

The insurrection of the L. Cobham against the king judged by circumstance

Thus you see Maister Cope, or els maister Harpsfield, or whatsoeuer ye be, to gainstand a king, and with open force to encounter with him in his owne land, and in his owne chamber of London, where he is so sure and strong, what a matter of how great chauce it is, wherein so many and so great difficulties do lye, the attempt to dangerous, the chances so vncertaine, the furniture of so manie things required, that scarce in any kings daies heretofore, any peeres or nobles of the Realme, were they neuer so strongly assisted with power, wit, or counsaile, yet either were able, or els well durst euer enterpyse vpon the case so dangerous, notwithstanding were they neuer of themselves so far from all feare of God, and true obedience. And what we then thinke, or can we imagine (maister Cope) that Syr John Oldcastle, a man so well instructed in the knowledge of Gods word, beyng but a poore Knight by his degree, hauing none of all the peeres and nobles in all the world to ioyne with him, being prisoner in the Tower of London a litle before in the moneth of December, could now in the moneth of January, so suddenly, in such an hoast season of the yeare, start vpon an army of xx. thousand fighting men to invade the kyng, to kill two Dukes his brethren, to aduulce Chyristen sayth, to destroy Gods law, and to subuert holy Church: And why doth not he adde moreouer, to set also all London on fire, and to turne all England into a fishepoole? Belike these men which geue out these figmentes of Syr John Oldcastle, byd thinke him to be one of Deucalions stocke, who casting of stones ouer his shoulder, could by and by make men at his pleasure, or els that he had Adams teeth to sowe, to make so many harnesse men to start vpon at once.

But let vs consider yet further of these xx. thousand men so suddenly without wages, without vitall, or other provision congregated together, what they were, fro whence out of what quarter, countrey, or countreys they came. In an other kyngs dayes, whensoever any rebellio is against the king, moued by the commons, as when Jacke Straw and war Wyler of Kent, & Essex rose in the tyme of kyng Richard 2. when William Maudeuill of Abingdon, Jacke Cade of Kent, in the tyme of kyng Henry the 6. In the tyme of kyng Henry the 8. when the comotion was of rebels in Lyncolnshyre, then in Yorkeshyre. when in kyng Edward the 6. tyme Humfrey Arundell in Devonshyre, Captaine Baye in Northfolke made styre against kyng, the countrey & partes from whence these rebels did spring, were both noted and also diffamed. In this so trayterous comotion therfore let vs now learne, what me they were, and seem what countrey or countreys in all England they came. If they came out of any, let the Chronicklers declare what countreys they were. If they came out of none (as none is named) then let them come out of Outopia, where belike this figment was first forged, and inuented. Wherefore sayng neither the countreys from whence they came, nor yet the names of any of all these xx. doe appeare what they were either in Chronicle or in recozde, but remaine altogether vnknewen, I leaue it (gentle reader) to thy iudgement, to thinke therupon, as thy wisdom shall lead thee.

(D) It foloweth more in the foresaid preface: And to destroy all other maner of estates, of the same Realme of England, as well spirituall as temporall, &c. By y^e course of this preamble it appeareth, that the layd sir John Oldcastle, was a wonderful cruell tyrant and murderer, who being not yet satisfied with the blood of the king, nor of the two Dukes his brethren, would also make hauocke and swopestake, of all maner of estates in the Realme of England. What, & leaue no maner of estate aliue? No, neither Lord spirituall nor temporall, but altogether should be destroyed. And what had all these estates done, thus so miserably to be destroyed? Although percase the mode of this man might haue bene incensed & kindled against the king, and the Lords spirituall, by whom he had bene condemned, as is aforesaid: yet why should all other maner of other estates both spirituall and temporall be killed? If none of all the estates in England, neither Duke, Earle, Baron, Lord, Knight or other gentleman had bene his friend, but all his enemies, how then is it like, that he hauing all the estates, peeres, nobles, and gentlemen of the Realme against him, and none to stand with him, either could or durst attempt any commotio against the whole power of the land, he being but one gentleman onely with sir Roger Acton, and maister Bawone left alone? At least, good reas^o yet would, that those hundred Knights should haue bin spared out of this bloody slaughter, whom he offered to produce vnto the king before, for his purgation, page. 159. And finally, if this was his purpose that all these estates both spirituall & temporall should haue bin cut down, what needed then

that he should haue made himselfe a Regent, when hee might as well haue made himselfe a king, or what else he would, being left then alone?

