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# The St. Nicholas Series

EDITED BY THE REV. DOM BEDE CAMM, O.S.B.

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## THE STORY OF BLESSED THOMAS MORE



**Nihil Obstat.**

**D. BEDA CAMM**

*Censor Deputatus*

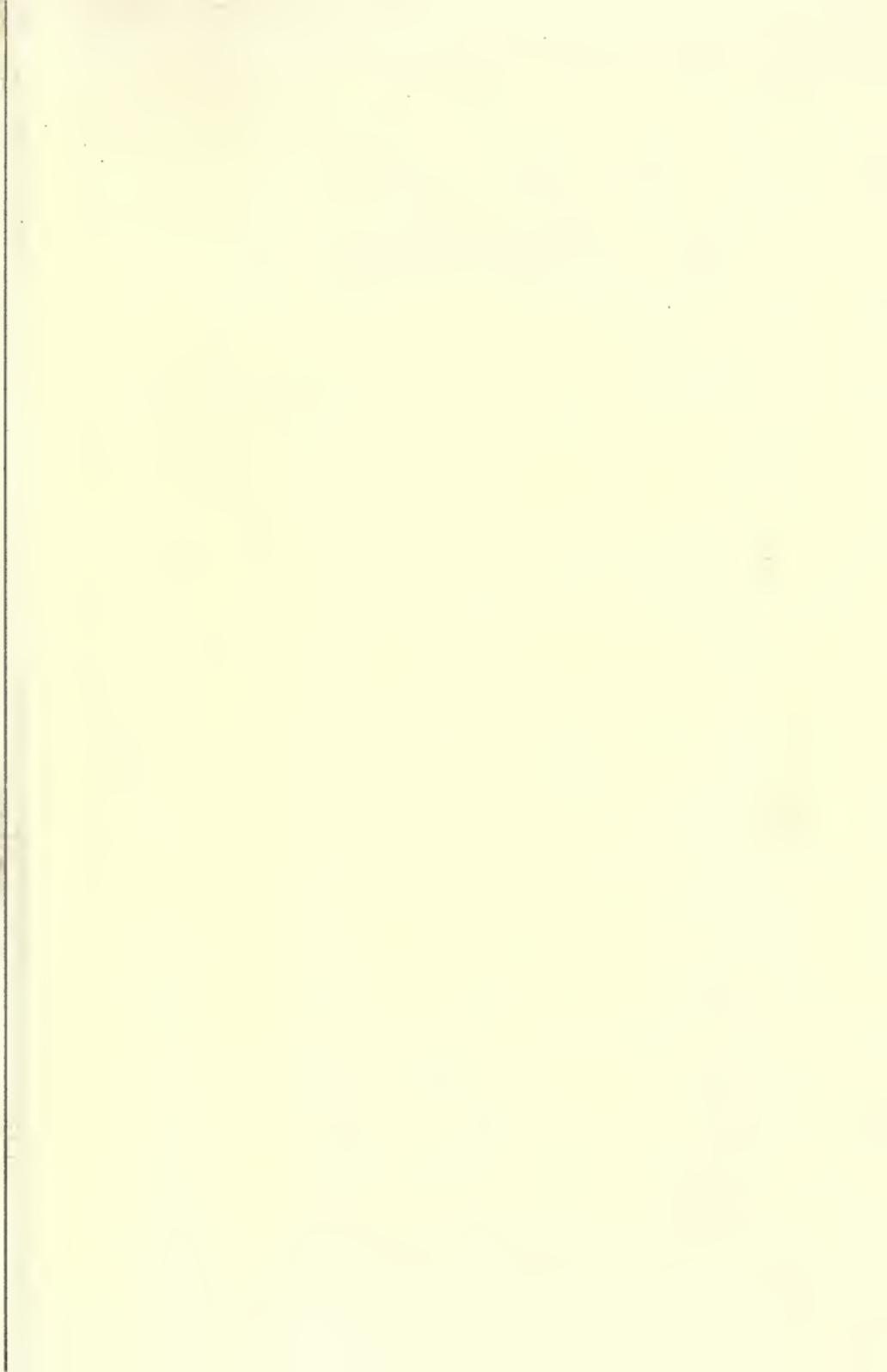
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Blessed Thomas More.

THE STORY OF  
BLESSED THOMAS MORE

BY

A NUN OF TYBURN CONVENT

WITH A PREFACE BY DOM BEDE  
CAMM, O.S.B.



LONDON

MACDONALD AND EVANS

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EDITED BY THE REV. DOM BEDE CAMM, O.S.B.

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## PREFACE

**T**HIS story of the life and sufferings of one of the noblest and blithest of Christ's martyrs has been written for young readers by a member of the Community of Tyburn Convent.

It seems specially fitting that one who has devoted herself to a life of prayer and reparation upon the blood-stained soil of Tyburn, should be chosen to write of a martyr who so earnestly longed to die there, and was indeed condemned to suffer there, though finally he was spared its horrors. The writer, who comes of a stock famous in literature, has herself worked for some years in the world with her pen. That pen is now devoted to the glory of God and His martyrs.

Although there is nothing new to say of Blessed Thomas More, his story is always fresh, always inspiring. We cannot possibly hear too much of him. The writer has

## PREFACE

sought, very successfully, as it seems to me, to make the story interesting to young readers. She has therefore avoided, as far as possible, dry details of history, and has set the living man before us in the intimacy of his domestic circle. As far as possible, she has wisely left him to speak for himself. Similarly, the artists who have illustrated the story have sought first to show what manner of man the martyr was—"what he was like," as the children say—and then to give some of the more striking episodes of his life with befitting dignity and simplicity. The reader will be grateful to them, as I myself am.

When Sir Thomas More and his companions were raised to the honours of beatification by Pope Leo XIII, in 1887, *Punch* wittily observed, that "though there are many Saints in the Calendar, no Englishman will object to *More!*" And it is certain that though that blessed martyr is already a household word among English-speaking Catholics, no one will object to hearing more about More.

In conclusion, let me express the hope

## PREFACE

that all who are fortunate enough to read the Life Story of this most noble Englishman and Blessed Martyr of our Holy Faith may be inspired to live, as he lived, impervious to the allurements of the world and fearless in allegiance to the Truth.

DOM BEDE CANN, O.S.B.

ERDINGTON ABBEY,  
BIRMINGHAM.

*Feast of the Epiphany, 1908.*



# THE STORY OF BLESSED THOMAS MORE

## CHAPTER I

### CHILDHOOD

“ In play is all my mind,  
To cast a coit, a cokstele and a ball,  
A top can I set, and drive it in its kind.” . . .

*Pageant of Youth.*

**B**LESSED THOMAS MORE'S saying that “ a man may live for the next world but be merry withal ” was the keynote of the life of the scholar, statesman, and martyr, who kept his child's heart and simplicity of soul unsullied to the end, unworldly in the midst of honours and courtly pomp, and blithe in adversity. So it was as one of the greater in the Kingdom of Heaven that he won the crown of martyrdom, and entered into the bliss of God.

With all the learning and piety that made his name renowned throughout Europe, his

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

“angelical wit” and dauntless gaiety never forsook him, his joy of spirit being a treasure defended against all fortunes, since it was placed safe above them.

Thomas More's birthday was on the 7th February, 1478. An old record of that year, which came to light in the second half of last century, tells how “on the Friday next after the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, viz. the seventh day of February . . . was born Thomas More, son of John More, Gentleman, in the 17th year of the reign of Edward IV.”

This was when the long unhappy Wars of the Roses that for thirty years laid the land waste and desolate, and made bitter feuds between the nearest of kin, was at its height. Yet, though heresies were not unknown, there was then no suspicion of that more terrible conflict that was to wrest England from the unity of Christendom, to divide the country against itself, and steep it in the blood of martyrs.

It was still the Age of Faith, of pious pilgrimages to the shrines of Our Lady Saint Mary, and the other Saints, of loyalty to the

## CHILDHOOD

Apostolic See, and tender devotion to the Holy Rood, and Passion of Our Redeemer. Christianity had then no other meaning than this.

The future martyr was one of a family of five children. He had three sisters, and one brother, who died in his infancy. Their father, John More, who was knighted on becoming a judge in the reign of Henry VIII, was then a simple barrister living in Milk Street in the heart of London, when it was a city of picturesque, ill-paved streets, and half-timbered houses with overhanging gables, and when gilded barges made a gay show on the broad river highway. It was then a city of narrow bounds, as yet distinct from Whitehall and Westminster.

It is not recorded at what age the hero of this history lost his mother. Sir John More was, however, three times married, and lived to see his son raised to the dignity of Lord High Chancellor, though not to see him attain the greater glory awaiting him on Tower Hill. He is described in the epitaph that Blessed Thomas More wrote for himself some years before his own death as: "A

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

man courteous, affable, innocent, gentle, merciful, just, and uncorrupted." Several stories are told of his shrewd, genial wit.

An adventure is related of Thomas More's babyhood, how, when his nurse was crossing a river-ford on horseback with him in her arms, the horse stumbled, and, in her panic, she flung the babe to land over the hedge of the field that skirted the bank. On gaining the shore she found him, after his rough transit, smiling and undismayed in the fashion that was to be ever characteristic of him. It was thus, as his great-grandson says, God showed "how dear this babe was unto Him."

His own earliest recollection was when he was five years old hearing a neighbour, after the death of Edward IV, tell his father how a retainer of the late king's brother had declared: "By my troth, then will my master, the Duke of Gloucester, be king, and that I promise thee."

It was at St. Anthony's School, Threadneedle Street, that little Thomas More was placed to learn the rudiments of Latin.

Books were still few and costly, for both printing and the manufacture of paper in the

## CHILDHOOD

place of parchment were but lately invented. It was only twenty-two years before Thomas More's birthday that William Caxton set up his first printing presses in the Abbeys of Westminster and St. Alban; but the feudal times when the monasteries were the only seats of learning, and knights and barons thought it a disgrace to be able to read, were already things of the past.

The boy was more fortunate in his master than many children in those days when, to use his own words, "schoolmasters were readier to beat than to teach their scholars." His first tutor was Nicholas Holt, famous as the author of a Latin grammar that he named *Lac Puerorum*, and as having taught Latimer and Colet, who were both to be friends of this later pupil of his.

When he was thirteen years old, and had outstripped his fellows at their lessons, his life as a school-boy was exchanged for that of a page in the household of Cardinal Morton.

It was still the custom—one borrowed from the Romans—for youths to be attached to the service of the king, or of some nobleman

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

or prince of the Church, before taking up arms or any other profession. Such a school of manners was considered an important part of a good education.

“The right reverend father, John Morton, Archbishop and Cardinal of Canterbury, and at that time also Lord Chancellor of England,” as seen through the eyes of his page, was afterwards pictured by him in *Utopia*.

“He was of a middle stature, and though stricken in age [he was then eighty-four years old] yet bare he his body upright. In his face did shine such an amiable reverence, as was pleasant to behold, gentle in communication, yet earnest, and sage. He had great delight many times with rough speech to his suitors, to prove, but without harm, what prompt wit and what bold spirit were in every man.”

Again, speaking in the person of his mythical hero, he says that the pleasant remembrance of the Cardinal in whose house he was brought up as a child was such as to make him “wax a child again.”

On the other hand, the Cardinal gave his

## CHILDHOOD

opinion of the boy saying to those who sat at dinner with him :

“This child here waiting at the table, whosoever shall live to see it, will prove a marvellous man.”

With his well-meant roughness of speech, he had satisfied himself “what prompt wit and what bold spirit” were in his *protégé*.

Another picture is given of young Thomas More at this period. His chroniclers tell how at the Christmastide mummeries he would suddenly “step in among the players, and never studying for the matter, make a part of his own there presently among them which made the lookers-on more sport than all the players beside.”

## CHAPTER II

### THE STUDENT

“Have we never so little if we be not in spirit merry therewith, but live in puling, and whimpering, and heaviness of heart, to the discomfort of ourselves and them that are about us . . . we have in our hearts neither more belief in Christ’s holy words nor trust in His faithful promise, than hath a Jew or a Turk.”—*The Four Last Things.*

**T**HROUGH the influence of Cardinal Morton, Thomas More was sent to Oxford, “that this goodly bud might be made a fair flower, and at length bring forth such fruit as he and the others expected and looked for.”

This was when he was only between fourteen and fifteen years old, but there was nothing unusual in those days in boys being sent to the Universities at such an early age. His college was Canterbury Hall, founded for the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury, and now absorbed in Christ Church College.

## THE STUDENT

The year 1492, in which the young student travelled to these new fields of learning, was a remarkable one. It was that in which Spain was at length entirely freed from the dominion of the Moors, which had lasted eight hundred years, and it was from the Spanish court that a poor Genoese sailor, mocked at by all but his patroness, Queen Isabella, for his theory that the world was round, and he might so find a way across the Atlantic to the Indian spice islands, and to other climes that should be won for Jesus Christ, set forth to discover the continent he had dimly seen in the dreams of genius.

More's life at the University was a hard one, and he must perforce learn to be frugal and industrious as his father wished. His allowance was so small that he was not able to get his shoes mended without first writing home. His father, too, required an exact account of how he spent his money, but far from resenting this strictness, he used to praise it in later days because it prevented him from sharing in the gaming and riot of idle companions, and kept him

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

faithful to his studies. Yet he treated his own children after a more generous fashion.

His happy disposition, and art of making merry at his own expense, stood him in good stead. He knew how to be blithe over the poverty of "Oxford fare" not only when looking back upon it from a distance, but moreover when feeling the pinch of it. Besides, he had no lack of what he loved best in books and friends, and he might drink his full at fountains of knowledge lately unsealed.

That was the age of the great revival of Greek art and literature known as the Renaissance, and brought about by the coming of Greek scholars to Italy after the taking of Constantinople by the Turks in the middle of the fifteenth century.

Thomas More had been sent to Oxford with the view of studying law in addition to Greek and Latin, since his father destined him to be a lawyer like himself, and the boy fell in with these wishes in all dutiful obedience.

But it was literature in which he found his delight, and the poetry and philosophy

## THE STUDENT

of the old Greeks. Like Giovanni Pico, that other saintly layman whose *Life and Letters* he afterwards translated, he never thought "that the beauty of pagan art could take away anything from the truth of the Gospel."

To follow his bent he cheerfully stinted himself of sleep and other relaxation. He learned, among other subjects, French, history, arithmetic, geometry, and practised both flute and viol. Music was always the language in which he loved to express himself. While still a boy he wrote many verses and little comedies, sometimes in Latin, sometimes in English.

His master at college was Thomas Linacre, priest, scholar, royal physician, and the companion of William Grocyn, who was the first to bring Greek letters to England, and who was at that time teaching at Oxford. Dr. Colet, afterwards Dean of St. Paul's, and More's confessor, was also lecturing there.

One who lived in Thomas More's days, and knew him well, says of him at this date: "For his age he wonderfully profited in the

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

Latin and Greek tongues, where if he had settled and fixed himself, and run his full race in the study of the liberal sciences and divinity, I trow he would have been the singular and only spectacle of his own time for learning."

When the promise given in his youth had been fulfilled another wrote:

"His genius is more than human, and his learning not only eminent, but so various that there is nothing of which he seems to be ignorant. His eloquence is incomparable and twofold, for he speaks with the same facility in Latin as in his own language. His sense of fun is joined with perfect refinement—you may call humour his father, and wit his mother. When the matter requires it, he can imitate a good cook, and serve up the meat in sharp sauce."

Yet there are other qualities beyond his scholarship that have endeared him to his countrymen, and won their honour and reverence.

## CHAPTER III

### FRIENDSHIP WITH ERASMUS

“Let us pray unto God that we may feel such a savour in the delight of Heaven, that respect of the talking of the joys thereof all earthly recreation be but grief to think on.”

*Dialogue of Comfort in Tribulation.*

THE student days of Blessed Thomas More were not all to be spent at Oxford.

His father watched his growing devotion to literature with some uneasiness, fearing lest it should gain so great a hold on him as to interfere with the plans made for his future. So after a brief two years of residence, when he was yet only sixteen years old, he was brought back to town, and at New Inn, one of the Inns of Chancery belonging to Lincoln's Inn, he gave himself in all earnestness to the study of the law of the Realm, and to work for his degree.

Another two years, and he was admitted as a student into the society of Lincoln's

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Inn, continuing until "in short time he was made and accounted a worthy outer-barrister." Outer-barristers were so named from the place they occupied beyond the bar which separated the dais where the benchers and judges sat from the rest of the hall in the Courts of Justice. Here he took his part in the mootings, though at first without authority to plead.

His purse was as empty as of yore, and in this he was in the same case as most of his fellow students, for the Inns were not endowed.

In Chancery Lane, near what is now known as More's Passage, is a memorial of these days. Beneath a statue of the martyr is a slab on which is set forth this inscription:

Sir Thomas More, Knight,  
Some time Lord High Chancellor  
of England;  
Martyred 6th July, 1535.  
The Faithful Servant  
Both of God and the King.

When still quite young the governors appointed him "Reader" or lecturer on the

## FRIENDSHIP WITH ERASMUS

science of law. This office was renewed three successive years.

We also hear of him lecturing in the Church of St. Lawrence Jewry, on St. Augustine's "City of God." He had laid the foundation of these lectures by much devout reading of the Doctors and Fathers of the Church, which had been for him a labour of love, "and all the chief learned of London," including the great Dr. Grocyn, came to listen to his words.

Father Bridgett writes on this subject: "Though there are many examples of lay-preaching in the history of the Church, More's lectures had in no sense the character of sermons, nor were they lectures in theology, but in history and the Divine philosophy of history."

