.

In that time saw I Master Doctor Latimer come into the garden and there walked he with divers other doctors and chaplains of my Lord of Canterbury. And very merry I saw him, for he laughed and took one or twain about the neck so handsomely that, if they had been women, I would have went he had been waxen wanton. After that came Master Doctor Wilson forth from the Lords and was with two gentlemen brought by me and gentlemanly sent straight unto the Tower. What time my Lord of Rochester was called in before them, that can I not tell. But at night I heard that he had been before them, but where he remained that night and so forth till he was sent hither, I never heard. I heard also that Master Vicar of Croydon and all the remnant of the priests of London that were sent for, were sworn. And that they had such favor at the Council's hand that they were not lingered <sup>15</sup> nor made to dance any long attendance to their travail and cost (as suitors were sometimes wont to be) but were sped apace to their great comfort: so far forth that Master Vicar of Croydon, either for gladness or for drinks (or else that it might be seen *Quod ille notus erat pontifici*) went to my Lord's buttery-bar and called for drink; and drank *valde familiariter* <sup>16</sup>.

When they had played their pageant <sup>17</sup> and were gone out of the place, then was I called in again. And then was it declared unto me what a number had sworn, even since I went aside, gladly, without any sticking. <sup>18</sup> Wherein I laid no blame in no man but for mine own self answered as before. Now as well before as then, they somewhat laid unto me for obstinancy that, whereas before, sith I refused to swear, I would not declare any special part of that Oath that grudged my conscience and open the cause wherefore.

For thereunto I had said unto them that I feared lest the King's Highness would (as they said) take displeasure enough toward me for the only refusal of the Oath. And that if I should open and disclose the causes why I should therewith but further exasperate his Highness (which I would in no wise do), but rather would I abide all the danger and harm that might come toward me than give his Highness any occasion of further displeasure than the offering of the Oath unto me of pure necessity constrained me. Howbeit, when they divers times imputed this to me for stubbornness and obstinancy that I would neither swear the Oath nor yet declare the causes why I declined thus far toward them, that rather than I would be accounted for obstinancy I would upon the King's gracious licence or rather his such commandment had, as might be my sufficient warrant that my declaration should not offend his Highness nor put me in the danger of any of his Statutes, I would be content to declare the causes in writing and over that to give an oath in the beginning that if I might find those causes by any man in such wise answered as I might think mine own conscience satisfied, I would after that with all mine heart swear the principal Oath, too. To this I was answered that though the King would give me licence under his Letters Patent, yet would it not serve against the Statute. Whereto I said that yet if I had them I would stand unto the trust of his Honor at my peril for the remnant. But yet thinketh me, lo, that if I may not declare the causes without peril, then to leave them undeclared is no obstinancy.

NOTES

(1) More was first cited to appear before the Commissioners at Lambeth Palace on April 12, 1534 to swear to the succession and take the oath, as required by the Act of Succession (March 1534) 25<sup>o</sup> Hen. VIII, c.22 [ *Statutes of the Realm* , London, 1817, repr. 1963, vol. III, pp. 471-4]). This act fixed the succession on the offspring of King Henry and his queen, Anne Boleyn; and all subjects could be compelled "to make a corporal oath" to observe and maintain "the whole effects and contents" of this act. Sir Thomas More recognized the right of the King and Parliament to fix the succession, and he was willing to swear to the succession, but he could not take the Oath as offered him. He was adamant, and he spent four days in the custody of the Abbot of Westminster without changing his mind. Committed to the Tower of London, he refused even to say precisely why he would not swear the Oath. In June 1535 More was examined again by Council, then brought to trial at Westminster Hall. Sir Richard Rich, Solicitor-general, perjured himself by testifying falsely that in the Tower on June 12 More had said that, though a King could be made by Parliament and by Parliament deposed, it was not so with the Head of the Church.

(2) **Vicar of Croydon** : Roland Philips, a notable preacher of Croydon in Surrey, was possibly the Professor of Divinity who said he would be glad to be missionary Bishop for More's Utopia (Chambers, p. 125). More had written: "...there's a very pious theologian who's desperately keen to visit Utopia, not in a spirit of idle curiosity, but so that he can foster the growth of Christianity...[and] he had decided to get himself sent out there by the Pope, and actually created Bishop of Utopia" (trans., Turner, p. 31).

