

THE LIFE OF SIR THOMAS MORE  
C. 1556  
BY WILLIAM ROPER

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*More's merit*

Forasmuch as Sir Thomas More, knight, sometime Lord Chancellor of England, a man of singular virtue and of a clear unspotted conscience, as witnesseth Erasmus, more pure and white than the whitest snow, and of such an angelical wit as England, he saith, never  
5 had the like before, nor never shall again, universally, as well in the laws of our own realm (a study in effect able to occupy the whole life of a man), as in all other sciences, right well studied, was in his days accounted a man worthy of perpetual famous memory:

*Why Roper is qualified to write*

I, William Roper, though most unworthy, his son-in-law by marriage to his eldest daughter,<sup>1</sup> knowing at this day no one man living that of him and of his doings understood so much as myself, for that I was continually resident in his house by the space of sixteen years and more, thought it therefore my part to set forth such matters touching his life as I could at this present call to remembrance. Among  
10 which things, very many notable things (not meet<sup>2</sup> to have been forgotten) through negligence and long continuance of time are slipped out of my mind. Yet, to the intent the same should not all utterly perish, I have at the desire of divers worshipful friends of mine (though  
15 very far from the grace and worthiness of them, nevertheless as far forth as my mean wit, memory and knowledge would serve me) declared so much thereof as in my poor judgment seemed worthy to be remembered.

*Early education*

This Sir Thomas More, after he had been brought up in the Latin tongue at St. Anthony's in London, was by his father's<sup>3</sup> procurement received into the house of the right reverend, wise, and learned prelate Cardinal Morton,<sup>4</sup> where, though he was young of years, yet would  
25

*At Morton's court, c. 1489*

1. Roper married Margaret More on July 2, 1521.

2. *meet* – proper, fitting

3. John More (1451?-1530)

4. Lord Chancellor of England, 1487-1500; Archbishop of Canterbury, 1486-1500; made a cardinal in 1493. More entered Morton's household in 1490, at Lambeth Palace.

<p>he at Christmas-tide suddenly sometimes 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. In whose wit and towardness<sup>1</sup> the Cardinal, much delighting, would often say of him unto the nobles that divers times dined with him, "This child here waiting at the table, whosoever shall live to see it, will prove a marvelous man."</p> <p>Whereupon for his better furtherance in learning, he placed him at Oxford, where, when he was both in the Greek<sup>2</sup> and Latin tongue sufficiently instructed, he was then for the study of the law of the realm put to an Inn of Chancery called New Inn, where for his time he very well prospered. And from thence was admitted to Lincoln's Inn, with very small allowance, continuing there his study until he was made and accounted a worthy utter barrister.</p> <p>After this, to his great commendation, he read for a good space a public lecture of St. Augustine's <i>De Civitate Dei</i>, in the Church of St. Lawrence in the old Jewry, whereunto there resorted Doctor Grocyn an excellent cunning<sup>3</sup> man, and all the chief learned of the City of London.</p> <p>Then was he made reader at Furnival's Inn, so remaining by the space of three years and more.</p> <p>After which time he gave himself to devotion and prayer in the Charterhouse of London, religiously living there, without vow, about four years, until he resorted to the house of one Master Colt, a gentleman of Essex, that had oft invited him thither, having three daughters, whose honest conversation and virtuous education provoked him there specially to set his affection. And albeit his mind most served him to the second daughter, for that he thought her the fairest and best favored, yet when he considered that it would be both great grief and some shame also to the eldest to see her younger sister in marriage preferred before her, he then of a certain pity framed his</p>	<p><i>Skill in acting</i></p> <p>5</p> <p><i>Morton's prediction</i></p> <p><i>Oxford, c. 1491</i></p> <p>10</p> <p><i>New Inn, c. 1493</i></p> <p><i>Lincoln's Inn, c. 1496</i></p> <p>15</p> <p><i>More's lectures on Augustine, c. 1501</i></p> <p>20</p> <p><i>Charterhouse, c. 1501-1504</i></p> <p>25</p> <p>30</p> <p><i>Marries Jane Colt, 1505</i></p>
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1. *towardness* – natural aptitude and good disposition

2. More actually began his study of Greek later, around 1501. See *Selected Letters*, p. 2.

3. *cunning* – learned

fancy towards her, and soon after married her, never the more discontinuing his study of the law at Lincoln's Inn, but applying still the same until he was called to the bench, and had read<sup>1</sup> twice, which is as often as ordinarily any judge of the law doth read.

*More's home at  
Bucklersbury*

5 Before which time he had placed himself and his wife at Bucklersbury in London, where he had by her three daughters and one son, in virtue and learning brought up from their youth, whom he would often exhort to take virtue and learning for their meat, and play for their sauce.

*More enters  
Parliament, 1504*

10 Who, ere ever he had been reader in Court, was in the latter time of King Henry VII made a burgess of the Parliament, wherein there were by the King demanded (as I have heard reported) about three-fifteenths<sup>2</sup> for the marriage of his eldest daughter, that then should be the Scottish queen. At the last debating whereof he made such

*An encounter  
with the King*

15 arguments and reasons there against, that the King's demands thereby were clean overthrown. So that one of the King's Privy Chamber named Master Tyler, being present thereat, brought word to the King out of the Parliament House that a beardless boy had disappointed all his purpose. Whereupon the King, conceiving great indignation towards him, could not be satisfied until he had some way revenged it. And, forasmuch as he nothing having, nothing could lose, His Grace devised a causeless quarrel against his father, keeping him in the Tower until he had made him pay to him an hundred pounds fine.