So he grew in knowledge and repute. And now began his acquaintance, quickly to ripen into one of the world-famed friendships, with the great master of classical lore, Erasmus of Rotterdam, who had lately come on a visit to England.

The letters of Erasmus tell of the affectionate esteem he had for the young man

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

some thirteen years his junior, and of whom he said Nature surely never framed a sweeter, happier character.

The following was written from Oxford nearly at the beginning of a long correspondence carried on in Latin, which was then the common language of the educated part of mankind, as it is still of the Church. Neither did Erasmus know any English, even in after days, when he was to be a frequent guest at his friend's house, for he never cared to learn any living language.

“I have poured curses on the letter-carrier, by whose laziness or treachery I fancy it must be that I have been disappointed of the most eagerly expected letters of my dear More. For that you have failed on your part I neither want nor ought to suspect, though I expostulated with you most vehemently in my last letter. . . . Adieu, my most delightful More.”

Erasmus relates the story of how together they paid a visit to the Royal nursery and found the little Henry playing with his sisters, Margaret, afterwards Queen of Scotland, Mary, and the baby prince, Edmund.

## FRIENDSHIP WITH ERASMUS

Henry was not then heir to the kingdom, as his elder brother, Arthur, was yet alive. He was destined in those early days to be a prince of the Church.

The writer gives his first impression of the boy "then nine years old, yet already with a royal bearing, betokening a certain loftiness of mind joined with singular condescension."

This was the future king, whose fall was to be so great from the gracious promise of his youth, and whose favour was to shine upon his beloved More, to be at last so ungratefully withdrawn.

Thomas More presented Prince Henry with some verses, it being expected of a scholar to act as court poet whenever there was an occasion. The same tribute was asked from Erasmus, who was not prepared for the demand, and he goes on to tell how he spent three days in composing a poem in praise of England and the reigning family.

It is from his pen we have this picture of Blessed Thomas More after they had been known to one another some years, showing what manner of man was this lover and

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

martyr of God in the sight of those with whom he lived. His personality is portrayed with the same faithful touch with which Hans Holbein portrayed his features.

The description is taken from a letter written to the German baron, Ulrich von Hutten.

. . . "You ask me to paint you a full-length portrait of More as in a picture. Would that I could do it as perfectly as you eagerly desire it. At least I will try to give a sketch of the man as well as from my long familiarity with him I have either observed or can now recall. To begin then with what is least known to you, in stature he is not tall, though not remarkably short. . . . His complexion is white, his face fair rather than pale, and though by no means ruddy, a faint flush of pink appears beneath the whiteness of his skin. His hair is dark brown, or brownish black. His eyes are grayish blue, with some spots, a kind which betokens singular talent. . . . His countenance is in harmony with his character, being always expressive of an amiable joyousness, and even an incipient laughter,

## FRIENDSHIP WITH ERASMUS

and, to speak candidly, it is better framed for gladness than for gravity or dignity, though without any approach to folly or buffoonery. The right shoulder is a little higher than the left, especially when he walks. This is not a defect of birth, but the result of habit. . . .

“He was from his boyhood always most careless about whatever concerned his body. . . . He has good health, though not robust, able to endure all honourable toil. . . . His voice is neither loud nor very weak, but penetrating; not resounding or soft, but that of a clear speaker . . . he delights in every kind of music. . . .

“He seems born and framed for friendship, and is a most faithful and enduring friend. He is easy of access to all; but if he chances to get familiar with one whose vices admit no correction he manages to loosen and let go the intimacy rather than to break it off suddenly. When he finds any sincere and according to his heart, he so delights in their society and conversation as to place in it the principal charm of life. . . . Though he is rather too negligent of his

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

own interests, no one is more diligent in those of his friends. In a word, if you want a perfect model of friendship, you will find it in no one better than in More. In society he is so polite, so sweet-mannered, that no one is of so melancholy a disposition as not to be cheered by him, and there is no misfortune that he does not alleviate. Since his boyhood he has so delighted in merriment that it seems to be part of his nature. . . . If a retort is made against himself, even without ground, he likes it from the pleasure he finds in witty repartees. . . . With a wonderful dexterity he accommodates himself to every disposition. . . . He is earnest in all true piety. He has his hours set apart for prayer—prayer not of routine but of the heart. With his friends he so converses on the life that will follow this, that you cannot doubt that he speaks from the heart with a most earnest hope.”

## CHAPTER IV

### WITH THE CARTHUSIANS

“In the inward affection of the mind he cleaved to God with very fervent love and devotion.”

*Life of Pico della Mirandola.*

THE love of heavenly things ran like a golden thread through all our martyr's history. His attraction for the religious life was so great as never to quit him to the end of his days when spending those last months alone with God in his cell “nigh heaven,” high in the Beauchamp Tower.

This attraction made him consider his vocation very seriously when he was about the age of twenty. His friend, William Lily, contemplated with him the thought of becoming a priest of the Order of St. Francis, or of entering a monastery.

Lily became the first head master of St. Paul's School founded a few years after this

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

time by Dean Colet, and dedicated to the little Boy Jesus as He was found disputing with the Doctors. It was the pious founder's intention that children should here "proceed and grow to perfect literature, and come at last to be great clerks." Lily wrote a stately Latin grammar by command "of the King's Majesty's wisdom."

The world was then full of hope and possibilities for the young advocate, in the freshness of his genius and vigour. It was at a time when men's pulses thrilled with the thirst for adventure and a larger liberty, that he devoted himself with single-hearted simplicity to learn what was God's will for him that he might make it his own.

For this cause he lived "four years and more, full virtuously and religiously in great devotion and prayer with the monks of the Charterhouse of London, without any manner of profession or vow, either to see and prove whether he could frame himself to the kind of life, or at least to sequester himself from all temporal and worldly exercises."

Here he had his cell with his Crucifix, his books—Greek, Latin, and French—and here

## WITH THE CARTHUSIANS

he was allowed to bring his viol consecrate now to sacred lauds and canticles.

He shared in the manual work of the monks as in the work of God, kneeling with them before their altars, chanting with them the Divine Office, and living under their austere rule.

The Chapel of the London Charterhouse therefore stands as a memorial of him as well as of the white-robed sons of St. Bruno, whose Order has needed no reform, nor fallen off from its first fervour by the forsaking of Holy Poverty, all the eight hundred years of its existence.

The honour was awaiting them of being the pioneers on the road to martyrdom that led from the Tower to Tyburn, and of being the first to lay down their lives in the great persecution for the love of Jesus Christ and His Church.

The martyr's great-grandson, Cresacre More, tells of the austerities he practised at this time.

“ He used oftentimes to wear a sharp shirt of hair next his skin, which he never left off wholly; no, not when he was Lord Chancellor

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

of England. . . . He used also much fasting and watching, lying often either upon the bare ground or upon some bench, or laying some log under his head, allotting himself but four or five hours in a night at the most for his sleep. . . . He had inured himself to straitness that he might the better enter in at the narrow gate of heaven, which is not got with ease." . . .

The writer adds: "whatsoever hardness he used secretly, still kept he in outward semblance a singular alacrity, being merry in company and full of jests: especially eschewing the vice of singularity; yea he was very cunning in dissembling his virtues, so that few came to know what holy exercises he practised." . . .

So "he laid his ground work of humility" that his spirit might possess more perfect joy and liberty.

That city life had few charms for him in contrast with the peace of the cloister is told in a letter to his father confessor. This was Dr. Colet, who had himself once thought of becoming a Carthusian, and was now Vicar of Stepney.

## WITH THE CARTHUSIANS

. . . “For what I pray you is there here in this City which doth move any man to live well, and doth not rather by a thousand devices draw him back, and with as many allurements swallow him up in all manner of wickedness, who of himself were otherwise well disposed and doth endeavour accordingly to climb up the painful hill of Virtue? Yet may the country about your parish of Stepney (whereof you ought also not to have the least care) afford you the like delights to those which that affords you wherein now you keep; from whence you may upon occasions come to London as into your Inn. . . . Finally (though this be the least motive) return for my sake, who have wholly dedicated myself to your directions, and do most earnestly long to see you. In the meantime I pass my time with Grocyn, Linacre, and Lily; the first being as you know the director of my life in your absence, the second, the master of my studies, the third, my most dear Companion. Farewell, and see you love me as you have done hitherto.”

On the other hand the honour in which he always held the monastic life is shown in

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

this sentence from one of his letters written to a monk on the eve of the bitter war waged against the religious houses.

“I have no doubt that there is no good man to be found anywhere to whom all religious orders are not extremely dear and cherished. Not only have I ever loved them, but intensely venerated them. . . . I desire, indeed, all mortals to honour you and your orders, and to regard you with the deepest charity, for your merits deserve it, and I know that by your prayers the misery of the world itself is somewhat diminished. If the assiduous prayer of the just man is of much value, what must be the efficacy of the unwearyed prayers of so many thousands?” . . .

This life was not to be for him. He was to steer a more difficult course: to be in the world but not of it, and to remain “the glory of English laymen.”

“God had allotted him another estate, not to live solitary, but that he might be a pattern to married men, how they should carefully bring up their children, how dearly they should love their wives, how they should employ their endeavours wholly for the good

## WITH THE CARTHUSIANS

of their country, yet excellently perform the virtues of religious men.”

So following the advice of his director, as well as the wishes of his father “in conclusion therefore he fell to marriage.”

But his friendship with the Carthusian fathers never slackened. He was one of them in spirit as long as he lived, neither were they to be long divided in death.

He never forsook the devotions and mortifications he had practised in their midst. “He heard an entire Mass every day before he undertook any worldly business, which custom he kept so religiously that being on a time sent for to the King whilst he was hearing Mass, he would not once stir, though he was once or twice sent for, until it was wholly finished. . . . Neither was King Henry any whit angry at that time with Sir Thomas More, but rather highly pleased with this his small neglect. He used every day to say Our Lady’s Matins, the Seven Psalms, and litanies, and many times the Gradual Psalms, with the Psalm *Beati immaculata in via*; and used other pious prayers which he himself composed.” . . .

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

And now to tell of the temperance he observed. He never ate of more than one dish at meals, and that was from the one he first tasted, however many kinds of meat might be served at his table. More wine and ale were drunk then than at present, and there was much pledging of one another at banquets: but in his youth he drank nothing but water, and when later in life he wished to hide any singularity from his guests, he drank from a pewter tankard wine or ale nearly as light as water.

## CHAPTER V

### MARRIED LIFE

“Far from her lips’ soft door  
Be noise, be silence stern,  
And hers be learning’s store,  
Or hers the power to learn.”

*Poem to Candidus.*

THE story of Thomas More’s courtship is told in almost the same words by his different chroniclers. It relates how he used often to enjoy the hospitality of Mr. John Colt, of New Hall, Essex, and take pleasure in the society and conversation of himself and his three daughters. His courtship was characteristic of the man.

At first his affection inclined towards the second daughter, who appeared to him to be the fairest and best favoured as well as most talented, “yet when he thought with himself that this would be a grief and some blemish in the eldest, to see her younger sister preferred before her, he, of a kind of compassion settled his fancy upon the eldest, and soon

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

after married her with all her friends' good liking."

It was in the spring of 1505 that he wedded Jane Colt. The delicacy of the affection that would spare her the supposed slight and chagrin was entirely lavished on his young country-reared wife, in whom he had a gentle sympathetic friend and companion. He taught her to become a skilful musician, and to increase in love of books for love of him.

They lived in Bucklersbury, in the parish of St. Stephen, Walbrook, where children began to grow up around them—Margaret, to be her father's dearest and pearl of daughters, Elizabeth, Cecily, and one son, John.

During the first year of their married life, Erasmus came to England as the guest of Blessed Thomas More, and together they translated several of Lucian's Dialogues from Greek into Latin.

With his friend Lily, Thomas More had already published a book of Latin Epigrams, and was held in no mean repute as a poet.

In 1503 he wrote *A Rueful Lamentation* on the death of Elizabeth, the Queen of the White Rose, representing her bidding a last

## MARRIED LIFE

good-bye to her children. Prince Arthur had died the previous year.

A few years later Erasmus again came to stay in the house at Bucklersbury, and it was here he wrote his famous satire *Moriæ Encomium*—"The Praise of Folly," this title being a play on the name of his host.

The Dutch scholar has been accused of sympathy with the first movements of Lutheranism, but if he was when young led away in a measure by the spirit of the age, it was afterwards his saying that "Protestantism is a tragedy that has the *dénouement* of Comedies: everything is finished by a marriage," and Luther certainly did not account him as a friend.

Much that was beautiful and simple in the Middle Ages was being left behind in the march of years. Even some parts of the Church suffered loss by the amassing of riches, and there were many among her most loyal sons who, knowing, like Blessed Thomas More himself, how to unite what was best in both old and modern times, wished for a Catholic reformation. But it was their desire as of the Council of Lateran that

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it should be for sacred things to change men, and not for men to change sacred things.

Twelve months before the publication of *The Praise of Folly*, the young friar, Martin Luther, pronounced his first vows, and received the order of priesthood.

In the meantime, Thomas More was advancing in his profession, having every quality to make him what he was, the most popular barrister of the day, as well as the most upright and keen-witted.

“He gave to all true and friendly counsel, considering their interests rather than his own; he persuaded many to settle with their opponents as the cheaper course,” for he ever preferred the part of peacemaker to that of lawyer.

He would charge no fee to widows and orphans, and if a client came to him with an unjust cause, he refused to defend it, and bade him seek another advocate.

The year before his marriage he was elected Member of Parliament. His readiness to uphold right against might soon made itself manifest.

Henry VII, the character of whose latter



Blessed Thomas More serveth the Mass of the Bd. John Larke in  
his chapel at Chelsea.



## MARRIED LIFE

days was spoilt by avarice, laid the people under an oppressive burden of taxation. On the event of the Princess Margaret's marriage with the King of Scotland, he demanded an extortionate grant, and it was due to the influence and eloquence of the young burgess that less than a third of the demand was granted. The King was greatly incensed on being told that "a beardless boy had disappointed him of his expectation."

As part of his revenge he accused the poor father, John More, of some offence of which he was innocent, and kept him in the Tower till he had paid a large fine, while the son was like to have been compelled to flee the country for safety of his life.

Sir Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley were then Barons of the Exchequer, and it was they who abetted the King in the oppression of his subjects. The second of these "two caterpillars of the Commonwealth" as Cresacre More calls them, was, moreover, Speaker in this Parliament. When in the next reign he was in prison awaiting execution for high treason, he said to Thomas More, who came to visit him :

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

“God was with you that you confessed no fault against the King. Had you done so you would have paid the penalty with your head.”

## CHAPTER VI

### UTOPIA

“A man may sometimes say full sooth in game; and one that is but a layman as I am, it may better haply become him merrily to tell his mind, than seriously and solemnly to preach.”—*The Dialogue.*

**T**HOMAS MORE was to lose his life in a more glorious cause.

At this time Henry VII was called out of this world, and buried in the beautiful chapel he had built in Westminster Abbey, and which still bears his name. He endowed three masses to be said over his tomb “daily so long as the world should last.” He was to be defrauded of this bequest in a few years by his own son.

At present there was nothing but good to be hoped from the young king, then only eighteen years old, and handsome, clever, and courageous. There were great rejoicings among the people at his succession, and nothing less than a return of the golden

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

age was looked for in Merry England. The next year his marriage was celebrated with Katherine of Aragon, and at Court all was gaiety and the joy of life. There were mummings, jousts, and May-games, in which the King and Queen took a foremost part.

Although the future Chancellor did not need to seek safety in flight, he travelled to Paris and Louvain at this date, and mentions the journey in one of his letters.

And now, after a few years of happiness, there was mourning in his house for the death of his young wife when their eldest child, little Margaret, was only six years old. For his babes' sake rather than for his own, he soon afterwards married Mrs. Alice Middleton, a widow about seven years older than himself. She had one daughter, Alice, who was brought up with his own children, and treated in every way as one of them.

There is a story told of the martyr's second courtship which says he first wooed the widow for a friend of his, but she bade him speak for himself if he would prosper in his suit.

## UTOPIA

If she was, as is said of her, somewhat worldly, and of little learning, and incapable of appreciating all her husband's worth, and his great-hearted genius, at least she proved a good wife to him, and a kind and loving step-mother to his children. Her very worldliness was of a kind which made her husband say of her "she was often penny-wise and pound-foolish, saving a candle's end and spoiling a velvet gown." Yet to give him pleasure she allowed herself to be taught to play the lute and viol and other instruments, which she practised every day. She also knew how to take him at times in his own humour. She sends this message through him to Erasmus:

"My wife desires a million of compliments, especially for your careful wish that she may live many years. She says she is the more anxious for this as she will live the longer to plague me."

After this second marriage Thomas More removed to Crosby Hall, in Bishopsgate Street, close to St. Helen's Priory, and this old home of his has been preserved as a precious relic to those to whom his name is

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dear. But at the very time we write these lines its fate hangs in the balance. It will surely be an everlasting shame to London if it falls a victim to Mammon.

Early in the reign of the new king, he was made Under Sheriff of the City of London, and a little later Judge of the Sheriff's Court.

“The said office,” says his biographer Harpsfield, “as it is very worshipful, so it is not very cumbersome, for the Judge sitteth upon Thursday only, once in the week before noon. No man despatched in the same office more causes than he did, no man used himself ever more sincerely and uprightly to the suitors, to whom oftentimes he forgave his own fee and duty. . . . Neither was there any matter in controversy of weight or importance in any of the Prince's Courts of Law in this Realm, that he was not retained for counsel of the one or the other party.”

His fellow citizens loved him as of old they had loved his patron, St. Thomas of Canterbury, or, as they preferred to name him, “Thomas of London,” who in his day

## UTOPIA

had also been Clerk to the Sheriff before becoming Lord High Chancellor.