(3) **Doctor Hugh Latimer** , Protestant divine, had preached before King Henry at Windsor in 1530 but was accused of heresy two years later. He was absolved, however, and made Bishop of Worcester in 1535, though not before having been examined and held in the Tower. Under King Edward VI he thrived, and his sermons were exceedingly popular, filled with anecdotes and tales much in the manner of More's polemical dialogues, and one at least borrowed from More. Some of his stories, like many of More's, were of an autobiographical nature. In his 4th Sermon (preached March 29, 1549) he recalls twice in the sermon having been sent to the Tower; and in a sermon preached November 9, 1550, Latimer tells a lurid story of his having been examined before five or six bishops and accused of heresy. He describes the room he sat in, the subtle questioning by a former friend, and then, oddly, of being told "to speak louder." To his astonishment he discovered that he was secretly being overheard and his remarks recorded. Latimer saw "one writing in the chimney behind the cloth" ( *Sermons* , ca. 1550, p. 256). (No doubt More's words were also being secretly recorded behind the arras during the commissioners' investigation of him; unfortunately no such record was put forth to disprove Sir Richard Rich's false testimony.) Latimer's luck ultimately ran out, for he was burnt alive at Oxford as a heretic in 1555 during Catholic Queen Mary's purge of Cambridge University Protestants, which included also Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and Bishop Nicholas Ridley.

(4) **Dr. Nicholas Wilson** , a Roman Catholic divine and a good friend of Sir Thomas More, was chaplain and confessor to Henry VIII before 1527, but he opposed Henry in the question of the divorce and was imprisoned for refusing to take the Oath relative to the Act of Succession. However, he was released from the Tower in April 1534, and he later decided to take the Oath.

(5) **John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester** , was born in 1469 and lived under numerous monarchs

during England's most critical periods, including the Civil Wars between the Yorkists and Lancastrians, the alleged despotism of Richard III, and the separation of the English Church and state from Catholic faith and Papal supremacy. He can be considered, in T.S. Eliot's term, the "objective correlative" of England's fascinating kaleidoscopic transition from late medieval to early renaissance. Scholarly, benign and energetic, Fisher helped bring the brilliant Erasmus to Cambridge and helped found two colleges at that University. In 1504 he was made Chancellor of Cambridge and Bishop of Rochester. During his long career he counselled Henry frequently and opposed Protestants vigorously, but he defended Queen Catherine in the divorce case and, unlike More, grew increasingly bold and blunt in his support of her; in fact, in 1533 he even appealed secretly to the Emperor Charles V to use force against King Henry (*Letters and Papers*, VI, 1164, 1249). Refusing to swear to the Act of Succession, he was committed to the Tower and, at the age of 76, and shortly after Pope Paul II had made him Cardinal, he was beheaded June 22, 1535, two weeks before his good friend, Sir Thomas More. Like More, John Fisher was canonized by Pope Pius XI in 1935.

(6) **Quod...pontifici** : i.e., "That he was well known to the High Priest": an allusion to *John* 18: 13-24, in which passage John describes how Caiaphas, the High Priest, questioned Jesus and some disciples, one of whom was acquainted with Caiaphas. Jesus refused to make a specific answer, and he was slapped in the face.

### **99. "The Court of 'Pie-Sir-William-Pounder' at Bartholomew Fair"**

[From *Letter from Margaret Roper to Alice Alington*; Works, pp. 1437b-1438b]

"And some may be, peradventure, of the mind that, if they say one thing and think the while the contrary, God more regardeth their heart than their tongue, and that therefore their oath goeth upon that they think, and not upon that they say, as a woman reasoned once (I trow, daughter, you were by). But in good faith, Margaret, I can use no such ways in so great a matter. But like as if mine own conscience served me, I would not let to do it though other men refused so, though others refuse it not, I dare not do it, mine own conscience standing against it.