*Almost entrapped  
by Bishop Fox*

20 Shortly thereupon it fortun'd that this Sir Thomas More, coming in a suit to Doctor Fox, Bishop of Winchester (one of the King's Privy Council), the Bishop called him aside, and, pretending great favor towards him, promised him that, if he would be ruled by him, he would not fail into the King's favor again to restore him, meaning (as it was after conjectured) to cause him thereby to confess his of-  
30 fense against the King, whereby His Highness might with the better

1. *read* – gave series of lectures

2. This is a property tax that amounted to three-fifteenths of the property's value.

color have occasion to revenge his displeasure against him. But when he came from the Bishop, he fell in communication with one Master Whitford, his familiar friend, then chaplain to that Bishop, and after a father of Sion,<sup>1</sup> and showed him what the Bishop had said unto him, desiring to have his advice therein, who for the Passion of God, prayed 5 him in no wise to follow his counsel. "For my lord, my master," quoth he, "to serve the King's turn, will not stick<sup>2</sup> to agree to his own father's death." So Sir Thomas More returned to the Bishop no more. And had not the King soon after died,<sup>3</sup> he was determined to have gone over the sea, thinking that, being in the King's indignation, he could 10 not live in England without great danger.

After this he was made one of the under-sheriffs of London, by which office and his learning together (as I have heard him say), he gained without grief not so little as four hundred pounds<sup>4</sup> by the year, since there was at that time in none of the prince's courts of the laws 15 of this realm any matter of importance in controversy wherein he was not with the one part of counsel. Of whom, for his learning, wisdom, knowledge, and experience, men had such estimation that, before he came to the service of King Henry VIII, at the suit and instance of the English merchants, he was by the King's consent made 20 twice ambassador in certain great causes between them and merchants of the Steelyard: whose wise and discreet dealing therein, to his high commendation, coming to the King's understanding, provoked His Highness to cause Cardinal Wolsey (then Lord Chancellor) to procure him to his service. And albeit the Cardinal, according to the King's 25 request, earnestly travailed<sup>5</sup> with him therefore, among many other his persuasions alleging unto him how dear his service must needs be unto His Majesty, which could not, with his honor, with less than he should yearly lose thereby, seem to recompense him. Yet he, loath to change his estate, made such means to the King, by the Cardinal, to 30 the contrary, that His Grace, for that time, was well satisfied.

*More appointed Under-sheriff of London, 1510-1518*

*Legal successes and reputation*

*Ambassador for English merchants, 1515 and 1517*

*More avoids working for the King*

1. Sion was a Bridgettine monastery in Middlesex.

2. *stick* – delay, hesitate

3. April 1509.

4. An ordinary worker earned roughly ten pounds a year.

5. *travailed* – labored

Now happened there after this, a great ship of his that then was Pope to arrive at Southampton, which the King claiming for a forfeiture, the Pope's ambassador, by suit unto His Grace, obtained that he might for his master the Pope have counsel learned in the laws of this realm, and the matter in his own presence (being himself a singular<sup>1</sup> civilian) in some public place to be openly heard and discussed. At which time there could none of our law be found so meet to be of counsel with this ambassador as Sir Thomas More, who could report to the ambassador in Latin all the reasons and arguments by the learned counsel on both sides alleged. Upon this the counselors of either part, in presence of the Lord Chancellor and other the judges, in the Star Chamber had audience accordingly. Where Sir Thomas More not only declared to the ambassador the whole effect of all their opinions, but also, in defense of the Pope's side, argued so learnedly himself, that both was the aforesaid forfeiture to the Pope restored, and himself among all the hearers, for his upright and commendable demeanor therein, so greatly renowned, that for no entreaty would the King from thenceforth be induced any longer to forbear his service. At whose first entry thereunto he made him Master of the Requests (having then no better room<sup>2</sup> void<sup>3</sup>) and within a month after, knight and one of his Privy Council.

And so from time to time was he by the Prince advanced, continuing in his singular favor and trusty service twenty years and above, a good part whereof used the King upon holy-days, when he had done his own devotions, to send for him into his travers,<sup>4</sup> and there sometime in matters of astronomy, geometry, divinity, and such other faculties, and sometimes of his worldly affairs, to sit and confer with him. And other whiles would he, in the night, have him up into his leads,<sup>5</sup> there for to consider with him the diversities, courses, motions, and operations of the stars and planets. And because he was of a

*Counsel to Pope's  
ambassador,  
1517*

*Henry insists on  
More's service*

*Henry delights in  
More's company*

1. *singular* – of exceptional status

2. *room* – office

3. *void* – empty

4. *travers* – small screened-off portion of a larger room

5. *leads* – flat roof covered with lead

pleasant disposition, it pleased the King and the Queen, after the Council had supped, at the time of their supper, for their pleasure, commonly to call for him to be merry with them. Whom when he perceived so much in his talk to delight, that he could not once in a month get leave to go home to his wife and children (whose company he most desired) and to be absent from the Court two days together, but that he should be thither sent for again, he, much misliking this restraint of his liberty, began thereupon somewhat to dissemble his nature, and so by little and little from his former accustomed mirth to disuse<sup>1</sup> himself, that he was of them from thenceforth at such seasons no more so ordinarily sent for. 5 10

*More merrier at home*

*More dissembles*

Then died one Master Weston, Treasurer of the Exchequer, whose office, after his death, the King of his own offer, without any asking, freely gave unto Sir Thomas More.<sup>2</sup>

In the fourteenth year of His Grace's reign was there a Parliament holden, whereof Sir Thomas More was chosen Speaker, who, being very loath to take that room<sup>3</sup> upon him, made an oration (not now extant)<sup>4</sup> to the King's Highness for his discharge thereof; whereunto when the King would not consent, he spake unto His Grace in form following: 15 20

*Appointed Speaker of the House, 1523*

Since I perceive, most redoubled Sovereign, that it standeth not with your high pleasure to reform this election and cause it to be changed, but have by the mouth of the most reverend father in God, the legate, your Highness's Chancellor, thereunto given your most royal assent, and have of your benignity determined, far above that I may bear, to enable me and for this office to repute me meet<sup>5</sup> rather than you should seem to impute unto your Commons that they have unmeetly chosen, I am therefore, and always shall be, ready obediently to conform myself to the accomplishment of your high commandment, in my most humble wise beseeching your most 25 30

*More is ready to obey*

1. *disuse* – disengage

2. Here Roper errs. More was made undertreasurer of the Exchequer, and his predecessor was John Castle, not Weston.

3. *room* – office

4. See Edward Hall's summary of that speech, p. 279.

5. *repute me meet* – declare me qualified

noble Majesty that I may with your Grace's favor, before I farther enter thereunto, make mine humble intercession unto your Highness for two lowly petitions: the one privately concerning myself, the other the whole assembly of your Common House.