(E) The preamble as it began with vnt^ruth, and continued in the same figure, heaping one vnt^ruth vpon another: so now enderth with another misreport as vnt^rue as the rest, shewing & declaring, the intent of sir John Oldcastle was also to destroy all maner of policie, & finally the lawes of y^e land, &c. We read of William Loquerer, otherwise named William Bassard: who being a puissant Duke in his countrey, wher that the crown of England was adotted to him, and he coming ouer with all his peeres, nobles, & barons of his whole land, into this Realme, & had with great difficultie obteined victorie against king Harold: yet to alter and destroy the policie and the lawes of the land: it passed his power. Insomuch that it had not bin permitted vnto him to haue proceeded so far as he did, vntill he had first swoorne to the nobles of this lande, to retaine still the lawes of King Edward, as he found them. And albeit he afterward forswore himselfe, breaking his othe in altering and changing many of the foresaid lawes, yet wild he, mild he, could not so destroy them all (for the which much war and great commotio endured long after in the Realme) but that he was constrained and also contented to allow and admit a great part of the said lawes of king Edward, page. 167. And if he being king and Conquerour with all his strength of Normans and Englishmen about him, was too weake and insufficient to destroy all maner of policie, and lawes of this land, which he had conquered: how much lesse then is it to be supposed, that Sir John Oldcastle being put a priuate subiect, and a poore Knight, and a condemned prisoner, destitute and forsaken of all Lords, Earles, and Barons, who to saue his owne life, had more to do, than he could well compasse, would either take in hand, or conceiue in his head any such exploit, after the subuersion of Chyristian faith, and law of God, after the slaughter of the king, and of all maner of estates, as well spirituall as temporall, in the Realme of England, after the desolation of holy Church, to destroy also all maner of policie, and finally the lawes of the land: which monstrous and incredible figment, how true it may seeme to M^r. Cope, or to some other late Chronicklers of the like credulitie, I can not tell: Certaine to me, and as I thinke to all indifferent readers it appeareth as true, as is the Verke of the Satyre, wherewith it may well be compared.

Nil intra est oleam, nil extra est in nuce duri.

But heere will be sayd again perhaps, that the matter of such preambles and prefaces being but pursuantes of statutes, and containing but words of course, to aggruuate, and to geue a shew of a thing, which they would to seeme more odible to the people, is not so precisely to be scanned or exquisitely to be stand vpon, as for the ground of a necessary case of trowth.

This is it (M^r. Cope) that I saide before, and now doe well grant & admit the same, that such preambles or foresaces lynced with a non sequitur, containyng in them matter but of surmise, and wordes of course (and rather monsters out of course) and many tymes rising vpon false informatio, are not alwayes in themselves materiall, or necessary probatio in all pointes to be followed: as appeareth both by this statute, & also by the statute of this kynges father, an. 2. Henr. 4. chap. 15. beginnyng Excellentissimo. &c. And yet notwithstanding out of these same preambles, & foresfrontes of statutes, & other inditementes, which commonly rising vpon matter of informatio, runne onely vpon wordes of course of office, and not vpon simple truth, a great part of our Chronicklers do othe take their matter, which they insert into their stories, hauyng no respect or examination of circumstances to be compared, but onely following bare rumours, or els such wordes as they see in such falsyng prefaces, or inditementes expressed. Whereby it cometh so to passe, that the younger Chronickler following the elder, as the blind leadyng the blind, both together fall into the pit of error. And you also (maister Cope) following the steppes of the same, do seeme likewise to erre together with them, for good felowshyp. And thus concerning the face of this statute hether to sufficiently.

Now let vs consider and discusse in like maner, first the coherence, then the particular contentes of the said statute. As touchyng the which coherence, if it be well examined, a man shall finde almost a Chimera of it. In which neither the head accordeth with the body, nor yet the branches of the statute well agree with themselves. Wherein he that was the drauer, or first inuenter thereof, seemeth to haue forgot his Verke and art Poeticall.

Atque ita mentitur, sic veris falsa remiscet, Primum ne medio, medium ne discrepet imo.

A rebellion to be of 20. thousand, and yet no countrey to be known from whence they came, it is not like.

Neuer was any rebellio of commons in England but the speciall countrey from whence they came was noted and knowen.

(D) Another false reporte of sir John Oldcastle that he intended to kill all maner of estates in the realme.

An hard matter to destroy all policie and lawes of a la. d.

Obiection.

Aunswere.

Ex originali statuti Hen. 4. cap. 15. The reason and cause, how chronicklers oft times be deceived.

Alanus Copus deceived by his chronicklers.

Horat. art. Poet.