It was when Under Sheriff that Thomas More translated the *Life and Letters* of the young prince, Pico della Mirandola. He next began his *Life of Richard III*, the first history written in English.

In 1515 the English merchants persuaded the King to send him on an embassy to Flanders as their spokesman, when a dispute arose between them and the foreign merchants in London. The settlement of this question took him away from home for six months, and it was during this time he wrote his "fruitful, pleasant, and witty work of the best state of a public weal, and of the new isle called Utopia" (or *Nowhere*).

This island is supposed to have been visited by one Raphael Hythloday, a sea companion of Amerigo Vespucci, a man sun-burned, black-bearded, and stricken in age, and with a great cloak slung over his shoulder, whom the author feigns to have met in the streets of Antwerp.

*Utopia*, originally written in Latin, was translated into most of the European lan-

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guages. It is inscribed to Peter Giles, Thomas More's host in the old Flemish city.

The dedication is not the least interesting part of the book, because of the light it throws on the daily life of the author, who shows how little leisure he had to complete the task he had set himself.

“Whiles I do daily bestow my time about law matters. . . . Whiles I go one way to see and visit my friend; another way about mine own private affairs. Whiles I spend almost all the day abroad among others, and the residue at home among mine own, I leave to myself, I mean to my book, no time. For when I am come home, I must commune with my wife, chat with my children, and talk with my servants. All which things I reckon and account among business, forasmuch as they must of necessity be done: and done must they needs be, unless a man will be a stranger in his own house. And in any wise a man must so fashion and order his conditions, and so appoint and dispose himself, that he be merry, jocund, and pleasant among them,

## UTOPIA

whom either nature hath provided, or chance hath made, or he himself hath chosen to be the fellows and companions of his life. . . . Among these things now rehearsed, stealeth away the day, the month, the year. When do I write then? . . . I therefore do win and get only that time which I steal from sleep and meat." . . .

## CHAPTER VII

### AT COURT

“As he reckoneth himself never the richer so is he never the prouder.”—*The Four Last Things.*

**A**FTER the success of the Flemish embassy, the King offered Blessed Thomas More a yearly pension, “which surely,” as he says, “if one would respect honour and profit, was not to be little esteemed.” He began by refusing it, preferring to remain the representative of the citizens, whose privileges were apt to clash with the power of the throne.

Henry, who prided himself on being surrounded by men of rare talent and learning, and who had himself no mean claims to scholarship, next tried to bring him to Court, and attach him to his person. He deputed Wolsey, now Primate of England, and whom Leo X had just created Cardinal-Priest of the Holy Roman Church, to forward his desire, promising Thomas More

## AT COURT

full recompense, and “alleging how dear his service would be to his Majesty.”

But the other was loath to exchange his present position, with its freedom of action, for that of a courtier.

Then came about the celebrated case of the Pope's ship which had put in at Southampton, and was claimed by the Crown in forfeit. He was chosen by the Papal nuncio as the man most able and learned in all the land in matters of the law to uphold the rights of the Holy Father, and this he did with such notable success as to win the cause for the Pope, and earn for himself much applause.

Henry knew how to appreciate such worth, although in this case his own interests were defeated, and he would no longer be gain-said.

Thomas More's genuine reluctance to have the honour of the King's choice thrust upon him is told in a letter to the Blessed John Fisher, the saintly Bishop of Rochester, whose fate he was afterwards to share.

He writes: “I am come to the Court extremely against my will, as everybody

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

knoweth, and as the King himself often twitteth me in sport for it. . . . But our Prince, whose special and extraordinary favour towards me I know not how I ever shall be able to deserve, is so affable and courteous to all men, that every one, who hath never so little hope of himself, may find somewhat, whereby he may imagine, that he loveth him; even as the citizens' wives of London do, who imagine that Our Lady's picture near the Tower doth smile upon them, as they pray before it."

It is the testimony of Erasmus that "the King really dragged him to his Court. No one ever strove more eagerly to gain admittance there than More did to avoid it." Showing how fitly his friend yet played his part in this capacity as in every other it was his lot to fill, he says:

"His elevation has brought with it no pride. Amidst all the weight of State affairs he remembers the humble friends of old, and from time to time returns to his beloved literature. Whatever influence he has acquired by his dignity, whatever favour he enjoys with his opulent King, he uses for

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the good of the State, and the assistance of his friends. He was ever desirous of conferring benefits, and wonderfully prone to compassion. This disposition has grown with his power of indulging it. Some he assists with money, others he protects by his authority, others he advances by his commendations. If he can help in no other way, he does it by his counsels; he sends no one away dejected. You would say that he had been appointed the public guardian of all those in need."

"Being retained in the King's service," adds Harpsfield, "the King gave him a notable and worthy lesson and charge that in all his doings and affairs touching the King, he should first respect and regard God, and afterwards the King, his master, which lesson and instruction never was there, I trow, any prince's servant that more willingly heard or more faithfully and effectually executed and accomplished. . . . And in this race of the King's service he ran painfully, wisely, and honourably, twenty years and above. Neither was there any one man that the King used more familiarly,

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nor with whom he more debated, not only for public affairs, but in matters of learning withal, taking a great comfort besides in his merry and pleasantly conceited wit."

There came a day when Henry needed to be reminded of these words he had spoken. As yet he had not, any more than others had, a notion of the depths of the malice and perversity by which, after this threefold apprenticeship to friendship, he was to requite with axe and block, and a spike on London Bridge, the best and truest counsellor that ever king possessed; and that for putting his own lesson into practice.

As for Thomas More, he loved and honoured the King in all sincerity, nor did he ever forget his old affection for him, despite the insight he soon gained into his character, and the final base betrayal.

"It is thus that kings beatify their friends," said Erasmus on another occasion—when speaking of the many and wearisome embassies on which Sir Thomas was engaged—and having no prophetic vision of that scene of martyrdom.

On the 1st May, 1517, to be known hence-

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forth as the Evil May Day, befell the great riot caused by the jealousy with which the London apprentices and journeymen, even more than their masters, regarded the foreign merchants. Houses and shops were plundered, the prisons broken open, and all was terror and tumult. The city guards, and aldermen, and others in authority sought to save their lives by flight. In the midst of this confusion Blessed Thomas More was chosen by the Privy Council to quell the uproar, and gained a peaceful hearing from the mob gathered round St. Martin's Gate.

That same year there was an outbreak of the terrible Sweating Sickness. The disease chiefly attacked the rich and well-to-do, passing by the poor and ill-fed.

A physician, who spoke from experience of the ravages it made during its first beginning in England, and of the sudden blow it dealt, tells how it "immediately killeth some in opening their windows, some in playing with children in their street doors, some in one hour, some in two, it destroyeth; and at the longest to them who merrily

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dined it gave a sorrowful supper. As it found them, so it took them: some in sleep, some in wake, some in mirth, some in care, some busy, and some idle; and in one house sometime three, sometime five, sometime more, sometime all; of the which, if the half in every town escaped, it was thought great favour." . . .

King Henry had studied medicine among other things, and there is a recipe against the plague still existing which is attributed to him. But there was little human science could do for those on whom "God's marks" had appeared.

Thomas More wrote to Erasmus at this period:

"We are in the greatest sorrow and danger. Multitudes are dying all around us. . . . I myself and my wife and children are as yet untouched, and the rest of my household have recovered. I assure you there is less danger in the battlefield than in the city. . . . I have prepared myself for any event." . . .

During the next spring, when the Court moved to Woodstock to escape contagion,

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it was his duty to remain at Oxford to see the necessary regulations carried out. All infected houses were closed and marked with a wisp of hay, and those who had been near the sick must on leaving them hold white rods in their hands to warn others of the danger of approaching them.

As Secretary, and Master of Requests, he must accompany his royal master in his progresses through the country, and examine the many petitions presented to the King. He made this office the means of performing many acts of justice and kindness. Whenever there was an important speech to be made, either in Latin or English, that also fell to his share.

Henry ever found greater delight in his company, and learned to depend on his wisdom. He gave the King such good and sincere advice that Queen Katherine would say he was the one sound counsellor in the kingdom, since the rest spoke, whether right or wrong, either to please their master or to profit themselves.

Oftentimes, writes Cresacre More, "the King's custom was, upon holy days, when

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he had done his devotions, to send for Sir Thomas into his Traverse (*i.e.*, gallery), and there, sometimes in matters of Astronomy, Geometry, and Divinity, and other such sciences, to sit and converse with him: otherwhiles also in the clear nights he would have him walk with him on the leads, there to discourse of the diversity of courses, motions, and operations of the stars, as well fixed as the planets. And because he was of a very pleasant disposition, it pleased his Majesty and the Queen at supper time commonly to call for him to hear his pleasant jests." . . .

## CHAPTER VIII

### LETTERS TO HIS CHILDREN

“What can be more rich than to live joyfully and merrily without all grief and pensiveness.”—*Utopia*.

**T**HE King took up so much of the time of Thomas More that often it was scarcely once in a month he could return to his home, which was the centre of his dearest interests.

It is, however, due to these repeated absences that he wrote so many letters, to be not only the delight of the children to whom they were addressed, but to others who were to come after. These letters have lost none of the fragrance of their charm during the four hundred years since they were freshly traced and folded by the martyr's hand.

Amidst the rush and press of statesmanship he always found time to write to them, and to read and correct the Latin in which those were written that were sent in reply. He tells them: “Persuade yourselves that

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there is nothing among these troublesome and careful affairs that recreateth me so much, as when I read somewhat of your labours, by which I understand those things to be true, which your most loving master writeth so lovingly of you, that unless your own epistles did show evidently unto me how earnest your desire is towards learning, I should have judged that he had rather written of affection than according to the truth."

As if the joy of seeing him again had not been enough, he never returned without bringing them some gift. At a period when such precautions were taken against children being spoilt by overmuch indulgence that they were expected to stand and keep meek silence in the presence of their elders, and kisses and prizes were less to be looked for from parents and teachers than blows and stripes, which were dealt for the least fault, the hardest rod he ever used was one of peacock's feathers!

Thanks to the power of the childlike genius of the saints he knew how to place himself on their level, and become a friend and playmate to them as well as a father to

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whom all reverence was due. They might be as sure of his interest in their games as in their lessons.

Though never grudging praise and encouragement, their shortcomings were not allowed to pass uncorrected; but his orphaned ward, Margaret Gigs, once confessed that, while careful not to pain him heedlessly, she would sometimes pretend to have committed slight faults because of the sweetness and loving wisdom with which his reproofs were given.

Their happiness and well-being were his chief concern: he desired them to be learned and diligent, but most of all that they should be good and loving to God.

He would say to them: "It is now no mastery for you, my joys, to go to heaven. For everybody giveth you good counsel, everybody giveth you good example. You see virtue rewarded, and vice punished, so that you are carried up to heaven even by the chins."

While never ceasing to superintend their education, he provided them with tutors distinguished for learning.

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The following letter is dated "from Court," and is addressed to "his whole school," which comprised his three daughters, whose ages would range at this time from thirteen to fifteen, his still younger son John, and Margaret Gigs, whom he is always most careful to assure was as dear to him as if she were his own child. His step-daughter, Alice, was already married, but she never lost her faithful devotion to the one she always named her "Father."

He writes: "Behold how I have found a compendious way to salute you all, and make spare of time and paper, which I must needs have wasted in saluting every one of you by your names; which would be very superfluous, because you are all so dear unto me, some in one respect, some in another, that I can omit none of you unsaluted. Yet I know not whether there can be any better motive why I should love you, than because you are scholars; learning seeming to bind me more straitly unto you, than the nearness of blood. . . . I rejoice, therefore, that Mr. Drue is returned safe, of whose safety you know I was careful. If I loved

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you not exceedingly, I should envy this your so great happiness, to have had so many great scholars for your masters. For I think Mr. Nicholas is with you also, and that you have learned of him much astronomy; so that I hear you have proceeded so far in this science that you now know not only the Pole-star, or Dog, or such like of the common constellations, but also, which argueth an absolute and cunning astronomer, in the chief planets themselves; you are able to discern the sun from the moon; go forward, therefore, with this your new and admirable skill, by which you do thus climb up to the stars, which whilst you daily admire, in the meanwhile I admonish you also to think of this holy fast of Lent, and let that excellent and pious song of Boethius sound in your ears, whereby you are taught also with your minds to penetrate heaven, lest when the body is lifted up on high, the soul be driven down to the earth with the brute beasts."

One to his eldest daughter tells her how grateful her letters were to him:

"Yet would they have been more grateful

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unto me, if they had told me what your and your brother's studies were, what is read amongst you every day, how pleasantly you confer together, what themes you make, and how you pass the day away amongst you in the sweet fruits of learning. And although nothing is written from you, but it is most pleasing unto me, yet those things are most sugared sweet which I cannot learn of but by you or your brother. . . . I pray thee, Meg, see that I understand by you, what your studies are. For rather than I would suffer you, my children, to live idly, I would myself look unto you, with the loss of my temporal estate, bidding all other cares and business farewell, amongst which there is nothing more sweet unto me than thyself, my dearest daughter."

It is to be seen, too, how he kept them on their side, in almost daily communication with him. This is also from the Court:

"Thomas More to his best beloved Children, and to Margaret Gigs, whom he numbereth amongst his own, sendeth greeting:

"The merchant of Bristow brought unto me your letters the next day after he had

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received them of you, with the which I was exceedingly delighted. For there can come nothing, yea, though it was never so rude, never so meanly polished, from this your shop, but it procureth me more delight than any other men's works, be they never so eloquent; your writing doth so much stir up my affection towards you; but excluding these your letters may also very well please me for their own worth, being full of fine wit, and of a pure Latin phrase: therefore none of them all but joyed me exceedingly, yet to tell you ingeniously what I think, my son John's letter pleased me best, both because it was longer than the other, as also for that he seemeth to have taken more pains than the rest. For he not only painteth out the matter decently, and speaketh elegantly, but he playeth also pleasantly with me, and returneth my jests upon me again very wittily; and this he doth not only pleasantly, but temperately withal, showing that he is mindful with whom he jesteth, to wit, his father, whom he endeavoureth so to delight, that he is also feared to offend. Hereafter I expect every day letters from every one of

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you; neither will I accept of such excuses, as you complain of, that you had no leisure, or that the carrier went away suddenly, or that you have no matter to write; John is not wont to allege any such things; nothing can hinder you from writing, but many things may exhort you thereto; why should you lay any fault upon the Carrier, seeing you may prevent (*i. e.*, anticipate) his coming, and have them ready made up and sealed two days before any offer themselves to carry them. And how can you want matter of writing unto me, who am delighted to hear either of your studies, or of your play: whom you may even then please exceedingly, when having nothing to write of, you write as largely as you can of that nothing." . . .

Another letter—"to his most dear daughters Margaret, Elizabeth, and Cicely, and to Margaret Gigs, as dear to him as if she were his own"—congratulates them on their eloquent letters to himself and on never having omitted, whatever journeys had taken them lately from home, anything of their custom of exercising themselves, either

## LETTERS TO HIS CHILDREN

in making of declamations, composing of verses, or in their study of logic.

“By this,” he says, “I persuade myself, that you dearly love me, because I see you have so great a care to please me by your diligence in my absence, as to perform these things, which you know how grateful they are unto me in my presence. And as I find this your mind and affection so much to delight me, so will I procure that my return shall be profitable unto you.” . . . And he tells them how “marvellous desirous” he is to come home to hear their witty and acute disputations of which their master had boasted almost above all belief.

In June, 1520, Blessed Thomas More accompanied the King and Queen to the great tournament held between Henry and the gallant Francis I on the plains of Ardres, where their Courts encamped beneath pavilions of cloth-of-gold, and where such was the luxury and extravagance that as the history books tell, the chevaliers carried their forests, their meadows, and their mills on their shoulders.

To the little son and daughters whose

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voices and footsteps then resounded in Crosby Hall, it would be no dull matter of history books to learn from their father on his return of the train of over four thousand persons, and of nearly half the number of richly caparisoned horses that passed over to Calais, of the gorgeous pageant that lasted eighteen days.

Soon afterwards he received the order of knighthood, which required him to wear gold insignia, and that there should be gold on his horse's trappings, and in pictures of him after this date we see him wearing the heavy gold chain about his neck, such as bondmen and rogues wore in his island of Utopia.

Though he conformed to what was fitting to his position and honourable to the King, it is evident how little he cared for gauds and grandeur, and there was always that cruel shirt of hair which he wore beneath his robes of state.

Cresacre More gives the following trait of his character:

“He had no care what apparel he wore: in so much that being once told by his

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secretary, Mr. Harris, that his shoes were all torn, he bade him tell his man, that looked unto him thereof, to buy him new, whom for this cause he called his tutor; for he bought and made all his apparel at his own discretion, Sir Thomas never busying his head about such matters; choosing rather to be in all things at the discretion of other men, than at his own guiding, that he might in all his actions exercise the chief virtues of a Christian man, obedience and humility." . . .

The King at this time also made him one of his Privy Councillors, giving him the office of Under-Treasurer, which is much the same as the present office of Chancellor of the Exchequer. The Duke of Norfolk was then Treasurer.

While the gay scene was taking place on the Plain of Ardres under the June sky, other scenes of a very different kind were taking place in Germany.

The young Saxon friar, Luther, who had begun to separate himself from the Church by attacking indulgences, had made rapid strides along his downward path.

The edict of the Holy Father appeared in

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June, 1520, condemning his writings as capable of seducing the faithful, and contrary to the Catholic Faith. However, before excommunicating him, he was given a delay of sixty days to burn his impious books. Instead of doing this, Luther publicly burnt the edict in the market-place of Wittemburg, and so his revolt was complete.