*A request for himself*

5 For myself, gracious Sovereign, that if it mishap me in anything hereafter that is on the behalf of your Commons in your high presence to be declared, to mistake my message, and in the lack of good utterance, by my misrehearsal,<sup>1</sup> to pervert or impair their prudent instructions, it may then like your most noble Majesty, of your  
10 abundant grace, with the eye of your accustomed pity, to pardon my simpleness, giving me leave to repair again to the Common House, and there to confer with them, and to take their substantial advice what thing and in what wise I shall on their behalf utter and speak before your noble Grace, to the intent their prudent devices<sup>2</sup>  
15 and affairs be not by my simpleness and folly hindred or impaired: which thing, if it should so mishap, as it were well likely to mishap in me, if your gracious benignity relieved not my oversight, it could not fail to be during my life a perpetual grudge and heaviness to my heart, the help and remedy whereof, in manner aforesaid remembered, is, most gracious Sovereign, my first lowly suit and humble  
20 petition unto your most noble Grace.

*A request for the Commons*

Mine other humble request, most excellent Prince, is this: forasmuch as there be of your Commons, here by your high commandment assembled for your Parliament, a great number which are,  
25 after the accustomed manner, appointed in the Common House to treat and advise of the common affairs among themselves apart, and albeit, most dear liege Lord, that according to your prudent advice, by your honorable writs everywhere declared, there hath been as due diligence used in sending up to your Highness's Court  
30 of Parliament the most discreet persons out of every quarter that men could esteem meet thereunto, whereby it is not to be doubted

1. *misrehearsal* – misrepresentation

2. *devices* – opinions

but that there is a very substantial assembly of right wise and poli-  
 tic persons; yet, most victorious Prince, since among so many wise  
 men neither is every man wise alike, nor among so many men, like  
 well-witted, every man like well-spoken, and it often happeneth  
 that, likewise as much folly is uttered with painted polished speech, 5  
 so many, boisterous and rude in language, see deep indeed, and  
 give right substantial counsel; and since also in matters of great  
 importance, the mind is often so occupied in the matter that a man  
 rather studieth what to say than how, by reason whereof the wisest  
 man and the best spoken in a whole country fortuneth among,<sup>1</sup> 10  
 while his mind is fervent in the matter, somewhat to speak in such  
 wise as he would afterward wish to have been uttered otherwise,  
 and yet no worse will had when he spake it, than he hath when he  
 would so gladly change it; therefore, most gracious Sovereign, con-  
 sidering that in your High Court of Parliament is nothing entreated 15  
 but matter of weight and importance concerning your realm and  
 your own royal estate, it could not fail to let<sup>2</sup> and put to silence  
 from the giving of their advice and counsel many of your discreet  
 Commons, to the great hindrance of the common affairs, except  
 that every of your Commons were utterly discharged of all doubt 20  
 and fear how anything that it should happen them to speak, should  
 happen of your Highness to be taken. And in this point, though  
 your well known and proved benignity putteth every man in right  
 good hope, yet such is the weight of the matter, such is the rever-  
 end dread that the timorous hearts of your natural subjects con- 25  
 ceive toward your High Majesty, our most redoubled King and  
 undoubted Sovereign, that they cannot in this point find them-  
 selves satisfied, except your gracious bounty therein declared put  
 away the scruple of their timorous minds, and animate and encour-  
 age them, and put them out of doubt. It may therefore like your 30  
 most abundant Grace, our most benign and godly King, to give to

*Request for  
freedom of speech*

1. *fortuneth among* – now and then

1. *let* – hinder

all your Commons here assembled your most gracious licence and  
 pardon, freely, without doubt of your dreadful displeasure, every  
 man to discharge his conscience, and boldly in everything incident  
 among us to declare his advice, and whatsoever happen any man to  
 5 say, that it may like your noble Majesty, or your inestimable good-  
 ness, to take all in good part, interpreting every man's words, how  
 uncunningly<sup>1</sup> soever they be couched, to proceed yet of good zeal  
 towards the profit of your realm and honor of your royal person,  
 the prosperous estate and preservation whereof, most excellent  
 10 Sovereign, is the thing which we all, your most humble loving sub-  
 jects, according to the most bounden duty of our natural allegiance,  
 most highly desire and pray for.

At this Parliament Cardinal Wolsey found himself much grieved  
 15 with the Burgesses thereof, for that nothing was so soon done or  
 spoken therein but that it was immediately blown abroad in every  
 alehouse. It fortuned at that Parliament a very great subsidy to be  
 demanded, which the Cardinal fearing would not pass the Common  
 House, determined for the furtherance thereof to be there personally  
 20 present himself. Before whose coming, after long debating there,  
 whether it were better but with a few of his lords (as the most opin-  
 ion of the House was) or with his whole train royally to receive him  
 there amongst them.

*Wolsey to violate  
 the ancient liberty  
 of the House,  
 1523*

*More advises the  
 Commons*

“Masters,” quoth Sir Thomas More, “forasmuch as my Lord Cardi-  
 25 nal lately, you wot<sup>2</sup> well, laid to our charge the lightness of our tongues  
 for things uttered out of this House, it shall not in my mind be amiss  
 with all his pomp to receive him, with his maces, his pillars, his pole-  
 axes, his crosses, his hat, and Great Seal, too – to the intent, if he find  
 the like fault with us hereafter, we may be the bolder from ourselves  
 30 to lay the blame on those that his Grace bringeth hither with him.”  
 Whereunto the House wholly agreeing, he was received accordingly.