"If I had (as I told you) looked but lightly for the matter I should have cause to fear. But now have I so looked for it and so long that I purpose at the least wise to have no less regard unto my soul than had once a poor honest man of the country, that was called Company."

And with this, he told me a tale, I ween I can scant tell it you again because it hangeth upon some terms and ceremonies of the law. But as far as I can call to mind my father's tale was this:

That there is a court belonging of course unto every fair to do justice in such things as happen with the same. This court hath a pretty fond name, but I cannot happen on it, but it beginneth with a "pie" and the remnant goeth much like the name of a knight that I have known, I wis, and I trow you, too (for he hath been at my father's oft ere this at such time as you were there), a meetly tall, black man; his name was Sir William Pounder. But, tut, let the name of the court go for this once or call it if ye will a "Court of Pie-Sir-William-Pounder." This was the matter, lo, that upon a time at such a court holden at Bartholomew Fair there was an escheator of London

that had arrested a man that was outlawed and had seized his goods that he had brought into the fair, tolling <sup>22</sup> him out of the fair by a train. <sup>23</sup> The man that was arrested and his goods seized was a northern man, which by his friends made the escheator within the fair to be arrested upon an action—I wot ner <sup>24</sup> what—and so was he brought before the judge of the "Court of Pie-Sir-William-Pounder." And at the last, the matter came to a certain ceremony to be tried by a quest <sup>25</sup> of twelve men, a jury as I remember they call it—or else a *per* jury. Now had the clothman by friendship of the officers found the means to have all the quest almost made of the northern men, such as had their booths there standing in the fair. Now was it come to the last day in the afternoon and the twelve men had heard both the parties and their council tell their tales at the bar and were from the bar had into a place to talk and common, <sup>26</sup> and agree upon their sentence. Nay, let me speak better in my terms yet. I trow the judge giveth the sentence and the quest's tale <sup>27</sup> is called a verdict. They were scant come in together but the northern men were agreed, and in effect all the others, too, to cast <sup>28</sup> our London escheator. They thought they needed no more to prove that he did wrong than even the name of his bare office alone!

But then was there among them, as the devil would, this honest man of another quarter, that was called Company. And because the fellow seemed but a fool and sat still and said nothing, they made no reckoning of him but said, "We be agreed now. Come let us give our verdict." Then, when the poor fellow saw that they made such haste and his mind nothing gave him that way that theirs did (if their minds gave them that way that they said), he prayed them to tarry and talk upon the matter and tell him such reason therein that he might think as they did. And when he so should do, he would be glad to say with them, or else he said they must pardon him. For sith he had a soul of his own to keep (as they had), he must say as he thought for his, as they must for theirs.

When they heard this, they were half angry with him. "What, good fellow," quoth one of the northern men, "whare wonnes thou? <sup>29</sup> Be not we aleven here and thou ne but een la alene, and all we agreed? Whereto shouldest thou stick? <sup>30</sup> What is thy name, gude fellow?" "Masters," quoth he, "my name is called Company." "Company," quoth they, "now by thy troth, gude fellow, play then the gude companion; come thereon forth with us, and pass even for gude company." "Would God, good masters," quoth the man again, "that there lay no more weight thereon. But now when we shall hence and come before God, and that He shall send you to heaven for doing according to your conscience, and me to the devil for doing against mine, in passing at your request here for good company now, by God, master Dickonson"—that was one of the northern men's names—"if I shall then say to all you again, 'Masters, I went once for good company with you, which is the cause that I go now to hell. Play you the good fellows now again with me, as I went then for good company with you, so some of you go now for good company with me.' Would ye go, master Dickonson? Nay, nay, by Our Lady, nor never one of you all. And, therefore, must ye pardon me from passing as you pass, but if I thought in the matter as you do I dare not in such a matter pass for good company. For the passage of my poor soul passeth all good company."