Henry, who had studied theology, and especially the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, now came forward as the champion of God's Church. "A matter of learning," in which he made use of his new councillor, was the revising of his famous book *The Defence of the Seven Sacraments*.

This book won the King wide renown and congratulations from all sides. A few months before his death the Pope joyfully accepted it from the hands of the English Ambassadors, and hastened to proclaim Henry "Defender of the Faith," of which he was mightily proud. Although he was soon to rob the title of its original meaning, it still remains full of happy presage to his successors.

It was during the last year of Leo X that

## LETTERS TO HIS CHILDREN

young Inigo Lopez, whom we best know as Ignatius Loyala, was wounded in battle, and turned away from the romances which had amused his convalescence in the lonely castle, to listen to the voice of God calling him from the scenes of chivalry and courtly pomp, amidst which his youth had been passed, and so became enkindled with the fire the Sacred Heart came to cast upon earth.

## CHAPTER IX

### FATHER AND DAUGHTER

“Give me Thy grace good God  
To set the world at naught,  
To set my mind fast upon Thee, and not to hang  
upon the blast of men’s mouths; . . .  
To have the last things in remembrance.”

*Written on the margin of the Book of  
Hours of Bl. Thomas More.*

“**N**O woman who could speak so well did speak so little” says an old writer in reference to Blessed Thomas More’s eldest daughter, Margaret, who of all his children most resembled her father in piety and scholarship, as in the wit and merriment of her disposition.

He had watched her mind unfold under the genial radiance of his encouragement that made the fruits of learning sweet in the gathering, and with her growth found in her a width and closeness of sympathy that never failed. She was so well worthy of



Henry VIII. visiting Blessed Thomas More.



## FATHER AND DAUGHTER

trust that he made her the confidant of secrets otherwise only known to God.

The marvellous extent of her knowledge "in all kinds of sciences most excellent," which earned her the name of the Ornament of Britain, and spread her fame in Europe, took nothing away from her simple unaffected manners, but developed the capacities of heart and soul as well as of brain. The letters written to her in particular by her father reveal the depths of his tenderness towards her. If he reproaches her it is only for setting any bounds to his generosity.

"You ask money, dear Meg, too shamefully and fearfully of your father, who is both desirous to give it you," he tells her in enviable upbraiding, "and your letter hath deserved it, which I could find in my heart to recompense, not as Alexander did Cherilos, giving him for every verse a Philippine of gold; but if my ability were answerable to my will, I would bestow two crowns of pure gold for every syllable thereof. Here I send you as much as you requested, being willing to have sent you more; but that as I am glad to give, so am desirous to

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

be asked and coaxed by my daughters, thee especially, whom virtue and learning hath made most dear unto me. Wherefore the sooner you have spent this money well as you are wont to do, and the sooner you ask me for more, the sooner know you will do your father a singular pleasure. Farewell my most beloved daughter."

When only sixteen she married William Roper, but Sir Thomas More did not lose her on that account, for as his daughters grew up and married, instead of going to new homes, they with their husbands still lived under their father's roof. So the family circle gradually widened.

Neither did Margaret leave her studies after her marriage; instead her husband shared them with her, and she had in him another school fellow.

Her father writes about this date:

"I love you for this, dear Meg, that whereas I never found you to be a loiterer . . . yet such is your modesty, that you would rather still accuse yourself of negligence than vainly boast of diligence; except you mean by this your speech that you will

## FATHER AND DAUGHTER

be hereafter so diligent, that your former endeavours, though indeed they were great and praiseworthy, yet in respect of your future diligence, may be called negligence. . . . I could wish, dear Meg, that I might talk with you a long time about these matters, but behold they which bring in supper, interrupt me and call me away. My supper cannot be so sweet unto me as this my speech with you is, if I were not to respect others more than myself. Farewell, dearest daughter, and commend me kindly to your husband, my loving son, who maketh me rejoice for that he studieth the same things you do; and whereas I am wont always to counsel you to give place to your husband, now on the other side I give you licence to strive to master him in the knowledge of the sphere. Farewell again and again. Commend me to all your school-fellows, but to your master especially."

Others beside her father found pleasure in the wit and learning, as well as affection displayed in her letters, as he delights to tell her.

One day he writes: "Whilst I was read-

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

ing them, there happened to be with me Reginald Pole [afterwards the famous Cardinal] that most noble youth, not so noble by birth as he is singularly learned, and excellently endowed with all kind of virtue: to him your letter seemed as a miracle. . . . I could scarce make him believe, but that you had some help from your master, until I told him seriously that you had not only never a master in your house, but also never another man, that needed not your help rather in writing anything than you needed his." . . .

“ I thought within myself how true I found that now,” he writes again, “ which once I remember I spoke unto you in jest, when I pitied your hard hap that men that read your writings would suspect you to have had help of some other man therein which would derogate somewhat from the praises due to your works; seeing that you of all others deserve least to have such a reputation had of you, or that you never could abide to be decked with the plumes of other birds. But you, sweet Meg, are rather to be praised for this, that seeing you cannot hope for

## FATHER AND DAUGHTER

condigne praise of your labours, yet for all this you go forward with this your invincible courage to join with your virtue the knowledge of most excellent sciences; and contenting yourself with your own pleasure in learning you never hunt after vulgar praises, nor receive them willingly, though they be offered you. And for your singular piety and love towards me, you esteem me and your husband a sufficient and ample theatre for you to content you with." . . .

And again to set down one more quotation from these epistles which after his death she begged so hard to be allowed to keep:

"I will let pass to tell you, my sweetest daughter, how much your letter delighted me; you may imagine how exceedingly it pleased your father when you understand what affection the reading of it raised in a stranger."

Then he tells her how when sitting in the company of the Bishop of Exeter, he had by chance drawn her epistle out of his pocket together with some other papers. The handwriting pleasing his Lordship he had asked to examine it more closely, and was amazed on reading it to learn that such a pure Latin

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style could be the work of any woman. He had insisted on sending her a gift as a token of his admiration.

This was written from the Court "even almost at midnight."

It was in the year 1522 when Sir Thomas was made a knight and one of the King's Privy Councillors that he wrote his treatise on the words "Remember the last things, and thou shalt never sin." According to his desire, his daughter at the same time wrote an essay on "The Four Last Things" (she can then have been only about seventeen) and he was pleased to protest that the reason his was never finished was because hers was better than his own. She also translated Eusebius out of Greek; besides making many verses and orations.

The last year of Sir Thomas More's Chancellorship the King invited Margaret Roper and her sisters to Court to hold a kind of literary tournament in his presence. As one wrote to Thomas More: "When your daughters disputed on philosophy afore the King's Grace, I would it had been my fortune to be present."

## FATHER AND DAUGHTER

We are told how meek and gentle she was to her servants, how pleasant with her brother and sisters, what a sure, steadfast, and comfortable friend, and how, moreover, men of wisdom and experience came to seek her prudent counsel in their perplexities. But what is most lovable in her character was her devotion to her father, which ever gained fresh strength until reaching its height in that last sorrowful meeting on the Tower Wharf. She shared in spirit his imprisonment and martyrdom, and when the end came, her love was the measure of her grief as of her heroic courage and self-forgetfulness.

## CHAPTER X

### CHELSEA

“Busy about alms and hospitality, and the guesting of the best Poor Man, and most gracious Guest that ever was guested in this world.”—*The Supplication of Souls*.

THE memory of Blessed Thomas More must always be closely intertwined about Chelsea, overshadowing the memories of many other illustrious personages who have made the Village of Palaces rich in historic associations.

Until long after the days of which we are now speaking, a wide tract of country separated Westminster from the village which was surrounded by lanes and fields where robbers lay in wait, making it unsafe to travel that way after dark.

It was in the year 1523 that Sir Thomas built at Chelsea his famous mansion, “neither mean nor subject to envy, but magnificent enough,” and with its great fruit and flower

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garden reaching down to the shady river side.

An old view of the house shows it with a projecting porch, some dozen large windows, four of which were oriel, on each floor, and many gables, turrets, and a small tower above.

It stood on the site now occupied by Beaufort Street, about a hundred yards from the river, where tradition fixes the ford to have been that was once crossed by Cæsar's army in pursuit of the Britons.

The river was wide in the days of King Henry, with no other embankment than the slight one built by the Romans, and tall old trees overhung the moss grown wall on which the sea-gulls flocked in the winter.

Sometimes the royal barge would moor at the water staircase near the old ford. Roper, who lived under his father-in-law's roof sixteen years, tells how the King would "suddenly come to his house at Chelsey to be merry with him, whither on a time unlooked for he came to dinner, and after dinner in a fair garden of his walked with him by the space of an hour holding his arm about his neck."

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

Yet for all Henry's loving favours, and Blessed Thomas More's own affection for him, he had already fathomed something of the capricious, headstrong nature.

When therefore after the King was gone, Roper congratulated Sir Thomas on these marks of his familiar friendship, which had been lavished on none other to the same extent, not even on Cardinal Wolsey on whom so many honours had been heaped, Sir Thomas replied:

"I thank our Lord, son, I find his Grace my very good lord indeed, and I do believe he doth as singularly favour me as any subject within this Realm. Howbeit (son Roper) I may tell thee, I have no cause to be proud thereof. For if my head would win him a castle in France (for then there were wars between us) it should not fail to go."

His other daughters were now married. Elizabeth to the son of Sir John Daunce, Cecily to Giles Heron of Shakelwell in Hackney. He was a ward of Blessed Thomas More, and was martyred at Tyburn five years after the martyrdom of his father-

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in-law. Margaret Gigs married Dr. Clements, who acted as tutor in his patron's family while continuing his own studies. He became Professor of Greek at Oxford, and was exiled for the faith during the next reign. Two of their four children entered religion in a Flemish convent.

The great heresy was the means of sending Hans Holbein the younger to England from Basle, since all artistic crafts were being made impossible by the fury of the iconoclasts who were destroying all the treasures of art—pictures, statues, and stained glass windows—that came in their way.

Holbein found a hospitable reception at the Chelsea house, and is said to have had his studio there. It is he who has made the features of the martyr so familiar. Blessed John Fisher likewise sat to him.

The portrait group the artist then painted includes others of the Chelsea household. Besides Thomas More himself, his three daughters and Margaret Clement, are old Sir John More, young John More, then nineteen, with his fifteen-year-old betrothed Anne Cresacre, John Harris, secretary and

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

tutor, and Henry Patenson, the fool who figures many times in the family annals.

Here, too, are some of the family pets, for Sir Thomas loved all God's creatures, and took pleasure in noting their habits and instincts. In addition to a variety of different kinds of birds, dogs, and rabbits, he found house-room for rarer animals, "foxes, ferrets, weasels, and the like."

Erasmus wrote to his friend Ulrich von Hutten concerning the master of the house, after the family circle had been further widened by eleven grandchildren:

"There is not any man living so loving to his children as he, and he loveth his old wife as if she were a young mayde, and such is the excellence of his temper, that whatsoever happeneth that could not be helped, he loveth it as if nothing could happen more happily." . . .

Other examples of this Christian philosophy of his have been handed down.

If any of his household were inclined to complain he would tell them:

"We may not look at our pleasure to go to heaven in feather beds. It is not the way.

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For our Lord Himself went thither with great pain, and by many tribulations which is the path wherein He walked thither, and the servant may not look to be in better care than his Master.”

And again when teaching them to withstand the temptations of Satan he told them:

“Whosoever will mark the devil and his temptations will find him therein much like to an ape. For as an ape not well looked to will be busy and bold to do shrewd turns, and contrariwise being spied will suddenly leap back and adventure no farther: so the devil, seeing a man idle, slothful, and without resistance ready to receive his temptations, waxeth so hardy that he will not fail still to continue with him, until to his purpose he hath brought him, but on the other side, if he see a man with diligence present to prevent and withstand his temptations, he waxeth so weary, that in conclusion he forsaketh him.” . . .

Perhaps it was the monkey in the picture that served as his text in this instance!

He never allowed any ill-speaking or de-

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traction at his table, always pleasantly turning the subject in some such manner as this; "Let any man think as he pleaseth, I like this room very well; for it is well contrived and fairly built."

One of his daughters always read aloud at dinner and supper, ending after the monastic manner with *Tu autem Domine, miserere nobis*. The reading was intoned in Latin, and was from the Holy Scriptures, and the commentaries of the Fathers, and this was the same when guests were present; when there were learned men amongst them who took part in their host's "heavenly discourses," the discussions that followed were the more interesting. Then there would be some gay conversation in English, in which the fool joined.

All were courteous and devout "as it were in some religious house," says his great-grandson, "their recreation was either music of voices or viols."

The same spirit reigned through all the house among children and servants alike.

Sir Thomas More's position required him to have some retainers to attend him at

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Court. But when at home he took care they should not fall into idle habits, or play with cards or dice which were the ruin of many men-servants in great households, who having lost their fitness for work often became thieves and gamesters when out of service.

Some were allotted a portion of the garden to tend; others were taught to cultivate any musical talent they had—to sing or play on the organ.

“Which household discipline,” continues Erasmus, “that worthy gentleman doth not govern by proud and lofty words, but with all kind and courteous benevolence: everybody performeth his duty; yet is there always alacritie, neither is sober mirth anie thing wanting.”

Stapleton tells more of his hospitality and charity.

There was a poor gentlewoman, a widow named Paula, who was brought to poverty by the loss of a lawsuit. Touched by her misfortunes, he gave her a home in his house, where she lived several years as one of the family.

He often invited his poor neighbours to

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his table, welcoming them joyously and familiarly, ever showing mercy with cheerfulness, as was his way, with no shade of condescension, but with the kindness of humility, knowing how to set all at their ease.

These he entertained much more often than those who could make a return of hospitality; the rich and the nobility were rarely admitted to his intimacy.

Never a week passed without some sick person being especially cared for by him; and he rented at Chelsea a large house which was called the House of Providence, where a number of aged men and women were maintained.

Besides receiving poor people into his house, he, in his turn, visited them, scattering frequent and abundant alms to all who were in want without distinction, and with the love and sympathy learnt from Him who is meek and humble of Heart, which turns common gifts into heavenly treasure.

Neither did his generosity stop short at small coins.

Especially at the times when fell the great

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feasts of the Church he would go through back lanes, and to out-lying hovels, seeking out the self-respecting poor, and when their need was great would leave behind him one or more pieces of the gold he valued so little on its own account.

In these deeds of kindness he was helped in particular by his daughter Margaret, who filled his place when he was absent, and by Margaret Clements, as we must now call her. It was in his school she first practised the charity that was in after days to reach an heroic degree when, at peril of her life, she descended the dark Newgate dungeon to carry food to the Carthusian monks chained to their posts and there left to starve.

## CHAPTER XI

### AFTER WHAT MANNER HIS PRAYERS WERE HEARD

“Let him choose himself some secret, solitary place, as far from noise and company as he conveniently can, and thither let him sometimes secretly resort alone. . . . Then let him there before an altar, or some pitiful image of Christ’s bitter Passion, kneel down or fall prostrate, as at the feet of Almighty God, verily believing Him to be there invisibly present, as without any doubt He is.”

*Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation.*

**A**S his family increased, Blessed Thomas More built in his garden at some distance from the house what was known as the New Building, where he had his library, a gallery, and an oratory.

Here he often came alone, and here he every evening called his household together and said night prayers with them. These included the *Miserere* with other psalms, the *Salve Regina*, and the *De Profundis* for the dead. Then on Good Fridays they all listened to the story of the Passion, which

## HOW HIS PRAYERS WERE HEARD

was generally read aloud by John Harris, his secretary, and Sir Thomas would further move them to compassion for the Saviour's sufferings, and to sorrow for sin.

He had permission to have Mass celebrated in his oratory, but on Sundays and Feasts he always went with his wife, children, and servants to the parish church by the river side, where he built a sumptuously decorated chapel supposed to have been designed by Holbein. The crest of Sir Thomas—a moor's head—may still be traced on the carved capitals of the columns, and on the centre of the Tudor arch which surmounts the altar-tomb where he had thought to be buried. On a slab of black marble is the epitaph he himself composed.

He also gave to the Church many costly vestments of silk and cloth-of-gold, and chalices, patens, and ornaments of gold and silver, grudging nothing to God's service, and least of all himself. Oftentimes he would sit and sing with the choir, serve the Priest's Mass, and carry the cross at the head of the Rogation-tide processions.

Many associations, fragrant with the

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

sweetness of his sanctity, are built up in the ancient gray walls of the church.

Of the New Building not one stone stands upon another, and only the record remains of the oratory where he spent long hours in contemplation of the mysteries of the life of God our Saviour when He walked the earth, and where on Fridays he continued his devotions from morning till night. Here as Christ's scholar he learnt the self-renunciation which gave him strength to overcome the world, and in reward God let him taste of heavenly delights, which was half the secret of his joyous humour.

He was careful that none but his confessor and eldest daughter should know anything of the sharp penances with which he hedged round "the white flower of a blameless life," and satisfied his loving desire for fellowship with the Crucified—of his midnight vigils, of how he scourged himself with knotted cords, and wore a rough hair shirt next his skin.

One hot summer evening when sitting at supper it befell that having removed his gown, his son John's wife, little Anne Cres-

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acre, began to laugh on seeing the edge of the rough garment with neither collar nor ruff, and for humility's sake he was distressed when this was told him by his daughter Margaret.

It was her office to wash this hair shirt. She would repair it too if necessary, thus performing the same womanly service which the legend tells was done by Our Lady for her faithful servant, St. Thomas of Canterbury, in Her chapel in the monastery church of Pontigny. For when forced to flee into France, he had none to whom he could confide the task that his unaccustomed fingers were trying to do for himself till his heavenly Visitant took pity on him.