1. *uncunningly* – unskillfully

2. *wot* – know

Where, after that he had in solemn oration by many reasons proved how necessary it was the demand there moved to be granted, and further showed that less would not serve to maintain the Prince's purpose, he, seeing the company sitting still silent, and thereunto nothing answering, and contrary to his expectation showing in themselves towards his request no towardness of inclination, said unto them: "Masters, you have many wise and learned men among you, and since I am from the King's own person sent hither unto you for the preservation of yourselves and the realm, I think it meet you give me some reasonable answer." Whereat, every man holding his peace, then began he to speak to one Master Marney (after Lord Marney): "How say you," quoth he, "Master Marney?" Who making no answer neither, he severally asked the same question of divers others accounted the wisest of the company.

*Wolsey's address*

5

10

*Silence*

To whom, when none of them all would give so much as one word, being before agreed, as the custom was, by their Speaker to make answer, "Masters," quoth the Cardinal, "unless it be the manner of your House, as of likelihood it is, by the mouth of your Speaker, whom you have chosen for trusty and wise, as indeed he is, in such cases to utter your minds, here is without doubt a marvelous obstinate silence."

15

20

*An attempt at intimidation*

And thereupon he required an answer of Master Speaker, who first reverently upon his knees excusing the silence of the House, abashed at the presence of so noble a personage, able to amaze the wisest and best learned in a realm, and after by many probable arguments proving that for them to make answer was it neither expedient nor agreeable with the ancient liberty of the House, in conclusion for himself showed that though they had all with their voices trusted him, yet except every one of them could put into his one head all their several wits, he alone in so weighty a matter was unmeet to make his Grace answer.

25

30

*More's response*

Whereupon the Cardinal, displeased with Sir Thomas More, that had not in this Parliament in all things satisfied his desire, suddenly arose and departed.

*Wolsey seeks  
revenge*

5 And after the Parliament ended, in his gallery at Whitehall in Westminster, uttered unto him his griefs, saying, "Would to God you had been at Rome, Master More, when I made you Speaker." "Your Grace not offended, so would I too, my lord," quoth he. And to wind

*More turns the  
conversation*

10 such quarrels out of the Cardinal's head, he began to talk of that gallery, and said, "I like this gallery of yours, my lord, much better than your gallery at Hampton Court." Wherewith so wisely brake he off the Cardinal's displeasent talk that the Cardinal at that present, as it seemed, wist<sup>1</sup> not what more to say to him. But for the revengement

*Wolsey strikes  
back*

15 of his displeasure, counseled the King to send him ambassador into Spain, commending to His Highness his wisdom, learning, and meetness for that voyage; and the difficulty of the cause considered, none was there, he said, so well able to serve His Grace therein. Which, when the King had broken to Sir Thomas More, and that he had declared unto His Grace how unfit a journey it was for him, the nature of the country and disposition of his complexion so disagreeing  
20 together that he should never be likely to do His Grace acceptable service there, knowing right well that if His Grace sent him thither, he should send him to his grave, but showing himself nevertheless ready, according to his duty (all were it with the loss of his life), to fulfill His Grace's pleasure in that behalf, the King, allowing well<sup>2</sup> his  
25 answer, said unto him, "It is not our meaning, Master More, to do you hurt, but to do you good would we be glad; we will this purpose devise upon some other, and employ your service otherwise."

*Wolsey foiled*

*Chancellor of  
Lancaster, 1525*

30 And such entire favor did the King bear him that he made him Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, upon the death of Sir Richard Wingfield, who had that office before.

And for the pleasure he took in his company, would His Grace

1. *wist* – knew

2. *allowing well* – accepting as satisfactory

suddenly sometimes come home to his house at Chelsea, to be merry with him; whither on a time, unlooked for, he came to dinner to him, and after dinner, in a fair garden of his, walked with him by the space of an hour, holding his arm about his neck. As soon as His Grace was gone, I, rejoicing thereat, told Sir Thomas More how happy he was, whom the King had so familiarly entertained, as I never had seen him to do to any other except Cardinal Wolsey, whom I saw his Grace once walk with, arm in arm. "I thank our Lord, son," quoth he, "I find His Grace my very good lord indeed, and I believe he doth as singularly favor 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 could win him a castle in France (for then was there war between us) it should not fail to go."

5 *Henry visits Chelsea*

10

*"My head . . . should not fail to go," c. 1524*

This Sir Thomas More, among all other his virtues, was of such meekness that if it had fortun'd him with any learned man resorting to him from Oxford, Cambridge, or elsewhere, as there did divers,<sup>1</sup> some for desire of his acquaintance, some for the famous report of his wisdom and learning, and some for suits of the universities, to have entered into argument (wherein few were comparable unto him) and so far to have discoursed with them therein that he might perceive they could not, without some inconvenience, hold out much further disputation against him, then, lest he should discomfort them, as he that sought not his own glory, but rather would seem conquered than to discourage students in their studies, ever showing himself more desirous to learn than to teach, would he by some witty device courteously break off into some other matter, and give over.

15

20

*More's love for dispute...*

25

*in a courteous manner*

Of whom, for his wisdom and learning, had the King such an opinion, that at such time as he attended upon His Highness, taking his progress either to Oxford or Cambridge, where he was received with very eloquent orations, His Grace would always assign him, as one

30

1. *divers* – on different occasions

that was prompt and ready therein, *ex tempore* to make answer thereunto. Whose manner was, whensoever he had occasion, either here or beyond the sea, to be in any university, not only to be present at the readings and disputations there commonly used, but also learnedly to dispute among them himself.

*Ambassador,  
1521, 1527*

Who, being Chancellor of the Duchy, was made ambassador twice, joined in commission with Cardinal Wolsey, once to the Emperor Charles into Flanders, the other time to the French King into France.

