

[ENGLAND]

[Proposal of Sir Richard Gresham, Lord Mayor of London, to King Henry 8, to take over unused monastic hospitals (1538)]

[1] Most redowted, puyasant, and noble prynce; my most dradd, beloved, and naturall sovraigne Lorde;

I, your pore, humble, and most obedient servaunt, dailly consideryng, and ever more and more perceyvyng by your vertuus begynnyngs, and charitable procedyngs in all your cawses, your persone and majestie Royall to be the elected and chosen vessell of God; by whome not ononly the very and true worde of God is, and shal be sett forthe, and accordyng to the trewghth and verytie of the same,—but also to be he, whom God hath constituted and ordeyned bothe to redresse and reforme all crymes, offences, and enormities, beyng repugnant to his doctryne, or to the detryment of the comon welthe and hurt of the pore people, beyng your naturall subjects; and forder, to forsee and vigilantly to provyde for the charitable reformacion of the same,—

whyche thyng hath, and yet dothe encorage me, and also my bounden dewtie obligethe me, (in especiall beyng most unworthy your Levetenaunt and Mayer of your Cytie Royall of London,) to enforme and advertise your most gracious highnes of one thyng in especiall, for the ayde and comferte of the pore, sykk, blynde, aged, and impotent persons beyng not able to helpe theymselffes, nor havyng no place certen where they may be refreshed or lodged at, tyll they be holpen and cured of their diseases and syknes.

So it is, most gracious Lorde, that nere, and withyn the Cytie of London, be iij Hospytalls, or Spytells, commonly called seynt Maryes spytell, [2] seynt Barthilmewes spytell, and seynt Thomas spytell; and the new abbey of Tower-Hyll, [3] founded of good devocion by auncient Faders, and endowed with great possessions and rents, onely for the releffe, comferte, and helpyng of the pore and impotent people, not beyng able to helpe theymselffes; and not to the mayntenaunce of Chanons, Preests, and Monks, to lyve in pleasure, nothyng regardyng the miserable people liyng in every strete, offendyng every clene person

passyng by the way, with theyre fylthy and nasty savours.

Wherefore may it please your marcifull goodness, (enclyned to pytie and compassion,) for the releffe of Crysts very images, created to his own similitude, to order by your high autoritie, as supreme hed of this Chyrche of England, or otherwise by your sage discrecion, that your Mayer of your Cytie of London, and his brethern the aldermen for the time beyng, shall and may from henssforthe have the order, disposicion, rule, and governaunce, bothe of all the lands, tenements, and renewes apperteynyng and belongyng to the said Hospitalls, or any of theym; and of the ministers which be, or shalbe withyn any of them.

And then your Grace shall facilie perceyve, that where now a small nombre of Chanons, Preests, and Monkes be founde, for theyr own profitt onely, and not for the common utilitie of the Realme; a great nombre of pore, nedy, sykke, and indigent persones shalbe refreshed, maynteyned, and comforted, and also healed and cured of their infirmities, frankly and freely, by Physicions, Surgeons, and Potycaries, which shall have stipende and salarie onely for that purpose: so that all impotent persons not hable to labour, shalbe releved; and all sturdy beggars not wylling to labour shalbe punyshed.

For the whiche doyng, your Grace shall not alonely merit highly towarde God, but shew your selffe to be more charitable to the pore than your noble progenitor King Edgar, foundour of so many Monasteryes: or Kyng Henry the Thyrd, renewer of Westminster: or King Edward the Thyrd, founder of the new Abbey: or Kyng Henry the Fyfte founder of Syon and Shene; but also shall have the name of conservatour, protectour, and defendour of the pore people, with their conynuall prayer for your helthe, welthe, and prosperitie long to endure.

Your humble and most obedyent servant,

RYCHARD GRESHAM. [4]

[1] [*The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Gresham* by John William Burgon, London: Jennings, 1839, vol 1 pp 26-29; citing Cotton MS Cleopatra E iv f. 222. To be researched at the British Library.

[2] Now called Bethlehem Hospital.—*Stowe's Survey*, ed. 1720, b. i. p. 192.

[3] This was the Abbey of St. Clare, called the Minorics.—*Ibid.* b. ii. p. 14.

[4] Cott. MS. Cleop. E. iv. f. 222.