When this dearest daughter was laid low by the terrible sweating sickness that again visited England, and when many that were full of life in the morning died before night, it was to his oratory he came to seek remedy in great heaviness of heart.

And there he "upon his knees with tears most devoutly besought Almighty God, that it would be like His goodness, unto whom nothing was impossible, if it were His

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blessed will, at his mediation, to vouchsafe graciously to hear his petition."

Then there came into his mind the remembrance of a remedy which the doctors wondered they had not thought of trying before, and which was given to her as she slept. And though they had already given her up, since "God's marks," which were held for sure tokens of near death, had appeared on her body, she recovered by little less than a miracle, and by and by was restored to perfect health. Her father solemnly declared that if it had been God's will to take her he would never more have meddled with worldly affairs.

His household was likewise visited by "the pestilence of error and corruption," which attacked Margaret's husband through the reading of Luther's books. The new doctrines they taught were quickly spreading in all parts of England. So cunningly were they disguised under the pretence of truth and liberty that they deceived some of the most upright, as in the case of William Roper.

Soon after his marriage he began to grow

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tired of the Catholic fasts and of the mortification which at first he practised beyond the bounds of prudence, and so he listened to the preachers who promised a new and easy way to heaven. He even wished to turn preacher himself, and was once brought before Cardinal Wolsey and convicted of heresy, but because of the esteem in which his father-in-law was held he was sent away with a friendly warning.

Sir Thomas took great pains to bring his son to reason.

At length he said: "I see, son, no disputation will do thee good; henceforth therefore I will dispute with thee no more, only will I pray for thee, that God will be so favourable as to touch thy heart."

And again in a wonderful manner his prayers obtained the blessing of the good God on his kinsman.

"So that ever after he was not only a perfect Catholic, but lived and died a stout and valiant champion thereof."

Tradition adds that after his death, and while his body lay still unburied in the house, "there was heard once a day for the

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space of a quarter of an hour the sweetest music that could be imagined, not of any voices of men, but angelical harmony, as a token how gracious that soul was to Almighty God and to the choirs of angels."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE KING'S SCRUPLE

“If thou didst reckon the treasure not thine, but the treasure of God delivered thee to dispose and bestow, thy treasure should be on earth, and thy heart in heaven.”—*The Four Last Things.*

CARDINAL WOLSEY had a high opinion of the man whose simplicity and contempt of worldly honours made his character so different from his own, and it was at his suggestion that Sir Thomas was chosen Speaker of the House of Commons the same year he moved to Chelsea.

Soon afterwards the King appointed him Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. And now we come to the year 1527, when the Lutheran army, which was rather an unruly mob, drunk with wine and blood, stormed the walls of Rome, and sacked the city. They desecrated the holy places, dressed themselves up in the priests' vestments, and went through the mockery of electing Luther

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as the Vicar of Jesus Christ. More has left the most frightful description of their savage cruelty.

Leo X had been succeeded by Adrian VI, who, as a humble successor of the Apostles, came on foot from Spain to Rome on being chosen Pope, and before entering the city took off his hose and shoes, and so passed barefooted to his palace. After his short pontificate Clement VII took up the heavy burden of the government of the Church, and was at that present time a prisoner in his besieged Castle of St. Angelo, from which he at length escaped in the disguise of a merchant.

It was during this stormy period that Blessed Thomas More accompanied Cardinal Wolsey to Amiens, where in the cathedral the treaty of peace was signed between England and France. Before setting forth he went with his family to Chelsea parish church to pray for the deliverance of the Holy Father, and that night he and his companion lay under the roof of Blessed John Fisher in his Palace at Rochester.

Thomas More had left the King with

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heaviness of heart. Henry had just broken to him the news of his pretended scruples in regard to his marriage with Queen Katherine.

Wolsey has been accused of fostering this idea. It may be that he encouraged the King in the first instance as a means of revenging himself on the Emperor Charles, who was the Queen's nephew, and who he believed had stood in the way of his obtaining the Papal tiara at which his ambition had aimed. He never guessed how dearly any part he had in the matter was to cost himself, as well as his fellow ambassador and their host at Rochester, and he lived to repent bitterly his conduct when it was too late to repair it for all his pains.

It is certainly true that Henry had been led astray by the fascinations of the lady-in-waiting, Anne Boleyn, and was glad of any excuse to be separated from his lawful wife.

The King took Sir Thomas More further into his confidence when he returned from France three months later. The little scene took place in one of the galleries of Hampton Court.

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Thomas More did not suspect the King's sincerity, and to satisfy him agreed to confer with the Bishops of Durham and Bath, that his doubts might be solved on the question of the dispensation he had received from Rome at the time of his marriage, for Katherine had first espoused his brother Arthur.

After his discussion with the Bishops he went again to the King, and told him that he need have no further scruple, but that the marrying of a new wife while his own was alive was altogether opposed to Holy Scripture; he urged him to consult the Fathers of the Church, St. Jerome and St. Augustine, whose authority he might trust, since they would not deceive him from human respect or fear.

Henry took his counsel in good part, still hoping to bring Sir Thomas to his views. But the other already foresaw all the evil that was likely to befall the country, and how the King's unfaithfulness to his Queen was leading him to unfaithfulness to his God. For some time Henry had been growing lax and careless, and he who had been so

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pious in the beginning, and so punctual at the hearing of Mass, now seldom went to his religious duties unless driven by the scare of the plague. He was even beginning to suppress some of the monasteries. Yet the "king's candle" was to burn before Our Lady of Walsingham for some years longer, and he was still far from wishing to separate himself from the Church.

Therefore one day Sir Thomas said to his son-in-law Roper, who was exulting in the happy state of the realm in the putting down of heresy:

"Troth it is indeed, son Roper, and yet, son Roper, I pray God that some of us live not the day that we would gladly be at league and composition with them [viz., the heretics], to let them have their churches quietly to themselves, so that they would be contented to let us have ours quietly to ourselves."

Then said William Roper: "By my troth, Sir, it is very desperately spoken."

And Sir Thomas, seeing him to be in a fume, said merrily: "Well, son Roper, it shall not be so, it shall not be so."

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It chanced on another time when they were walking together along the Thames side at Chelsea, Blessed Thomas said:

“Now would to God, son Roper, upon condition three things were well established in Christendom, I were put in a sack, and here presently cast into the Thames.”

“What great things be these, Sir, that should move you so to wish?”

“Wouldest thou know, son Roper, what they be?”

“Yea, marry, Sir, with a good will, if it please you.”

“In faith they be these, son. The first is, that whereas the most part of Christian princes be at mortal wars, they were all at universal peace. The second, that where the Church of Christ is at this present sore afflicted with many errors and heresies, it were settled in perfect uniformity of religion. The third, that where the matter of the King’s marriage is now come in question it were to the glory of God, and quietness of all parties brought to a good conclusion.” . . .

With all his press of business, Sir Thomas

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More's pen was always busy. Henry's *Defence of the Seven Sacraments* had met with another book from Luther, in which "he played the very varlet with the King," and this was replied to by Sir Thomas, it being beneath the royal dignity to reply in person.

In 1528 his *Dialogue* appeared, which was soon followed by *The Supplication of Souls*, written on behalf of the Holy Souls who were being robbed by the new heresy of the masses and prayers that were their due.

The clergy were grateful to him for all he had written in defence of the true religion, and they agreed to contribute together to make him a present of the sum of four or five thousand pounds to recompense him. They knew that, in spite of his high position at Court, he was far from rich, owing to his generosity and contempt of worldly wealth. Roper says that he never asked of the King one penny for himself.

So Bishop Tunstall came, with others, begging him to accept their gift; but Sir Thomas said, while refusing it: "That like

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as it were no small comfort unto him, that so wise and learned men so well accepted his simple doing, for which he intended never to receive reward but at the hands of God only, to Whom alone was thanks thereof chiefly to be ascribed: so gave he most humble thanks unto their honours all for their bountiful consideration.”

Then when they still failed to persuade him to take it, they besought him to allow them to bestow it on his wife and children.

“Not so, my Lords,” he said, “I had rather see it all cast into the Thames than I, or any of mine, should have thereof the worth of one penny. For although your offer, my Lords, be indeed very friendly and honourable, yet set I so little by my profit, and so much by my pleasure, that I would not, in good faith, have lost the watching of so many nights for much more than your liberal offer. And yet wish I would, for all that, upon conditions that all heresies were suppressed, that all my books were burned, and my labour utterly lost.”

“Thus departing, were they fain to restore to every man his own again.”



Blessed Thomas More in Prison.



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With Tunstall, Bishop of Durham, Blessed Thomas More went to Cambray in July, 1529, to sign the treaty of peace between the Kings of England and France and Charles the Emperor.

“In which journey,” says Cresacre More, “Sir Thomas so worthily behaved himself that he procured in our league with the said Princes far more benefits to our realm than at that time was thought possible by the King and all his Council.”

He still found time to write long letters home to his family. On the occasion of his barns of corn and hay being burnt he wrote to his wife in his usual strain of patience under his own misfortunes, and sympathy with those of his neighbours:

“Mistress Alice, I commend me unto you: having heard by my son Heron, that ours and some of our neighbours' barns with all the corn in them are burnt, although we may be sorrowful for the loss of so much good corn . . . let us never murmur or grudge for this accident, but take it in good part, and give God thanks as well for adversity as prosperity. . . . Be therefore of

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good courage, I pray thee, and, taking all our family with you, go to the Church, and give God thanks as well for these things which He hath given us, as for that He hath taken away, and for all that which He hath left us, which He can easily increase, when He seeth it fittest for us; and if He pleaseth to take more from us, His blessed will be fulfilled; let it be diligently enquired out what our neighbours have lost, and desire them not to be sad for anything, for I will not see any of them endamaged by any mischance of my house, although I should thereby not leave myself so much as one spoon. I pray thee be cheerful with all my children and family." . . .

This letter was written from the Court at Woodstock after his return from Cambray, and about five weeks before he was made Lord Chancellor.

## CHAPTER XIII

### CHANCELLOR OF THE REALM

“Now the high mind of proud fortune, rule and authority, Lord God, how slight a thing it would seem to him that would often and deeply remember that death shall shortly take away all this royalty.”

*The Four Last Things.*

**D**URING the time that the truce was being signed at Cambray, the Pope sent one of his Cardinals as legate to England, who, with Cardinal Wolsey, sat at Blackfriars to consider the affair of the King's marriage. Wolsey knew that great interests were at stake, and that if Henry did not have his way he was prepared to defy Rome, and let the tide of heresy overwhelm the country, as was afterwards to befall. The Holy Father, Clement VII, refused to cancel the marriage, which led to Wolsey's downfall from the King's favour and made Anne Boleyn his enemy. Henry treated him with open contempt, and at length, on the 19th October, 1529, he was

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forced to resign the great seal, and retire to his diocese of York.

Henry looked for one to fill his place, and his choice quickly fell on Blessed Thomas More, who in less than a week after was made Lord Chancellor. It was very unusual for any but great ecclesiastics to fill this high position.

The King still hoped to gain his ends through him, but Sir Thomas never gave him any reason to suppose that he intended to support him in the proceedings against the good Queen Katherine, whose faithful servant he always remained. Neither was he at all elated by the honour thrust upon him. One of his biographers says:

“His acceptance of the great seal, rightly estimated, seems one of the noblest and most conscientious acts of a noble and conscientious life.”

So on the 26th October, which was a Tuesday, there was a large assembly at Westminster Hall when he was led up to the Star Chamber between the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk and placed in the judgment seat of Chancellor.

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The first Duke then made a grand speech, in which he said how the admirable wisdom, integrity, and innocency, joined with most pleasant facility of wit, with which Sir Thomas More was endowed, had been sufficiently known to all Englishmen from his youth, and for these many years also to the King's Majesty himself, wherefore he bade the people receive their new Chancellor with joyful acclamations, at whose hands they might expect all happiness and content.

These words met with much joy and applause, and Sir Thomas replied that as the King knew he had been drawn perforce to be a courtier, but to take this dignity upon him was most of all against his will, adding:

“As you therefore do hope for great matters, and the best at my hands, so though I dare not promise any such, yet do I promise truly and affectionately to perform the best I shall be able.”

His old friend Erasmus expressed his opinion on this occasion in these words:

“I do not at all congratulate More, nor literature, but I do indeed congratulate

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England, for a better or holier judge could not have been appointed.”

Wolsey himself declared that no man was so fit for the office.

This was just before the great prelate was arrested and hurried to London to be tried for high treason. He was probably only saved from the scaffold by the sickness which overtook him on the journey, and of which he died at Leicester Abbey. The grand marble tomb he had planned as his last resting-place in St. Paul's was taken possession of by the King, who had confiscated all his goods, and it is in it that Wellington now lies.

Many stories are told of the new Lord High Chancellor, of his wit, justice, and charity, and with what quickness he decided tedious cases, some of which had been delayed more than twenty years, to the great injury of those concerned. He had soon settled all the cases left unheard, whereupon this punning verse was written of him :

When More some years had Chancellor been,  
No more suits did remain :  
The like shall never more be seen  
Till More be there again.

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His great grandson says: "The poorer and meaner the suppliant was, the more affably he would speak unto, the more attentively he would harken unto his cause, and with speedy trial dispatch him; for which purpose he used commonly to sit every afternoon in open hall, so that if any person whatsoever had any suit unto him, he might the more boldly come unto him, and there open to him his complaints."

One day when he was thus sitting in his hall at Chelsea, there came before him a beggar woman complaining that Lady More was keeping back her dog from her, for it was true that the dog had been stolen and sold to Lady More, and its owner had just learnt where it was to be found. The Chancellor caused his wife to be called, and made her stand at the upper end of the hall, and the beggar at the lower, and taking the dog in his hands bade them both call it. The little animal, hearing the voice of its true mistress, immediately ran to her. "The dog does not belong to you," Sir Thomas said to his wife, "you must console yourself." But as this judgment was not to Lady

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More's liking, for she had grown fond of the dog during the fortnight it had been in her possession, the Chancellor bought it for her, giving the poor woman a piece of gold in exchange, with which she was well satisfied, and so both were content.

During the time of his Chancellorship there was a citizen of Westminster who was troubled by a terrible temptation to despair. A friend brought him before Sir Thomas, who gave him good wholesome advice, but could not bring him to a better frame of mind. He then promised to pray for him, and his prayer was answered in such a manner that for three years all temptation left him in peace. This man is to be met with once again in the story of Sir Thomas More's life.

Sir John More had been made a judge about the time his son became Privy Councillor, and was certainly one of the oldest judges of the King's Bench, being nearly ninety years old. "Now it was a comfortable thing for any man to behold," says Cresacre More, "how two great rooms at Westminster Hall were taken up one with

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the son, the other with the father." And every day before Sir Thomas took his place in his high seat of honour, if his father was already sitting, he would first go into the same court, and there before all, would reverently kneel down and ask his blessing, as he had done in the days of his childhood before starting off to school, and with the same love and obedience. Soon the time came for old Sir John to die, and he was buried in the churchyard of St. Lawrence Jewry, where he must have once listened with pride when his son was lecturing there as a young man on "The City of God."

Neither did Sir Thomas More's high estate interfere with his simple duty and obedience to God.

Still at Rogation-tide he would walk round the parish with the rest of the procession, and when urged to ride on account of his dignity and increase of years, would reply:

"My Lord goes on foot, I will not follow Him on horseback."

Roper tells the story of how the Duke of Norfolk "coming on a time to Chelsey to dine with him, fortun'd to find him at

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church singing in the choir with a surplice on his back; to whom after service, as they went home together, arm in arm, the Duke said:

“ ‘What! my Lord Chancellor, a parish clerk—a parish clerk! You dishonour the King and his office.’ ”

“ ‘Nay,’ quoth Sir Thomas More, smiling upon the Duke, ‘your Grace may not think, that the King, your master and mine, will be offended with me for serving God, his Master, or thereby count his office dishonoured.’ ”

Still, too, he counted it an honour to serve Mass. It was in the year 1530 that Blessed John Larke, who was afterwards martyred at Tyburn for the same cause of the Supremacy, came to Chelsea as its rector; so that it was remembered in later days how in the old church by the river one martyr said Mass while another served.

## CHAPTER XIV

### “MY LORD IS GONE”

“Now I live at liberty after my own mind and pleasure, which I think very few of these great states and peers of realms can say.”—*Utopia*.

THE time was come when Blessed Thomas More must remind the King of the words he had said to him on first coming to Court, how “in all his doings and affairs touching the King, he should first respect and regard God, and afterwards the King, his master.” This he now told him he did and would do, “or else might his Majesty account him for his most unworthy vassal.”

Ever since Sir Thomas became Chancellor, Henry had pressed him to come round to his opinion on the subject of his proposed marriage with Anne Boleyn, but when the other answered that he could not in conscience serve him in this manner, the King left him for a time in peace, saying that he

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was content to accept his service in other ways.

Now Henry went so far as to make a Royal proclamation ordering the clergy to acknowledge him as Supreme Head of the Anglican Church. He had been forced to add "as far as the law of Christ allows," but although he did not yet openly deny the higher authority of the Holy See, it was clear that, in usurping this title which belonged to the Pope, he meant to have his own way about what he called his "great matter."

It was in regard to this affair that as Lord Chancellor, Sir Thomas must go with the bishops and noblemen of the House of Lords to the Lower House and tell them what had been agreed on at the Universities at home and abroad. This he did at the King's request, "not showing of what mind himself was therein."