*Complaints  
against More*

Not long after this, the Water-bailiff of London, sometime his servant, hearing, where he had been at dinner, certain merchants liberally to rail against his old master, waxed so discontented therewith that he hastily came to him and told him what he had heard. "And were I you, sir," quoth he, "in such favor and authority with my Prince as you are, such men surely should not be suffered so villainously and falsely to misreport and slander me. Wherefore I would wish you to call them before you, and to their shame for their lewd malice punish them."

*Seeing enemies as  
friends*

Who, smiling upon him, said, "Why, Master Water-bailiff, would you have me punish those by whom I receive more benefit than by you all that be my friends? Let them, a God's name, speak as lewdly as they list of me, and shoot never so many arrows at me, as long as they do not hit me, what am I the worse? But if they should once hit me, then would it indeed not a little trouble me. Howbeit I trust, by God's help, there shall none of them all once be able to touch me. I have more cause, I assure thee, Master Water-bailiff, to pity them than to be angry with them." Such fruitful communication had he oftentimes with his familiar friends.

*His concern for  
integrity*

So on a time, walking with me along the Thames-side at Chelsea, in talking of other things he said unto me, "Now would to our Lord, son Roper, upon condition that three things were well established in Christendom, I were put into a sack, and here presently cast into the Thames."

“What great things be those, sir,” quoth I, “that should move you so to wish?”

“Wouldst thou know what they be, son Roper?” quoth he.

“Yea, marry, with good will, sir, if it please you,” quoth I.

“In faith, son, they be these,” said he. “The first is, that where the most part of Christian princes be at mortal war, they were all at an 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 a perfect uniformity of religion. The third, that where the King’s matter of his marriage is now come in question, it were to the glory of God and quietness of all parties brought to a good conclusion.” Whereby, as I could gather, he judged that otherwise it would be a disturbance to a great part of Christendom.

Thus did it by his doings throughout the whole course of his life appear that all his travail and pains, without respect of earthly commodities, either to himself, or any of his, were only upon the service of God, the prince, and the realm, wholly bestowed and employed, whom I heard in his later time to say that he never asked the King himself the value of one penny.

As Sir Thomas More’s custom was daily, if he were at home, besides his private prayers, with his children to say the Seven Psalms, litany and suffrages following, so was his guise<sup>1</sup> nightly, before he went to bed, with his wife, children, and household, to go to his chapel and there upon his knees ordinarily to say certain psalms and collects with them. And because he was desirous for godly purposes sometime to be solitary, and sequester himself from worldly company, a good distance from his mansion house builded he a place called the New Building, wherein there was a chapel, a library, and a gallery, in which, as his use was upon other days to occupy himself in prayer and study together, so on the Friday there usually continued he from morning till evening, spending his time only in devout prayers and spiritual

1. *guise* – custom

exercises.

And to provoke his wife and children to the desire of heavenly things, he would sometimes use these words unto them:

It is now no mastery<sup>1</sup> for you children to go to heaven, for every-  
 5 body 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. But if you live the time that no man  
 will give you good counsel, nor no man will give you good ex-  
 ample, when you shall see virtue punished and vice rewarded, if  
 10 you will then stand fast and firmly stick to God, upon pain of my  
 life, though you be but half good, God will allow you for whole  
 good.

If his wife or any of his children had been diseased or troubled, he  
 would say unto them: "We may not look at our pleasure to go to  
 15 heaven in featherbeds; it is not the way, for our Lord himself went  
 thither with great pain and by many tribulations, which was the path  
 wherein he walked thither, for the servant may not look to be in bet-  
 ter case than his master."

And as he would in this sort persuade them to take their troubles  
 20 patiently, so would he in like sort teach them to withstand the devil  
 and his temptations valiantly, saying,

Whosoever will mark the devil and his temptations shall find him  
 therein much like to an ape. For like as an ape, not well looked  
 unto, will be busy and bold to do shrewd turns,<sup>2</sup> and contrariwise,  
 25 being spied, will suddenly leap back and adventure no farther, so  
 the devil, finding 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 have thoroughly  
 brought him. But on the other side, if he see a man with diligence  
 30 persevere to prevent and withstand his temptations, he waxeth so  
 weary that in conclusion he utterly forsaketh him. For as the devil

1. *mastery* – achievement, victory

2. *shrewd turns* – harmful tricks

*Desiring heavenly  
things*

*Of heaven and  
featherbeds*

*Devil as an ape*

of disposition is a spirit of so high a pride that he cannot abide to be mocked,<sup>1</sup> so is he of nature so envious that he feareth any more to assault him, lest he should thereby not only catch a foul fall himself, but also minister to the man more matter of merit.

Thus delighted he evermore not only in virtuous exercises to be occupied himself, but also to exhort his wife, children and household to embrace and follow the same. 5

To whom, for his notable virtue and godliness, God showed, as it seemed, a manifest miraculous token of his special favor towards him, at such time as my wife, as many other that year were, was sick of the sweating sickness; who, lying in so great extremity of that disease as by no invention or devices that physicians in such cases commonly use (of whom she had divers both expert, wise, and well-learned, then continually attendant about her) she could be kept from sleep, so that both physicians and all other there despaired of her recovery, and gave her over; her father, as he that most entirely tendered her, being in no small heaviness for her, by prayer at God's hand sought to get her remedy. 10 15

*Daughter  
Margaret near  
death, 1528*

Whereupon going up, after his usual manner, into his foresaid New Building, there in his chapel, upon his knees, with tears most devoutly besought almighty God that it would like His goodness, unto whom nothing was impossible, if it were His blessed will, at his mediation to vouchsafe graciously to hear his humble petition. Where incontinent<sup>2</sup> came into his mind that a glister<sup>3</sup> should be the only way to help her. Which, when he told the physicians, they by and by<sup>4</sup> confessed that, if there were any hope of health, that was the very best help indeed, much marveling of themselves that they had not before remembered it. 20 25

