

Thomas More
A dyaloge . . . touching the pestylent
sect of Luther and Tyndale . . .
London
1529

A dyaloge of syr Thomas
More knyghte: one of the
counsayll of oure souerayne lorde the kyng
and chauncellour of hys duchy of Lan=
caster. Wherin be treated dyuers
matters, as of the veneration
and worshyp of ymages and
relyques, prayng to
sayntys, and goyng
on pylgrymage.
Wyth many othere
thyngys touching the
pestylent sect of Luther and
Tyndale, by the tone bygone in
Saxony, and by the tother
laboryd to be brought in
to England.

.....

<book 4, chapter 14>

119rb

. . . robbed, polluted, and pulled downe
many a goodly chyrch of Cryst.

And now wher they lay for a profe,
that god were not contented wyth batayl made
against infydelys, the losse and mynyshment of
crystendom synnys that guyse bygan, they fare
as dyd onys an olde sage father fole in
Kent at such tyme as dyuers men of wor
shyp assembled old folk of the cuntre to com=
mune and deuyse about the amendement of
Sandwich hauen. At which time as they
bygan fyrst to enserche by reason and by the re=
port of old men there about, what thing
had ben thoccasyon that so good an hauen was
in so few yerys so sore decayed, and suche
sandys rysen, and such shalow flattys made
therewyth, that ryght smal vessels had now
mych worke to come in at dyuers tydys,
where grete shyps were wythin few yeris
passed accustomed to ryde wythout dyffy=
cultie, And som layng the fawt to Good=
wyn sandys, sum to the landis Inned by dy=
uers owners in the Ile of Tenate oute
of the chanell, in which the se was wont
to cumpace the Isle and brynge the vessels
round about yt, whose course at the ebbe
was wont to scoure the hauen, whych
now the see excluded thense, for lacke
of such course and scouryng ys chouked
vp wyth sande, as they thus alledged
dyuers men dyuers causes, there starte
vp one good old father and sayd, ye may=
sters say euery man what he wyll, cha
marked this mater as wel as sum other,

and by god I wote how it waxed nought
well ynoughe. For I knew yt good, and
haue marked so chaue when it bygan to
wax wors. And what hath hurt it good
father quod these gentylnen? By my

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fayth maysters quod he yonder same ten=
terden stepell and nothyng ellys, that by
the masse sholde twere a fayre fyshepole.
Why hath the stepell hurt the hauen good
father quod they? Nay byr lady maysters
quod he ych can not tell you wel why, but
chote well yt hath. For by god I knew
yt a good hauen tyll the steple was byl=
ded. And by the Mary masse cha marked
yt well yt neuer throue synnys. And
thus wysely spake these holy Luthera=
nys, which sowing scysmes and sedycyons
among crysten people, lay the losse ther
of to the wythstandyng of the Turkes
inuasyon, and the resystynge of hys ma=
lyce, where they sholde rather yf they
had eny reason in theyr heddys, lay yt
to the contrary. . . .

r. cholde

r. speke

<This is, as far as I know, the first recorded version of the silly story about Tenterden steeple. (The passage is quoted by Lewis (1723, pp. 4–5); that is how I came across it.) As More tells the story here, the point of it is its absurdity. This old man insists on seeing a causal connection where no causal connection can possibly exist. (Lutherans, says More, are inclined to do the same.) The old man proves himself to be a figure of fun by swearing all the time, and by speaking in Kentish dialect (or in More's idea of Kentish dialect). If I understand him correctly, he says 'ych' for 'I', 'cha' or 'chaue' for 'I have', 'cholde' for 'I would', 'chote' for 'I wot, I know'. (Probably More expects us to join in the joke by mispronouncing 'f' as 'v' – 'a vair vishpool', vor example. Londoners found that hilarious.) The printed text uses many abbreviations, which I have silently expanded. More's spelling makes it hard enough to read, without letting other obstacles get in the way. – C.F. February 2011.>

<The same story is alluded to five years later, again as an example of fallacious reasoning, in a pamphlet (STC 23551.5) entitled *A litel treatise ageynste the mutteryng of some papistis in corners* (London, 1534): 'that is as wyse a sayenge and opinion, as this is of them that sey, . . . sens Tenterdyn steple was builded, Sandwiche hauen hath euer more decayed' (sig. B6r). (According to John Bale, the author was a man named Thomas Swinerton, who died, he says, in exile at Emden in 1554.) Already the story is mutating: now it is 'them that say', not just one daft old man. – C.F. May 2013.>