But because he could not be in any way a party to the conduct of the King, who was moreover beginning to be angry with Sir Thomas More for not supporting his views, and was making it evident that he would no longer tolerate his holding aloof from med-

## “MY LORD IS GONE”

dling with them, Sir Thomas asked the Duke of Norfolk, “his singular dear friend,” to intercede for him that he might be allowed to resign the Chancellorship. This was at length obtained for him when he had further declared that his health and strength were unmeet for the heavy burden, as was indeed the truth.

A time was appointed when he might yield up the great seal which “his Grace with thanks and praise for his worthy service . . . courteously at his hands received.” He also told him that “for the good service he had hitherto done unto him, in any suit that he should hereafter have unto him, that either should concern his honour, or that should appertain to his profit, he should not fail to find him a good and gracious Lord.” The ungrateful King soon proved how little his promises were to be trusted.

It was in the garden of York Place on 16th May, 1532, that Sir Thomas resigned the office he had held for two and a half years.

This was still a secret from his family, and he waited till next morning to tell them

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what had been done. The manner in which he broke the news to them was characteristic.

It was a holy day, and as was his custom he went with his wife, and children, and the rest of his household to Chelsea Church. When the Mass was over instead of as usual sending one of his gentlemen-in-waiting to Lady Alice More's pew to tell her that my Lord Chancellor was gone before, he came instead and making a low bow said:

“May it please your Ladyship to come forth now: my Lord is gone.”

Then she thinking it was one of his jests, that he would utter with such an unmoved countenance it was often a riddle to know whether or not he was in earnest, he must needs explain the solemn truth that he was no longer Lord Chancellor.

This she was very sorry to hear, it being one of her sayings, “it is better to rule than be ruled,” and besides the loss of her high estate she had to lament a serious loss of income. He had to use his wit to make her think less of these things, for she was not naturally apt to perform heroic acts of renun-

## “MY LORD IS GONE”

ciation, in which she must nevertheless bear her part.

Sir Thomas had spent both himself and his substance in all the service he had done the King and the realm. He would never take advantage of opportunities to enrich himself, and such had been the smallness of his gains that he had only £50 a year belonging to him, with a few grants of land bringing in about as much again. It must however be said that money was then worth seven or eight times as much as it is at the present day.

First of all it was necessary to reduce the number of his household, though all his retainers and servants said with tears in their eyes that they would rather serve him for nothing than any other master for great wages. Since he could not agree to this he saw them all well provided for, and settled in good positions. His barge was given up with its eight watermen to Sir Thomas Audley, who succeeded him as Chancellor, and his jester, Henry Patenson, to whom he must likewise bid farewell was given up to the Lord Mayor for that year, on the under-

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standing that he should always belong to whoever held that rank.

Not only was it impossible to be surrounded by any of his former state, but now he did not know how to support all his large family of married sons and daughters with their children, as he would gladly have done. So he called them around him, and asked their advice as to how they might still contrive to live together.

And when they stood silent, not knowing in their sorrow how to answer, he said merrily:

“Then will I show my poor mind to you. I have been brought up at Oxford, at an Inn of Chancery, at Lincoln’s Inn, and also in the King’s Court, and so from the least degree to the highest, and yet have I in yearly revenues at this present left me a little above a hundred pounds by the year. So that now we must hereafter, if we like to live together, be contented to become contributors together. But by my counsel it shall not be best for us to fall to the lowest fare first. We will not therefore descend to Oxford fare, nor to the fare of New Inn, but we will begin with

## “MY LORD IS GONE”

Lincoln's Inn diet, where many right worshipful and of good years do live full well, which if we find ourselves not able the first year to maintain, then will we next year after go one step down to New Inn fare, where-with many a honest man is well contented. If that exceed our ability too, then will we the next year after descend to Oxford fare, where many grave, ancient, and learned fathers be conversant continually; which if our ability stretch not to maintain neither, then may we yet with bags and wallets go a-begging together, and hoping for pity some good folk will give their charity, at every man's door to sing *Salve Regina*, and so keep company merrily together.”

Some of his children afterwards went to homes of their own, but Margaret Roper and her husband stayed with him always. The narrow circumstances of the reduced household brought father and daughter all the nearer together, and their affection was made more intense by the shadow of coming evil that already hung over them, and which was to cause a longer parting than any his attendance on the King had made necessary.

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It was real poverty that was now blithely and bravely met. Sir Thomas was scarcely able to provide sufficient food and clothing and other needful things for himself and those belonging to him, and it was necessary for him to sell many of his household goods. We are told that when the winter came he "was enforced and compelled for lack of other fuel every night before he went to bed, to cause a great burden of ferns to be brought into his own chamber, and with the blaze thereof to warm himself, his wife and his children, and so without any other fire to go to their beds."

Although he was sorry enough for the reason that had made him surrender his office, and sorry too for the number of changes it had brought to his household, he was well pleased to exchange the life of Courts and worldly affairs for one more to his taste. He was now able to give himself up to his books, and to the service of the good God, always dedicating more time to his devotions than to study, though he wrote much in those days of his new leisure.

## “MY LORD IS GONE”

On his retirement he wrote to Erasmus:

“That which I have from a child unto this day almost continually wished (my most dear Desiderius) that being freed from the troublesome business of public affairs, I might live some while only to God and myself, I have now by the especial grace of Almighty God, and the favour of my most indulgent prince, obtained.”

Thomas Cromwell, once a common trooper in the Italian wars, and one of the mad rabble that sacked Rome, was now secretary and privy councillor, and high in the Royal favour. One day he came to Chelsea with a message from the King. Before he went Sir Thomas said to him:

“Mr. Cromwell . . . if you will follow my poor advice, you shall in counsel giving unto his Majesty, ever tell him what he ought to do, but never tell him what he is able to do, so shall you show yourself a true faithful servant, and a right worthy Councillor. For if the lion knew his own strength, hard were it for any man to rule him.”

Cromwell was far from following this wise

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counsel. It was he who advised the King "to cast off the yoke of Rome," and who helped him in the wholesale plunder and destruction of the monasteries.

Another favourite of the King was Thomas Cranmer, Anne Boleyn's chaplain, and who Henry had just made Archbishop of Canterbury. Cranmer likewise gave the King the advice that would best please him, and took upon himself to dissolve his first marriage.

In the beginning of the year 1533, one of Henry's chaplains was told to celebrate the nuptial Mass early in the morning in the Palace chapel, being falsely assured that the Pope had just given judgment in favour of the King's marriage with Anne Boleyn, which thus privately took place.

When these tidings reached Blessed Thomas More of how the King had taken matters in his own hands, declaring he could get no justice from Rome, he said to Roper: "God give grace, son, that these matters within a while be not confirmed with oaths."

## CHAPTER XV

### A DECISIVE STEP

“The conscience of the good deed with the remembrance of the thankful love and benevolence of them to whom thou hast done it, doth bring more pleasure to thy mind than that which thou hast withholden from thyself could have brought to thy body.”

*Utopia.*

THE next event was an invitation to the coronation of the new queen which was sent to Blessed Thomas More by three of the bishops. They sent him by the bearer of the invitation a present of twenty pounds to buy himself a new gown, which he thankfully accepted. He, however, remained at home, not being able to accept their bidding to bear them company.

When he next met them he said merrily:

“My Lords, in the letters which you sent me lately, you required two things of me, the one whereof since I was so well contented to grant you, the other therefore

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I thought I might be the bolder to deny you.”

He knew that he was braving the King's anger, and, foreseeing something of what was soon to befall, he took means to prepare his family by prophesying future troubles, because, as he said, “shafts foreseen hurt not so much.”

“He would often talk with his wife and children of the exceeding joys in heaven . . . of the lives of holy martyrs, what torments they endured for the love of God, of their marvellous patience and deaths, which they suffered most willingly rather than they would offend God's divine Majesty, and what an honourable thing it was for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ to abide imprisonment, loss of goods, lands, and life; adding also what a comfort it would be to him, if he might find that his wife and children would encourage him to die in a good cause; for it would cause him for joy thereof merrily to run to death.”

Another time he hired an officer to come suddenly to the house and give a great knock at the door during dinner, and warn

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Sir Thomas that he must next day appear to stand his trial.

It must have seemed to poor Dame Alice More that she did not need preparing for anything worse to follow, and that there was already sufficient contrast from the proud happy days when from her window she had watched her husband walking in the garden with the King's arm about his neck. She had seen all her little state vanish like the river-haze which the sunlight makes golden and then scatters.

Very soon these false alarms were exchanged for the reality.

His enemies were beginning to try to bring about his ruin by inventing all manner of unjust accusations against him. First they tried to prove that he had been guilty of taking bribes while he was Lord Chancellor. One charge was that he had taken as a New Year's gift from a rich widow, whose case he had won, a pair of gloves lined with forty gold pieces, but it was easily proved that he had only taken the gloves and not the money, for he had said to her:

“ Mistress, since that were against good

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manners to forsake a gentlewoman's New Year's gift, I am content to receive your gloves, but as for your money I utterly refuse."

Then he was accused of having taken a golden cup of beautiful workmanship from one whose case he had to deliver judgment upon. That was certainly true, but it was also true that he had given in exchange one of much greater value, which was the only condition under which he would take it.

So all attempts to find him guilty of unfair dealing turned to his credit and renown.

It was next tried to prove that he had behaved cruelly to heretics. He writes of these libels:

"What cannot these brethren say, that can be so shameless as to say thus? . . . And of all that ever came in my hand for heresy, as help me God, saving (as I said) the sure keeping of them, had never any of them stripe or stroke given them, so much as a fillip on the forehead."

He wrote again at the end of his life: "As for the heretic, I hate his error, and not his person, and I would with all my

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heart that the one was exterminated and the other saved."

At last the King flattered himself he had really found a means to cause him to relent, and win him to his side. He now tried threats instead of favours, thus vainly hoping to frighten him into submission, for he did not yet know all the strength of character that lay beneath Sir Thomas More's sweetness and easiness of temper.

There happened at that time to be a nun, known as the Holy Maid of Kent, living in Canterbury, who said it had been revealed to her by God that she was to warn the King of the downfall that would overtake him for persisting in his wickedness.

Many good people believed in her, and the Bishop of Rochester was one to whom she told her revelations before she went herself to the King. When she was accused of treason, the names of Bishop Fisher and Sir Thomas More unjustly appeared in the Bill that was brought before Parliament as having been among the number of her supporters.

All the dealings the latter had had with

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her was one short interview at the request of the Fathers of Sion House, and he had then behaved so prudently as to be worthy of praise instead of blame. He asked to be allowed to plead his own cause before Parliament. This the King refused, and appointed that he should be examined by the Archbishop, the Lord Chancellor, the Duke of Norfolk, and Mr. Thomas Cromwell.

They began by telling him that such was the King's affection towards him there was nothing he would not grant that should be for his honour and profit. Then they went on to tax him with ingratitude for not confessing the wisdom and necessity of Henry's behaviour to the Pope, and to threaten him with all the terrors they could imagine, as they had been bidden to do if Sir Thomas was to be won in no other way.

“For,” said they, “by his subtle sinister sleights he had most unnaturally procured and provoked the King to set forth a book of the Assertion of the Seven Sacraments, and in maintenance of the Pope's authority, and caused him to his dishonour throughout all Christendom to put a sword in the Pope's hand to fight against himself.”

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“My Lords,” said Sir Thomas, “these terrors be frights for children, and not for me; but to answer that wherewith you chiefly burden me, I believe the King’s Highness of his honour will never lay that to my charge. For none is there that in that point can say more in mine excuse than his Highness himself, who right well knoweth that I was never procurer or councillor of his Majesty thereunto, but after that it was finished, by his Grace’s appointment . . . only a sorter out, and placer of the principal matters therein contained.” . . .

The others were ill satisfied with their small success, and in great displeasure.

“Then took Sir Thomas More his boat towards his house at Chelsea,” says his son-in-law—in whose words the rest shall be told—“wherein by the way he was very merry, and for that was I nothing sorry, hoping that he had gotten himself discharged out of the Parliament Bill. When he was come home, then walked we two alone in his garden together, where I, desirous to know how he had sped, said:

“‘Sir, I trust all is well, because you are so merry.’

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

“‘That is so, indeed, son Roper, I thank God,’ quoth he.

“‘Are you put out of the Parliament Bill, then?’ said I.

“‘By my troth, son Roper,’ quoth he, ‘I never remembered it.’

“‘Never remembered it, Sir?’ quoth I. ‘A case that toucheth yourself so near, and us all for your sake. I am sorry to hear it. For I verily trusted when I saw you so merry, that all had been well.’

“Then said he, ‘Wilt thou know, son Roper, why I was so merry?’

“‘That would I gladly, Sir,’ quoth I.

“‘In good faith I rejoiced, son,’ quoth he, ‘that I had given the devil so foul a fall, and that with those Lords I had gone so far, as without great shame I could never go back again.’”

“At these words,” continues Roper, “waxed I very sad. For though himself liked it well, yet liked it me but a little.”

The King was very angry at the report of what had taken place, and it was not until the Lord Chancellor had humbly besought him on his knees, telling him that the House

## A DECISIVE STEP

of Lords would never pass such a Bill while Sir Thomas More's name remained in it, that he consented for a time to forego his vengeance.

Next morning Cromwell met Roper in the Parliament House, and told him that his father's name was put out of the Bill, and this news he sent off in all haste by his servant to his wife Margaret at Chelsea.

"In faith, Meg," said Sir Thomas, when she had gladly given him the message, "*Quod defertur, non aufertur*, which is to say, 'What is delayed is not taken away.'"

Again, when the Duke of Norfolk warned him, saying:

"It is perilous striving with Princes, and therefore I would wish you somewhat to incline to the King's pleasure"; quoting the proverb, "The indignation of Princes is death:"

Sir Thomas replied:

"Is that all, my Lord? then, in good faith, between your Grace and me is but this difference, that I shall die to-day and you to-morrow."

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE FIELD IS WON

“Of this thing we be very sure, that old and young, man and woman, rich and poor, prince and page, all the while we live in this world we be but prisoners.”  
—*The Four Last Things.*

A DECREE was next passed that all the King's subjects should take an oath to declare that Anne's children should succeed to the throne to the setting aside of the little Princess Mary, whose mother, Queen Katherine, was now allowed no other title than that of the widow of Prince Arthur. This was in open defiance of the Holy Father, Clement VII, who, scarcely a week before, had solemnly pronounced Henry's first marriage to be true and lawful.

This Act of Succession, as it was named, was to be followed later by that of the Supremacy, by which the Pope's authority was to be abolished throughout the British dominions. Henry, indeed, was soon to go

## THE FIELD IS WON

even greater lengths than forbidding any of his subjects to appeal to Rome, or even to go there, and then taking all spiritual power on himself; for he so far gave vent to his evil passions as to order the name of the Pope to be effaced out of every book wherein it might be contained, and moreover caused the bones of Saint Thomas of Canterbury to be cast out of the shrine where they lay, and by which many miracles had been wrought, because of the brave part he had acted more than three hundred years before in upholding the liberty of Holy Church.

All the priests in the land were required to take Henry's side and swear to accept the new marriage, in spite of the Pope's decision, and the King's Commissioners sat at Lambeth in order to see the oath taken, but as yet no layman was called to appear except Blessed Thomas More. To him the oath meant separation from God, and he knew that the choice lay between this and the anger of the King, which would not stop short of depriving him of everything. When the message came to Chelsea the sacrifice was already made in his heart.

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

It was his custom before undertaking any matter of importance, or starting upon a journey, to go first to church to be confessed, to hear Mass, and receive Holy Communion, which is the food of the strong.

“So,” says Roper, “did he likewise in the morning early the self-same day that he was summoned to appear before the Lords at Lambeth. And whereas he used evermore before, at his departure from his house and children (whom he loved tenderly) to have them bring him to his boat, and there to kiss them all and bid them farewell, then would he suffer none of them forth of the gate to follow him, but pulled the wicket after him, and shut them all from him, and, with an heavy heart (as by his countenance it appeared) with me and our four servants, there took his boat towards Lambeth.” . . .

It was on Monday, the thirteenth of April in the year of grace 1534, that Blessed Thomas More for the last time heard the river waves lapping against the wooden piers and bridges between Chelsea and Westminster. The pleasant days of simple home joys were over.



Martyrdom of Blessed Thomas More.



## THE FIELD IS WON

Presently he whispered in his son's ear:

“Son Roper, I thank our Lord, the field is won.”

Not knowing what was meant by this, yet not wishing to appear ignorant, the other answered: “Sir, I am thereof very glad.”

It was not until afterwards he understood that it was an inward battle that had been silently won, in which Divine love had triumphed over earthly affections.

We know what followed from the letter Sir Thomas wrote to his daughter a few days later. He tells her how he was the first to be called in before the Commissioners on arriving at Lambeth, and how the oath he was required to take was shown him under the great seal. He was likewise shown the Act of Succession, which having read secretly to himself, he answered that his purpose was not to condemn the conscience of any other man, but for himself his own conscience so moved him in the matter that he could not swear to the oath they offered him without peril of his soul.

“Unto this,” adds the letter, “my Lord Chancellor said, that they were all very

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sorry to hear me say this, 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 towards me. And therewith they showed 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 therefore I tarried in the old barred chamber that looketh into the garden, and would not go down because of the heat." . . .

He was then called in again, and told that a number had sworn since he went aside, whereon he replied that he laid no blame on any man, but for himself he answered as before: and though he might have cause to fear he was in the wrong, seeing the great Council of the realm had determined to the contrary, yet on the other side he was not bound to change his conscience, and con-

## THE FIELD IS WON

form it to the Council of one realm against the general council of Christendom.