*More's prayer*

Then was it immediately ministered unto her sleeping, which she could by no means have been brought unto waking. And albeit after that she was thereby thoroughly awaked, God's marks,<sup>5</sup> an evident 30

1. C. S. Lewis quotes this on the frontispiece of the *Screwtape Letters*.

2. *incontinent* – all of a sudden

3. *glister* – enema

4. *by and by* – immediately

5. Visible signs of the plague.

*Margaret's cure*

5

undoubted token of death, plainly appeared upon her, yet she, contrary to all their expectations, was, as it was thought, by her father's fervent prayer miraculously recovered, and at length again to perfect health restored. Whom, if it had pleased God at that time to have taken to His mercy, her father said he would never have meddled with worldly matters after.<sup>1</sup>

*Wolsey's desire to be pope. 1522*

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Now while Sir Thomas More was Chancellor of the Duchy, the See of Rome chanced to be void, which was cause of much trouble. For Cardinal Wolsey, a man very ambitious, and desirous (as good hope and likelihood he had) to aspire unto that dignity, perceiving himself of his expectation disappointed, by means of the Emperor Charles so highly commending one Cardinal Adrian, sometime his schoolmaster, to the cardinals of Rome, in the time of their election, for his virtue and worthiness, that thereupon was he chosen pope, who from Spain, where he was then resident, coming on foot to Rome, before his entry into the city, did put off his hose and shoes, barefoot and barelegged passing through the streets towards his palace, with such humbleness that all the people had him in great reverence. Cardinal Wolsey, I say, waxed so wood<sup>2</sup> therewith, that he studied to invent all

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*Wolsey plans revenge*

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This Cardinal therefore, not ignorant of the King's inconstant and mutable disposition, soon inclined to withdraw his devotion from his own most noble, virtuous, and lawful wife, Queen Katherine, aunt to the Emperor, upon every light occasion, and upon other, to her in nobility, wisdom, virtue, favor, and beauty, far incomparable, to fix his affection, meaning to make this his so light disposition an instrument to bring about his ungodly intent, devised to allure the King (then already, contrary to his mind, nothing less looking for, falling in love

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*Wolsey's responsibility for the divorce*

1. Years after this event, More wrote, "Love no child of thine own so tenderly but that thou couldst be content so to sacrifice it to God as Abraham was ready with Isaac" (*Complete Works*, vol. 13, p. 84).

2. *waxed so wood* – became so angry

with the Lady Anne Boleyn) to cast fantasy to one of the French King's sisters, which thing, because of the enmity and war that was at that time between the French King and the Emperor (whom, for the cause afore remembered, he mortally maligned) he was very desirous to procure. And for the better achieving thereof, [Wolsey] requested Longland, Bishop of Lincoln, and ghostly father to the King, to put a scruple into His Grace's head, that it was not lawful for him to marry his brother's wife, which the King, not sorry to hear of, opened it first to Sir Thomas More, whose counsel he required therein, showing him certain places of Scripture that somewhat seemed to serve his appetite; which, when he had perused, and thereupon, as one that had never professed the study of divinity, himself excused to be unmeet many ways to meddle with such matters. The King, not satisfied with this answer, so sore still pressed upon him therefore, that in conclusion he condescended to His Grace's motion. And further, foreasmuch as the case was of such importance as needed great advisement and deliberation, he besought His Grace of sufficient respite advisedly to consider of it. Wherewith the King, well contented, said unto him that Tunstall and Clark, Bishops of Durham and Bath, with other learned of his Privy Council, should also be dealers therein.

5 *The King's marriage*

*Henry seeks More's advice on the divorce, 1527*

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*More deliberates on the case*

So Sir Thomas More departing, conferred those places of Scripture with expositions of divers of the old holy doctors, and at his coming to the Court, in talking with His Grace of the aforesaid matter, he said,

To be plain with Your Grace, neither my Lord of Durham, nor my Lord of Bath, though I know them both to be wise, virtuous, learned, and honorable prelates, nor myself, with the rest of your Council, being all Your Grace's own servants, for your manifold benefits daily bestowed on us so most bounden to you, be, in my judgment, meet counselors for Your Grace herein. But if Your Grace mind to understand the truth, such counselors may you have devised, as

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*Why More and others are not fitting advisors*

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neither for respect of their own worldly commodity, nor for fear of your princely authority, will be inclined to deceive you.

To whom he named then St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and divers other old holy doctors, both Greeks and Latins, and moreover showed him what authorities he had gathered out of them, which although the King (as disagreeable with his desire) did not very well like of, yet were they by Sir Thomas More, who in all his communication with the King in that matter had always most discreetly behaved himself, so wisely tempered, that he both presently took them in good part, and oftentimes had thereof conference with him again.

After this were there certain questions among his Council propounded, whether the King needed in this case to have any scruple at all, and if he had, what way were best to be taken to deliver him of it. The most part of whom were of opinion that there was good cause of scruple, and that for discharging of it, suit were meet to be made to the See of Rome, where the King hoped by liberality to obtain his purpose, wherein, as it after appeared, he was far deceived.

Then was there for the trial and examination of this matrimony procured from Rome a commission in which Cardinal Campeggio and Cardinal Wolsey were joined commissioners, who for the determination thereof, sat at the Blackfriars in London where a libel<sup>1</sup> was put in for the annulling of the said matrimony, alleging the marriage between the King and Queen to be unlawful. And for proof of the marriage to be lawful, was there brought in a dispensation, in which, after divers disputations thereon holden, there appeared an imperfection, which, by an instrument or brief, upon search found in the Treasury of Spain, and sent to the commissioners in England, was supplied. And so should judgment have been given by the Pope accordingly, had not the King, upon intelligence thereof, before the same judgment, appealed to the next General Council. After whose application the Cardinal upon that matter sat no longer.