And when my father had told me this tale, then said he further thus:

"I pray thee now, good Margaret, tell me this: wouldest thou wish thy poor father (being at the leastwise somewhat learned) less to regard the peril of his soul than did there that honest

unlearned man? I meddle not (you wot well) with the conscience of any man that hath sworn. Nor I take not upon me to be their judge. But now if they do well and their conscience grudge them not, if I with my conscience to the contrary should for good company pass on with them and swear as they do, when all our souls hereafter shall pass out of this world and stand in judgment at the bar before the High Judge, if He judge them to heaven and me to the devil because I did as they did, not thinking as they thought; if I should then say (as the good man Company said), 'Mine old good Lords and friends'—naming such a Lord and such, yea, and some bishops, peradventure, of such as I love best—I swore because you swore and went that way that you went. Do likewise for me now; let me not go alone. If there be any good fellowship with you, some of you come with me.'

"By my troth, Margaret, I may say to thee in secret council, here between us twain—but let it go no further, I beseech thee heartily—I find the friendship of this wretched world so fickle that for anything that I could treat or pray that would for good fellowship go to the devil with me, among them all I ween should I not find one. And then, by God, Margaret, if you think so too, best it is, I suppose, that for any respect of them, all were they twice as many more as they be, I have myself a respect to mine own soul!"

#### NOTES

(1) **Company** : For interesting analyses of this honest man of the country, see Louis L. Martz (CW 12, pp. lxiii-lxv), and (with two Aesopic fables, Wegemer, pp. 173-178).

(2) In this selection Sir Thomas More is being quoted by his daughter, Margaret, in a letter written by her to Alice Alington, More's second wife's daughter by a previous marriage. (See No. 14, n.4).

(3) **Sir William Pounder's** identity is not known, but Elizabeth F. Rogers asks if this Pounder is "the one accused of theft in a letter of the Earl of Arundel to Wolsey, 4 May 1521" (E.F. Rogers, p. 521, n. 278). A grant recorded June 1522, provides a pardon for "Sir William Pounder of Grantham, Lincolnshire and of London." Margaret alludes to the **Court of Pie-Poudres**, a Court of Record set up at every market for quick justice in civil disputes. John Stowe (*A Survey of London* [1598]), notes that this court was held "daily during the [Bartholomew tide] fair holden for debts and contracts," (ed., W.J. Thoms, p. 141). Ben Jonson makes appropriate use of its name in his play, *Bartholomew Fair* (II.i). The name is derived ultimately from French, "pied puldreaux," "dusty foot," i.e. a pedlar.

(4) **Escheator** : i.e., an officer of the Lord Treasurer who certifies property falling by escheat (i.e., without inheritor) to the King, etc. Here More makes a homonymic pun on "cheater."

<sup>1</sup> Aware, watchful

<sup>2</sup> *Quick and quething* : alive and talking

<sup>3</sup> Hindrances

<sup>4</sup> *Saint Stephen's day* : i.e., December 26

<sup>5</sup> *No force* : no matter

<sup>6</sup> Examined, one by one

- <sup>7</sup> *Pothheaded postles* : stupid apostles
- <sup>8</sup> One who renounces his faith
- <sup>9</sup> Boasts
- <sup>10</sup> Guaranteed security (for)
- <sup>11</sup> *Upon the assay* ; i.e., ? at the commencement of the trial; for the purpose of a test or trial.
- <sup>12</sup> Blame
- <sup>13</sup> In retirement, privately
- <sup>14</sup> Jeopardizing
- <sup>15</sup> Kept waiting
- <sup>16</sup> *Valde familiariter* : in a very convivial way
- <sup>17</sup> *Played...pageant* : i.e., acted out their part
- <sup>18</sup> Hesitation
- <sup>19</sup> *Me*: i.e., Margaret Roper, More's daughter
- <sup>20</sup> Foolish
- <sup>21</sup> *You* : i.e., Dame Alice Alington
- <sup>22</sup> Enticing
- <sup>23</sup> Trickery, lure
- <sup>24</sup> *Wot ner* : know not
- <sup>25</sup> Inquest
- <sup>26</sup> Confer
- <sup>27</sup> Statement
- <sup>28</sup> Find guilty
- <sup>29</sup> *Whare wonnes thou?* : i.e., what is the matter with you?
- <sup>30</sup> Stand fast, i.e., be unwilling to go along