So together with Bishop Fisher, who had likewise refused to take the oath, he was placed in the custody of the Abbot of Westminster till it was decided what should be his fate. Since he still stood firm and constant, he was four days later, on Friday, 17th April, committed to the Tower, where many a common rogue was at that time confined. His prison was the Beauchamp Tower, in the western ward.

On his way thither the one who had the charge of conducting him advised him to take off the chain of gold that, as usual, he was wearing about his neck, and to send it to his wife or one of his children.

“Nay, sir,” said he, “that I will not; for if I were taken in the field by my enemies, I would that they should somewhat fare the better for me.”

On his landing at the Tower gate, where the Lieutenant of the Tower, Sir Edmund Walsingham, was waiting to receive him, the porter demanded that Sir Thomas should give up his upper garment.

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“Mr. Porter,” quoth he, taking off his cap and presenting it to him, “here it is: I am sorry it is no better.”

“No, sir,” quoth the porter, “I must have your gown.”

“And so was he,” says Roper, “by Mr. Lieutenant conveyed to his lodging, where he called upon John à Wood, his own servant, there appointed to attend him, who could neither read nor write, and sware him before the Lieutenant that if he should hear or see him at any time speak or write any matter against the King, Council, or the state of the Realm, he should open it to the lieutenant, that the lieutenant might in contentment reveal it to the Council.”

So John à Wood was rather to be a spy than a servant. “According to the fixed scale of charges of the lieutenant,” says Fr. Bridgett, “Sir Thomas as a knight paid fees of ten shillings a week for himself, and five shillings for his servant,” which together was equal to about £6 a week according to the modern value of money; yet his friends had to provide him with everything besides that was absolutely necessary.

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One day the lieutenant, who had been an old friend of Sir Thomas and often enjoyed his hospitality, came into his cell, saying how gladly in return he would have entertained him better if it had not been to displease the King, but he trusted he would accept his good will and such poor cheer as he had.

“I verily believe you, good Mr. Lieutenant,” replied Sir Thomas with another of his merry sayings, “and I thank you most heartily for it, and assure yourself I do not mislike my fare; but whensoever I do, then spare not to thrust me out of your doors.”

It was not until a month had passed that his daughter, after earnest entreaty, obtained leave to visit him in his narrow cell, the walls of which were eleven feet thick with only narrow loop-holes to admit light and air. After they had repeated the seven Penitential Psalms and the Litany of the Saints together, as he would always do at her coming, before speaking of other things, he said to her, quaintly describing the sweet consolations God gave him:

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

“I believe, Meg, they that have put me here ween that they have done me a high displeasure; but I assure thee, on my faith, mine own good daughter, if it had not been for my wife, and ye that be my children, I would not have failed long ere this to have closed myself in as strait a room and straiter too. But since I have come hither without mine own desert, I trust that God of His goodness will discharge me of my care, and with His gracious help supply the want of my presence amongst you, and I find no cause, I thank God, to reckon myself here in worse case than in mine own house. For methinks God by this imprisonment maketh me one of His wantons (*i.e.*, spoilt children), and setteth me upon His lap and dandleth me even as He hath done all His best friends, S. John Baptist, S. Peter, S. Paul, and all His holy apostles, martyrs, and His most especial favourites, whose examples God make me worthy to imitate.”

Separation from the world had still for him the old meaning of nearness to God, as in the never-forgotten days spent in the cloisters of the Charterhouse.

## THE FIELD IS WON

On another of Margaret Roper's visits, when he had questioned her concerning his wife and the rest of his family, he at last asked how Queen Anne was prospering.

"In faith, Father," was the reply, "never better; there is nothing else in the Court but dancing and sporting."

"Never better: alas, Meg, alas; it pitieth me to remember into what misery, poor soul, she will shortly come; these dances of hers will prove such dances that she will spurn our heads off like foot balls; but it will not be long ere her head will dance the like dance."

And in this he spoke a true prophecy that he did not live to see fulfilled; for after her three years' pageant of royalty the unhappy Queen was beheaded on Tower Hill, and the next day Henry married Jane Seymour at Old Chelsea Church, as tradition tells.

Margaret meanwhile only thought of how to save her father's life. In her love and anxious dread she did not even hesitate to urge him, "in such vehement and piteous manner," to relent and take the oath as so many other wise and learned men were

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doing, that he declared this was the most grievous thing to him in all the world.

“Daughter Margaret,” he said to her, “we too have talked of this thing more than once or twice, and I have told you that if it were possible for me to do the thing that might content the King’s Grace, and God not offended, no man had taken this oath more gladly than I would do.”

Then seeing her sit musing sadly, he said smiling:

“How now, daughter Margaret? What now, mother Eve? Where is your mind now? Sit not musing with some serpent in your breast, upon some new persuasion to offer Father Adam the apple yet once again.”

“In good faith, father, I can no further go,” said she. “For since the example of so many wise men cannot move you, I see not what to say more, unless I should look to persuade you with the reason that Master Harry Patenson made. For he met one day one of our men, and when he had asked where you were, and heard that you were in the Tower still, he waxed angry with you, and said: ‘Why, what aileth him that he

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will not swear? Wherefore should he stick to swear? I have sworn the oath myself.' And so," she added, "have I sworn": for this she had done with the condition "as far as was lawful."

"That word was like Eve, too," returned her father: "for she offered Adam no worse fruit than she had eaten herself."

Again he replied when she reminded him that still worse things might be decreed against him, and there might be terrors in store when it would be too late to change:

"Too late, daughter Margaret! I beseech Our Lord that if ever I make such a change, it may be too late, indeed; for well I wot the change cannot be good for my soul." Then he went on to say that though he should fall by weakness like Saint Peter himself, yet he trusted in God's tender pity to raise him up again. "And, therefore, mine own good daughter, never trouble thy mind for anything that shall happen to me in this world. Nothing can happen, but that which God pleaseth; and what that is, though it should seem evil unto us, yet it is truly the best . . . And if anything happen me that you would

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be loth, pray to God for me, but trouble not yourselves; as I shall full heartily pray for us all that we may meet together once in Heaven, when we shall make merry for ever, and never have trouble after."

That although she was distraught by her sorrow, and influenced by the arguments by which many at that time excused themselves for their weak compliance with the King's new command, she never wished him to act unworthily of himself, is told in a letter she afterwards wrote.

. . . "Father, what think you hath been our comfort since your departing from us? Surely the experience we have had of your life past, and godly conversation, and wholesome counsel, and virtuous example, and a surety not only of the continuance of the same, but also a great increase by the goodness of Our Lord, to the great rest and gladness of your heart . . . Who defend you (as I doubt not, good father, but of His goodness He will) of all trouble of mind and of body, and give me, your most loving, obedient daughter and handmaid, and all us, your children and friends, to follow that that

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we praise in you; and to our only comfort remember and commune (*i.e.* converse) together of you, that we may in conclusion meet with you, mine own dear father, in the bliss of Heaven, to which our most merciful Lord hath bought us with His precious Blood.

Your own  
most loving obedient daughter and  
bedeswoman,            Margaret Roper,  
which desireth above all worldly things to be in John à Wood's stead to do you some service. But we live in hope that we shall shortly receive you again; I pray God heartily we may, if it be His holy will."

His step-daughter Alice, now Lady Alington, was not idle either in her efforts to save him. She went to the Lord Chancellor, begging his help in her father's behalf. This he easily promised to give if Sir Thomas would renounce what Audley called his foolish scruples, and which he treated so jestingly, that Alice said to her step-sister after the interview:

"I see no better suit than to Almighty God, for He is the comforter of all sorrows."

## CHAPTER XVII

### IN THE TOWER WARD

“Of worldly substance, friends, liberty, life, and all, to set the loss at right naught for the winning of Christ.”—*Written on the margin of the Book of Hours of Blessed Thomas More.*

**A**FTER her husband had been some time in prison, his wife obtained leave to visit him, “who at her first coming,” says Roper, “like a simple woman, and somewhat worldly too, with this manner of salutations bluntly saluted him.

“What the good year, Mr. More, I marvel that you, that have been always hitherto taken for so wise a man will now . . . be content to be shut up among mice and rats, when you might be abroad at your liberty, and with the favour and goodwill both of the King and His Council, if you would but do as all the bishops and best learned of this Realm have done. And seeing you have at Chelsea a right fair house,

## IN THE TOWER WARD

your library, your books, your gallery, your garden, your orchards, and all other necessaries so handsomely about you, where you might, in the company of me your wife, your children and household be merry, I muse what a God's name you mean here still fondly to tarry."

Having quietly listened to her he said blithely:

"I pray thee, good Mistress Alice, tell me one thing."

"What is that?" she asked.

"Is not this house as nigh Heaven as mine own?"

Then she, not liking this talk, cried, "Tilly vally! tilly vally! man, will this gear never be left?"

"Well then, Mistress Alice, if it be so, it is very well. For I see no great cause why I should much joy of my gay house, or of anything belonging thereunto, when, if I should but seven years lie buried under the ground, and then arise and come thither again, I should not fail to find some therein that would bid me get out of the doors, and tell me that were none of mine. What cause

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

have I then to like such an house as would so soon forget his master? Again, tell me, Mistress Alice, how long do you think we may live and enjoy it?"

"Some twenty years," said she.

"Truly," said he, "if you had said some thousand years, it had been somewhat; and yet he were a very bad merchant that would put himself in danger to lose eternity for a thousand years; how much the rather if we are not sure to enjoy it one day to an end."

In the beginning the prisoner was allowed such little liberty as to walk in the garden and attend the Church in the Tower precincts. By and by even the privilege of hearing Mass was denied him, yet still he kept count of the Church's Festivals, and did not fail on those days to wear his best apparel "to honour his Creator." Still too, he added many mortifications to all he suffered from the privations and sickness which ever increased.

The *Dialogue of Comfort in Tribulation*, which he wrote at this time—while Blessed John Fisher, confined in the Bell Tower, near his own, was writing his *Spiritual*

## IN THE TOWER WARD

*Consolation*—is as full of humour combined with saintly wisdom as any of his works.

In the midst of sufferings of every kind which his courageous cheerfulness made light of, still he wrote on, using, when pens failed him, a piece of coal or charred wood, as in the following letter.

“ Mine own good Daughter,—

“ Our Lord be thanked, I am in good health of body, and in good quiet of mind: and of worldly things I no more desire than I have. I beseech Him make you all merry in the hope of Heaven. And such things as I somewhat longed to talk with you concerning the world to come, our Lord put them into your minds, as I trust He doth, and better too, by His Holy Spirit, who bless you and preserve you all.

“ Written with a coal by your tender loving father, who in his poor prayers forgetteth none of you all, nor your babes, nor your nurses, nor your good husbands, nor your good husbands’ shrewd wives, nor your father’s shrewd wife neither, nor our other friends.

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

“And thus fare ye heartily well for lack of paper.

“Thomas More, Knight.

“Our Lord keep me continually true, faithful and plain, to the contrary whereof I beseech Him heartily never to suffer me to live. For as for long life (as I have often told thee, Meg) I neither look for nor long for, but am well content to go, if God call me hence to-morrow. . . . Recommend me to your shrewd Will (*i.e.* William Roper), and mine other sons, and to John Harris, my friend, and yourself knoweth to whom else, and to my shrewd wife above all, and God preserve you all, and make and keep you His servants all.”

Another letter written likewise with a coal, “and other pens have I none here,” warns her that he feared there would be a new and closer search in all his houses, because folks would not believe he was really so poor as had appeared in the search made after his first refusal of the oath. He says “which thing, if ever it should happen, can make but sport to us that know the truth of my poverty, unless they find out my wife’s

## IN THE TOWER WARD

gay girdle, and her golden beads. Howbeit, I verily believe that the King's Grace of his benign pity will take nothing from her."

The Parliament that met that November framed a new law, making it high treason for any person to deny that the King was the only supreme Head in earth of the Church of England, or "maliciously to wish, will, or desire by words or writing, or by craft imagine, invent, practise, or attempt" any of the Royal titles.

It was this new law to which Blessed Thomas More owed his martyrdom, though it was not passed until after he had spent many months in the Tower, whither he had been condemned contrary to all justice, and without even being allowed the right of trial by jury.

His grants of land were taken from him, for he was declared to be a sower of sedition; and his poor wife was in such distress of poverty that she had to make a sacrifice of many of her trinkets, and even to sell her clothes, to pay her husband's fees in prison. She and her children entreated Henry to pardon his old friend and councillor, plead-

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

ing the sickness of which he was already dying, and their own great need. But the King had forgotten both justice and mercy; he only listened now to evil advisers and his old love was turned into hate.

It was now determined that Blessed Thomas More should no longer be allowed only to protest by his steadfast silence against the authority the King had usurped, but should either be made to confess Henry's supremacy, or condemn himself out of his own mouth.

On the last day of April, 1535, there came to him Mr. Secretary Cromwell, and asked him to give his opinion as to whether the new statutes were lawful, pretending much friendliness, and assuring him that the King was ready to show him mercy, and would be glad to see him conform to the royal will that he might be abroad in the world again among other men.

“I am the King's true, faithful subject and daily bedesman, and pray for his Highness, and all his, and all the Realm,” replied the martyr. “I do none harm, I say none harm, I think none harm, but wish

## IN THE TOWER WARD

everybody good. And if this be not enough to keep a man alive, in good faith I long not to live. And I am dying already, and have, since I came here, been divers times in the case that I thought to die within one hour. And I thank Our Lord I was never sorry for it, but rather sorry when I saw the pang past. And therefore my poor body is at the King's pleasure. Would God my death might do him good." And he would at that present time give no further answer.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### FOR CAUSE OF THE SUPREMACY

“The things, good Lord, that I pray for, give me Thy grace to labour for.”

*From a Prayer composed in prison.*

SIR THOMAS MORE knew he had no reason to take comfort by heeding any promises of pardon. But his daughter Margaret took fresh hope on receiving tidings of what had taken place, and obtained permission to again visit her father. It was the 4th May, on which the Feast of the Blessed English Martyrs is now kept in honour of Blessed John Houghton, Prior of the London Charterhouse, the other two Carthusian Priors, with Blessed Richard Reynolds, and the old Vicar of Isleworth, who on that day were the first to shed their blood at Tyburn for the Faith that Saint Augustine brought to England nine hundred years before.

Sir Thomas chanced to see them from his

## FOR CAUSE OF THE SUPREMACY

window being led forth from the Tower to martyrdom, and said to his daughter standing by him:

“Lo, dost thou not see, Meg, that these blessed fathers be now as cheerful going to their deaths, as bridegrooms to their marriages?” And he spoke as one who would fain have been of their company. Poor brave Margaret, soon to give to God the life she loved better than her own, saw any hope she had cherished droop and wither in the chill certainty of separation.

Three days later Cromwell came again, and with him the Lord Chancellor, the Duke of Suffolk, and the Earl of Wiltshire, Anne Boleyn’s brother and father, and the bitter foes of the future martyr, whom they now put to the same questions either to prove him guilty of high treason or force him to comply.

They asked him why he did not speak plainly out against the statute if he was ready to die as he said.

“Whereto I answered,” repeats Sir Thomas in a letter to his daughter, “as the truth is, that I have not been a man of such

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

holy living as I might be bold to offer myself to death, lest God, for my presumption, might suffer me to fall; and therefore, I put not myself forward, but draw back. Howbeit, if God draw me to it Himself, then trust I in His great mercy that He shall not fail to give me grace and strength."

He was writing his book on the Passion of Christ, and had come to the story of the Agony in the Garden and the words "They laid hands on Jesus," when the hands of these men were laid on him, and his books, manuscripts, and writing materials snatched from him. It had been discovered that letters had passed between him and the Bishop of Rochester, though there was not a word in them to give any excuse for this treatment.

When his books were taken away, Solicitor-General Rich tried to catch the prisoner in his speech while pretending friendly talk with him. It was upon the report Rich gave of this conversation that the desired crown of martyrdom was finally won.

"Forasmuch as it is well known, Mr. More, that you are a man both wise and

## FOR CAUSE OF THE SUPREMACY

well learned as well in the laws of the Realm as otherwise, I pray you therefore, let me . . . put unto you this case. Admit there were an Act of Parliament that all the Realm should take me for the King, would not you take me for the King?"

"Yes, sir, that would I," said Sir Thomas.

"I put the case further that there were an Act of Parliament that all the Realm should take me for the Pope; would not then you, Mr. More, take me for the Pope?"

"For answer to your first case," Sir Thomas replied, "the Parliament may well, Mr. Rich, meddle with the state of temporal princes; but to make answer to your second case, I will put you this case, Suppose the Parliament would make a law, that God should not be God, would you then, Mr. Rich, say God were not God?"

"No, sir," quoth he, "that I would not, since no Parliament may make any such law."

"No more," said Sir Thomas, as Rich repeated his words, "could the Parliament make the King supreme head of the Church." . . .

## BLESSED THOMAS MORE

He might speak no more through his books; the joy and comfort he had found in his work, which had helped to break the monotony, was taken from him, and the still greater comfort of speaking with his daughter, for now she was allowed to come no more. But he knew how to suffer as well as work in mirth and contentment, and the more earth was darkened for him, the more gloriously heaven shone forth. Left alone, he now closed the shutters of his cell, and gave himself wholly up to contemplation, and prayer.

“When all the wares are gone the shop windows might as well be shut,” he replied merrily to the Lieutenant who, when next coming in, wondered at the darkness.

“Yet still by stealth,” says his great grandson, “he would get little pieces of paper, in which he would write divers letters with a coal.” These he contrived to send to his family, who accounted them as precious jewels, afterwards tracing them over in ink.