1. *libel* – plaintiff's statement

*More's art of candor*

*Commission appointed, 1528*

*King appeals to General Council*

It fortun'd before the matter of the said matrimony brought in question, when I, in talk with Sir Thomas More, of a certain joy commended unto him the happy estate of this realm that had so Catholic a prince that no heretic durst show his face, so virtuous and learned a clergy, so grave and sound a nobility, and so loving, obedient subjects, all in one faith agreeing together. 5

"Troth it is indeed, son Roper," quoth he, and in commending all degrees and estates of the same went far beyond me. "And yet, son Roper, pray God," said he, "that some of us, as high as we seem to sit upon the mountains, treading heretics under our feet like ants,<sup>1</sup> live not the day that we gladly would wish to be at league and composition with them, to let them have their churches quietly to themselves, so that they would be content to let us have ours quietly to ourselves." After that I had told him many considerations why he had no cause so to say. "Well," said he, "I pray God, son Roper, some of us live not till that day," showing me no reason why he should put any doubt therein. To whom I said, "By my troth, sir, it is very desperately spoken." That vile term, I cry God mercy, did I give him. Who, by these words, perceiving me in a fume, said merrily unto me, "Well, well, son Roper, it shall not be so, it shall not be so." Whom, in sixteen years and more being in house conversant with him, I could never perceive as much as once in a fume. 10 15 20

*Foreseeing the growth of heresy and the breakdown of Christendom*

*Sixteen years and never a fume*

But now to return again where I left. After the supplying of the imperfections of the dispensation sent (as before rehearsed) to the commissioners into England, the King, taking the matter for ended, and then meaning no farther to proceed in that matter, assigned the Bishop of Durham and Sir Thomas More to go [as] ambassadors to Cambrai, a place neither Imperial nor French, to treat a peace between the Emperor, the French King, and him. In the concluding whereof Sir Thomas More so worthily handled himself, procuring in our league far more benefits unto this realm than at that time by the 25 30

*Peace efforts, 1529*

1. Compare with *Complete Works*, vol. 15, p. 279, lines 11-12.

King or his Council was thought possible to be compassed, that for his good service in that voyage, the King, when he after made him Lord Chancellor, caused the Duke of Norfolk openly to declare unto the people (as you shall hear hereafter more at large) how much all  
5 England was bound unto him.

Now upon the coming home of the Bishop of Durham and Sir Thomas More from Cambrai, the King was as earnest in persuading Sir Thomas More to agree unto the matter of his marriage as before, by many and divers ways provoking him thereunto. For the which  
10 cause, as it was thought, he the rather soon after made him Lord Chancellor, and further declaring unto him that, though at his going over sea to Cambrai he was in utter despair thereof, yet he had conceived since some good hope to compass it. For albeit his marriage, being against the positive laws of the Church and the written laws of  
15 God, was helped by the dispensation, yet was there another thing found out of late, he said, whereby his marriage appeared to be so directly against the law of nature that it could in no wise by the Church be dispensable, as Doctor Stokesley (whom he then preferred to be Bishop of London, and in that case chiefly credited) was able to in-  
20 struct him, with whom he prayed him in that point to confer. But for all his conference with him, he saw nothing of such force as could induce him to change his opinion therein, which notwithstanding the Bishop showed in his report of him to the King's Highness so good and favorable that he said he found him in His Grace's cause very  
25 toward, and desirous to find some good matter wherewith he might truly serve His Grace to his contentment.

This Bishop Stokesley, being by the Cardinal not long before in the Star Chamber openly put to rebuke and awarded<sup>1</sup> to the Fleet, not brooking his contumelious usage, and thinking that forasmuch as the  
30 Cardinal, for lack of such forwardness in setting forth the King's divorce as His Grace looked for, was out of His Highness's favor, he

1. *awarded* – sentenced

had now a good occasion offered him to revenge his quarrel against him, further to incense the King's displeasure towards him, busily travailed to invent some colorable device for the King's furtherance in that behalf, which (as before is mentioned) he to His Grace revealed, hoping thereby to bring the King to the better liking of himself, and the more misliking of the Cardinal, whom His Highness therefore soon after of his office displaced, and to Sir Thomas More, the rather to move him to incline to his side, the same in his stead committed.

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*More replaces  
Wolsey as Lord  
Chancellor, 1529*

Who, between the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, being brought through Westminster Hall to his place in the Chancery, the Duke of Norfolk, in audience of all the people there assembled, showed that he was from the King himself straightly charged, by special commission, there openly, in the presence of them all, to make declaration how much all England was beholding to Sir Thomas More for his good service, and how worthy he was to have the highest room<sup>1</sup> in the realm, and how dearly His Grace loved and trusted him, for which, said the Duke, he had great cause to rejoice. Whereunto Sir Thomas More, among many other his humble and wise sayings not now in my memory, answered: that although he had good cause to take comfort of His Highness's singular favor towards him, that he had, far above his deserts, so highly commended him, to whom therefore he acknowledged himself most deeply bounden, yet, nevertheless, he must of his own part needs confess, that in all things by His Grace alleged he had done no more than was his duty, and further disabled himself as unmeet for that room, wherein, considering how wise and honorable a prelate had lately before taken so great a fall, he had, he said, thereof no cause to rejoice. And as they had before, on the King's behalf, charged him uprightly to minister indifferent justice to the people, without corruption or affection,<sup>2</sup> so did he likewise charge them again that, if they saw him, at any time, in any thing, digress from any part

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*Praise from  
Norfolk*

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*More's reply*

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1. *room* – office

2. *affection* – bias

of his duty in that honorable office, even as they would discharge their own duty and fidelity to God and the King, so should they not fail to disclose it to His Grace, who otherwise might have just occasion to lay his fault wholly to their charge.