The outlook was dark enough for his poor country, as likewise for the Church in different parts of Europe. But meanwhile the bounds of God’s Kingdom were ever grow-

## FOR CAUSE OF THE SUPREMACY

ing wider in the lands lately discovered beyond the seas, and it was a century of great saints, of heroic virtues, and zeal and charity for souls. On a day during the August Sir Thomas spent in the Tower, St. Ignatius and his companions gathered together in the crypt of the church of Montmartre, after Mass, pronounced their vows to consecrate their entire lives to help the Christians, and convert the Saracens. That was the first beginning of the Society of Jesus. One of these companions, St. Francis Xavier, was soon to set out to preach the Gospel in the Far East, as the Brothers Minor of St. Francis of Assisi were already doing in the New World. . . .

In England martyrdoms were quickly following one another for the cause of the true Faith of Christ, and the supremacy of the successor of Saint Peter. Henry's apostasy was bringing about a reign of terror.

On 19th June three more Carthusian monks were martyred at Tyburn; on the 22nd, the Feast of St. Alban, the first British martyr, Blessed John Fisher, met the reward of his constancy. He had been

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the confessor of Queen Katherine, and her advocate against the injustice done her, and his fate had been even harder than that of his brother prisoner. He was already dying of age and sickness when brought out from his squalid dungeon to shed his blood. To show his esteem and sympathy for the holy Bishop, Paul III, who had lately succeeded Pope Clement VII, sent him the Red Hat, thinking that the dignity of Cardinal would procure his freedom and be respected by the King. "The Pope may send him the hat, but I shall take care he has no longer a head to wear it," was Henry's brutal remark. He was more than ever determined to alarm others from following the brave examples set by him and the late Lord Chancellor.

Blessed Thomas More had calmly and humbly abided God's good time. Now the day came for which he had longed when he might speak out and bear his witness by words as well as deeds. On 1st July, 1535, when he had been in the Beauchamp Tower fifteen months, he was indicted of high treason, and summoned to stand his trial at Westminster Hall.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE TRIAL

“Thou mayest look upon death not as a stranger, but as a nigh neighbour.”—*The Four Last Things.*

**W**HEN Sir Thomas was brought to the King's Bench at Westminster Hall where five years before, as Lord Chancellor, he had often knelt to ask his father's blessing, “he went thither,” says Cresacre More, “leaning on his staff, because he had been much weakened by his imprisonment, his countenance cheerful and constant.” Each month passed in the Tower might have been a year, so greatly was he aged before his time. When at last he came out into the daylight his hair had turned gray, his face was thin and pale, his beard grown long, and his infirmity was such that his judges were compelled to give him permission to be seated.

The long indictment was read, accusing him of having maliciously opposed the

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King, of having, as a traitor to his Prince and Realm, slandered the supremacy, and advised Bishop Fisher to do the same. His condemnation was already decided upon, and a verdict of guilty was at once returned. "According to the tenor of the new law," he was sentenced to be dragged on a hurdle to Tyburn, and there hanged, drawn, and quartered. This horrible sentence, which he heard with gentle serenity, was afterwards changed to beheading, as in the case of Blessed John Fisher who it was feared might die on the way.

"Since I am condemned and God knows how justly," said Blessed Thomas More, "I will freely speak for the disburdening of my conscience, what I think of this law: When I perceived that the King's pleasure was to sift out, from whence the Pope's authority was derived, I confess I studied seven years together to find out the truth thereof; and I could not read in any one Doctor's writings, which the Church alloweth, any one saying that avoucheth that a layman was or could ever be the head of the Church."

## THE TRIAL

Then said the Lord Chancellor: "Would you be accounted more wise and of more sincere conscience than all the Bishops, learned Doctors, Nobility and Commons of this Realm?"

Sir Thomas spoke out again: "I am able to produce against one bishop which you can bring forth of your side, one hundred holy and Catholic bishops for my opinion; and against one realm, the consent of all Christendom for more than a thousand years. . . . More have I not to say, my Lords, but that like as the blessed Apostle S. Paul, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, was present and consenting to the death of the proto-martyr, S. Stephen, keeping their clothes that stoned him to death, and yet they be now both twain, holy saints in Heaven, and there shall continue friends together for ever; so I verily trust, and shall therefore heartily pray that though your lordships have been on earth my judges to condemnation, yet we may hereafter meet in Heaven merrily together to our everlasting salvation; and God preserve you all, especially my Sovereign Lord the King, and grant him faithful councillors."

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Roper tells the rest of the pathetic story.

“Now after this arraignment departed he from the bar to the Tower again, led by Sir William Kingston, a tall, strong and comely knight, Constable of the Tower, and his very dear friend. Who when he had brought him from Westminster to the Old Swan towards the Tower, there with a heavy heart, the tears running down his cheeks, bade him farewell. Sir Thomas More, seeing him so sorrowful, comforted him with as good words as he could, saying:

“‘Good Mr. Kingston, trouble not yourself, but be of good cheer; for I will pray for you, and my good lady your wife that we may meet in Heaven together, where we shall be merry for ever and ever.’

“Soon after, Sir William Kingston, talking with me of Sir Thomas More, said:

“‘In good faith, Mr. Roper, I was ashamed of myself, that at my departing from your father I found my heart so feeble and his so strong, that he was fain to comfort me who should rather have comforted him.’

“When Sir Thomas More came from Westminster to the Tower Ward again, his

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daughter, my wife, desirous to see her father, whom she thought she should never see in this world after, and also to have his final blessing, gave attendance about the Tower Wharf, where she knew he would enter into the Tower. There tarrying his coming, as soon as she saw him, after his blessing upon her knees reverently received, she hasting towards him, without consideration or care of herself, pressing in amongst the midst of the throng and company of the guard, that with halberds and bills went round about him, hastily ran to him, and there openly in sight of them embraced him, took him about the neck and kissed him. Who, well liking her most natural and dear daughterly affection towards him, gave her his fatherly blessing and many godly words of comfort besides. She was not able to say any word but ‘Oh, my father! Oh, my father!’

“‘Take patience, Margaret,’ he said, ‘and do not grieve; God has willed it so. For many years didst thou know the secret of my heart.’

“From whom after she was departed, she not satisfied with the former sight of him,

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and like one that had forgotten herself, being all ravished with the entire love of her father, having respect neither to herself, nor to the press of people and multitude that were there about him, suddenly turned back again, ran to him as before, took him about the neck, and divers times kissed him lovingly, and at last with a full and heavy heart was fain to depart from him; the beholding whereof was to many that were present so lamentable, that it made them for very sorrow thereof to weep and mourn."

Margaret Clements, Dorothy Harris and John More, who were Margaret Roper's companions in this pitiful scene, likewise received the martyr's blessing on their knees, and embraced him for the last time.

He had not been told on which day he was to die, but on the eve of what proved to be his martyrdom, he felt that the end was near for which he had been further preparing himself in the little time that remained to him by fervent prayer and severe penances.

So now four days after his trial he sent his hair-shirt to his daughter Margaret,



Margaret Roper receiving the Head of Blessed Thomas More.



## THE TRIAL

together with this letter, written with a piece of charred wood—the last he was to write.

“Our Lord bless you, good daughter, and your good husband, and your little boy, and all yours, and all my children, and all my godchildren, and all our friends. Recommend me when you may, to my good daughter Cicely, whom I beseech our Lord to comfort; and I send her my blessing, and to all my children, and pray her to pray for me. I send her an handkercher. And God comfort my good son, her husband.” . . . And so on with tender affectionate messages to others of his family. “I cumber you, good Margaret, much; but I should be sorry if it should be any longer than to-morrow. For it is Saint Thomas Even, and the octave day of Saint Peter, therefore to-morrow long I to go to God. It were a day very meet and convenient for me. I never liked your manner towards me better than when you kissed me last; for I love when daughterly love and dear charity hath no leisure to look to worldly courtesy. Farewell, my dear child, and pray for me, and I shall for you

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and all your friends that we may merrily meet in Heaven. . . . I pray you at good time convenient recommend me to my good son John More, I liked well his natural fashion. Our Lord bless him, and his good wife, my loving daughter; to whom I pray him be good as he hath great cause." . . .

Sir Thomas was still expecting to travel the same road to Tyburn that the two bands of Carthusians had already taken, when one came to him, saying, the King had mercifully acquitted him of the first sentence; he was instead to be beheaded.

"God forbid that the King should use any more such mercy unto any of my friends," said Sir Thomas with his dauntless humour; "and God bless all my posterity from such pardons."

## CHAPTER XX

### THE MARTYRDOM

“And so they say, these matters be King’s games, as it were stage-plays, and for the most part played upon scaffolds.”—*Life of Richard II.*

**E**ARLY next morning being Tuesday, the 6th July, and the eve of the Translation of St. Thomas of Canterbury, in the year of Grace 1535, Sir Thomas Pope brought a message from the King and his Council to the martyr to tell him to prepare himself to suffer death that day before nine of the clock.

“Master Pope,” said he, “for your tidings I most heartily thank you. I have always been bounden much to the King’s Highness for the benefits and honours which he hath from time to time most bountifully heaped upon me. Yet more bounden am I to his Grace for putting me into this place, where I have had convenient time and space to have remembrance of my end; and most of all

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that it hath pleased him so shortly to rid me of the miseries of this wretched world. And therefore will I not fail most earnestly to pray for his Grace, both here and in another world."

"The King's pleasure is further that at your execution you shall not use many words," he was told, to which he meekly agreed; though said he, "Otherwise had I purposed at that time somewhat to have spoken, but of no matter wherewith his Grace, or any other should have had cause to be offended."

He then asked the other to plead for him that his daughter Margaret should be allowed to be present at his burial, and was assured that the King had granted his wife and children and other friends this permission.

On taking his last leave of him the messenger could not refrain from weeping, whereat Sir Thomas must again be the consoler, saying with gentle cheerfulness:

"Quiet yourself, good Mr. Pope, and be not discomfited. For I trust that we shall once in Heaven see each other full merrily, where we shall be sure to live and love together in joyful bliss eternally."

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Left alone, Sir Thomas made haste to put on his best apparel, as he had been wont to do on other solemn feast days, for this was to be the happiest festival of all, since it was to be spent in Heaven.

Then the Lieutenant, seeing him arrayed in the silk camlet gown that had been given him while in prison, advised him to put it off, saying that the executioner, who would have it, was but a worthless fellow.

“What, Mr. Lieutenant,” said he, “shall I account him a rascal that shall do me this day so singular a benefit? Nay, I assure you, were it cloth-of-gold I should think it well bestowed on him, as St. Cyprian did, who gave his executioners thirty pieces of gold.”

Yet, for friendship's sake, he yielded to the other's persuasions, and consented to change his gown for a plain one of frieze, and, to make amends to the executioner, sent him from his poor store a piece of gold.

“He was, therefore, brought about nine of the clock by Mr. Lieutenant out of the Tower, his beard being long, which fashion he had never before used, his face pale and

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lean, carrying in his hands a red cross, casting his eyes often towards Heaven."

And now as with his feeble steps, resembling those of an old man, he passed with his armed guard by the house of a good woman, she, like another Veronica, seeing him led to his Calvary, offered him out a cup of wine. But he refused to drink, saying:

"Christ at His Passion drank no wine, but gall and vinegar."

By and by, while taking this last short journey of his life's glorious career, he again met with the same citizen of Westminster whom he had freed from his temptation to despair that time he was Chancellor. After Sir Thomas More's imprisonment, being unable to come to him, the man's trouble had returned so that he was tempted to take his own life. Now, hearing of what was that day to befall, he took up his position on the road where he knew Sir Thomas was to pass, and running up to him again begged the help of his prayers.

"Go and pray for me, and I will carefully pray for you," said Sir Thomas; and the

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man went away comforted, and remained full of hope ever after.

“Being now brought to the scaffold,” the martyr’s great-grandson continues, “where he was to be beheaded, it seemed to him so weak that it was ready to fall, wherefore he said merrily to Mr. Lieutenant:

“‘I pray you, Sir, see me safe up, and for my coming down let me shift for myself.’

“When he began to speak a little to the people, which were in great troops there to hear and see him, he was interrupted by the sheriff. Wherefore briefly he desired all the people to pray for him, and to bear witness with him that he there died in and for the Faith of the Holy Catholic Church, a faithful servant both of God and the King. Having spoken but this, he kneeled down, and pronounced with great devotion the *Miserere* psalm (his favourite psalm that he was used to say every evening with his children in his oratory at home); which, being ended, he cheerfully rose up, and the executioner asking him forgiveness, he kissed him, saying:

“‘Thou wilt do me this day a greater benefit than ever any mortal man can be

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able to give me; pluck up thy spirit, man, and be not afraid to do thy office; my neck is very short, take heed, therefore, that thou strike not awry for saving thy honesty.'

“When the executioner would have covered his eyes, he said, ‘I will cover them myself’; and presently he did so, with a cloth that he had brought with him for the purpose; then, laying his head upon the block, he bade the executioner stay until he had removed aside his beard, saying that that had never committed any treason. So with great alacrity and spiritual joy, he received the fatal blow of the axe, which no sooner had severed the head from the body, but his soul was carried by Angels into everlasting glory, where a crown of martyrdom was put upon him, which can never fade nor decay.” . . .

And so meeting death as a good friend, and serene and joyous as a child entering his Father's house, Blessed Thomas More quitted this life and looked upon the face of the King and Crowner of Martyrs.

\* \* \* \* \*

The head of the martyr was placed on a

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pole on London Bridge as though it had been that of a traitor, side by side with the head of Blessed John Fisher. His body was given up to his daughter, who, with loving, reverent hands laid it to rest in the Chapel of St. Peter in the Tower.

Cresacre More tells how when she came to bury him she had forgotten to bring a winding-sheet, and could not buy one, for she had given all her money in alms to the poor, on behalf of her father's soul. Her maid, Dorothy Harris, and Margaret Clements were with her, but they had not a penny of money amongst them: "wherefore Mrs. Harris her maid went to the next draper's shop, and agreeing upon the price, made as though she would look for some money in her purse, and then try whether they would trust her or no; and she found in her purse the same sum, for which they had agreed upon, not one penny over or under; though she knew before certainly that she had not one cross (*i.e.* coin) about her." This thing was reported as a miracle by the three women.

Henry felt some remorse, and suffered a

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passing fit of melancholy when the execution was accomplished, and the news of it was brought to him, and he cried in anger to Anne Boleyn, "Thou art the cause of this man's death." He had need to try to justify his conduct in foreign courts, because of the outcry raised against him for the slaughter of the Carthusian monks, the Cardinal, and now, a fortnight after the last, Sir Thomas More.

Cardinal Pole wrote: "Strangers and men of other nations that never had seen him in their lives, received so much grief at the hearing of his death, that, reading the story thereof, they could not refrain from weeping, bewailing an unknown person, only famous unto them for his worthy acts." . . . In both Rome and Paris there was great public mourning for Cardinal Fisher and Sir Thomas More.

Henry's grief was so short and little sincere that he did not cease his pitiless behaviour to the wife and children of his old and faithful friend, whose head looked down on him from London Bridge, as he took his daily voyage on the river from Whitehall to Greenwich.

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Others in plenty found strength to suffer courageously and follow the noble examples set them for the same cause of the supremacy. And now, after some weeks, the impaled heads of Blessed John Fisher and Thomas More were to be cast into the river to make room for further victims. But Margaret Roper's heroic love found a way to save the dear sacred head of her murdered father from this last sacrilege.

Learning when it should be taken down, she came alone to the bridge, and waited till the hangman should come to obey his orders. There is a story which tells that as her boat passed under the bridge the head fell into her lap by force of her longing prayers. It is true she obtained possession of it, bribing the man to give it into her keeping, and then rowed again up the river to Chelsea with her sad burden. The kind face that would never smile upon her again as it had often done upon that same journey, was almost as beautiful as in life, and the gray hair and beard had regained a reddish-brown colour.

Margaret was not allowed to keep the

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dear treasure which she embalmed with spices, intending it to be buried with her. The Council called her to account for her act, and, perhaps in obedience to their orders, she buried it in the Roper family vault in St. Dunstan's Church, Canterbury, the city of his patron saint, in whose steps he had so closely followed.

The bloodstained shirt in which he suffered was carefully kept by Margaret Clements, who took it with her to Douay in Flanders, when she and her husband became exiles for the Old Religion. She also kept his hair-shirt which is now at the Convent of the Augustinian Canonesses, near Newton Abbot in Devonshire; for this Community was founded by her daughter Mother Margaret Clements, at Louvain, and when the nuns returned to England in 1796, they brought the precious relic back with them.

The house Blessed Thomas More built at Chelsea stood for more than two hundred years, passing through the hands of many owners, numbering among them the great Lord Burleigh. It was rebuilt in 1619, being known as Beaufort House on becoming the

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property of the Duke of Beaufort, and was totally pulled down in 1749 by Sir Hans Sloane. From him Count Zinzendorf bought a portion of the garden to be used as the Moravian burying-ground, which is entered by an ancient gateway which once formed the entrance to the back garden and stables of Sir Thomas. The ground is divided by paths into four grass-grown plots, where men and women, married and unmarried, stand in their upright coffins in expectation of the Resurrection. Part of the original garden wall remains, made of the same kind of narrow bricks that are to be seen in the More Chapel in the Old Church. Some of the trees still standing are said to have been planted by the martyr himself, including a mulberry tree in the garden of the Convent of Adoration Réparatrice, which covers part of the site.

It is twenty-one years ago since he and Blessed John Fisher received the Honours of the Blessed.

“O God, by whose mercy the blessed martyr, Thomas, in the midst of the allurements of the world cheerfully and courage-

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ously embraced Thy cross, together with sufferings of prison and death, grant, we beseech Thee, by his example and intercession, that we may joyfully fight in behalf of faith and justice, and attain to everlasting bliss.”









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