*More's  
impartiality and  
justice*

5 While he was Lord Chancellor, being at leisure (as seldom he was), one of his sons-in-law<sup>1</sup> on a time said merrily unto him, "When Cardinal Wolsey was Lord Chancellor, not only divers of his privy chamber, but such also as were his doorkeepers got great gain." And since he had married one of his daughters, and gave still attendance upon  
10 him, he thought he might of reason look for some, where he indeed, because he was so ready himself to hear every man, poor and rich, and kept no doors shut from them, could find none, which was to him a great discourage. And whereas else, some for friendship, some for kindred, and some for profit, would gladly have had his further-  
15 ance in bringing them to his presence, if he should now take anything of them, he knew, he said, he should do them great wrong, for that they might do as much for themselves as he could do for them, which condition, although he thought in Sir Thomas More very commendable, yet to him, being his son, he found it nothing profitable.

20 When he had told him this tale: "You say well, son," quoth he. "I do not mislike that you are of conscience so scrupulous, but many other ways be there, son, that I may both do yourself good and pleasure your friend also. For sometime may I by my word stand your friend in stead, and sometime may I by my letter help him, or if he  
25 have a cause depending before me, at your request I may hear him before another. Or if his cause be not all the best, yet may I move the parties to fall to some reasonable end by arbitrament. Howbeit, this one thing, son, I assure thee on my faith, that if the parties will at my hands call for justice, then, all were it my father stood on the one side and the devil on the other, his cause being good, the devil should  
30 have right." So offered he his son, as he thought, he said, as much

*Justice for all,  
even the devil*

1. William Dounce, married to More's second daughter, Elizabeth, since Sept. 29, 1525.

favor as with reason he could require.

And that he would for no respect digress from justice, well appeared by a plain example of another of his sons-in-law called Master Heron.<sup>1</sup> For when he, having a matter before him in Chancery, and presuming too much of his favor, would by him in no wise be persuaded to agree to any indifferent order, then made he in conclusion a flat decree against him. 5

This Lord Chancellor used commonly every afternoon to sit in his open hall, to the intent that, if any persons had suit unto him, they might the more boldly come to his presence and there open their complaints before him, whose manner was also to read every bill himself ere he would award any subpoena, which bearing matter sufficient worthy a subpoena, would he set his hand unto or else cancel it. 10

*More's  
availability to all*

Whensoever he passed through Westminster Hall to his place in the Chancery by the court of the King's Bench, if his father, one of the judges thereof, had been sat ere he came, he would go into the same court, and there reverently kneeling down in the sight of them all, duly ask his father's blessing. And if it fortun'd that his father and he, at readings in Lincoln's Inn, met together, as they sometimes did, notwithstanding his high office, he would offer in argument the pre-eminence to his father, though he, for his office's sake, would refuse to take it. And for the better declaration of his natural affection towards his father, he not only, while he lay on his death-bed, according to his duty, oft-times with comfortable words most kindly came to visit him, but also at his departure out of the world with tears taking him about the neck, most lovingly kissed and embraced him, commending him into the merciful hands of Almighty God, and so departed from him. 15 20 25

*Reverence for a  
father*

And as few injunctions as he granted while he was Lord Chancellor, yet were they by some of the judges of the law misliked, which I understanding, declared the same to Sir Thomas More, who answered 30

*Dealing with  
disgruntled judges*

1. Married to More's third daughter, Cecily.

me that they should have little cause to find fault with him therefore. And thereupon caused he one Master Crooke, chief of the six clerks, to make a docket containing the whole number and causes of all such injunctions as either in his time had already passed, or at that present  
 5 depended in any of the King's Courts at Westminster before him. Which done, he invited all the judges to dine with him in the Council Chamber at Westminster, where, after dinner, when he had broken with them what complaints he had heard of his injunctions, and moreover showed them both the number of causes of every one of them,  
 10 in order, so plainly that, upon full debating of those matters, they were all enforced to confess that they, in like case, could have done no otherwise themselves. Then offered he this unto them: that if the justices of every court (unto whom the reformation of the rigor of the law, by reason of their office, most especially appertained) would,  
 15 upon reasonable considerations, by their own discretions (as they were, he thought, in conscience bound), mitigate and reform the rigor of the law themselves, there should from thenceforth by him no more injunctions be granted. Whereunto when they refused to condescend, then said he unto them, "Forasmuch as yourselves, my lords, drive me  
 20 to that necessity for awarding out injunctions to relieve the people's injury, you cannot hereafter any more justly blame me." After that he said secretly unto me, "I perceive, son, why they like not so to do, for they see that they may by the verdict of the jury cast off all quarrels from themselves upon them, which they account their chief defense,  
 25 and therefore am I compelled to abide the adventure of all such reports."

*What judges should do*

*Why judges shirk responsibility*

*Reward refused from clergy*

And as little leisure as he had to be occupied in the study of Holy Scripture and controversies upon religion and such other virtuous exercises, being in manner continually busied about the affairs of the  
 30 King and the realm, yet such watch<sup>o</sup> and pain in setting forth of divers profitable works, in defense of the true Christian religion, against

1. *watch* – vigilance

heresies secretly sown abroad in the realm, assuredly sustained he,<sup>1</sup> that the bishops, to whose pastoral cure the reformation thereof principally appertained, thinking themselves by his travail, wherein by their own confession they were not able with him to make comparison, of their duties in that behalf discharged; and considering that for all his  
5  
prince's favor he was no rich man, nor in yearly revenues advanced as his worthiness deserved, therefore at a convocation among themselves and other of the clergy, they agreed together and concluded upon a sum of four or five thousand pounds, at the least, to my remembrance, for his pains to recompense him. To the payment whereof  
10  
every bishop, abbot, and the rest of the clergy were – after the rate of their abilities – liberal contributories, hoping this portion should be to his contentation.<sup>2</sup>

Whereupon Tunstall, Bishop of Durham, Clark, Bishop of Bath, and, as far as I can call to mind, Veysey, Bishop of Exeter, repaired  
15  
unto him, declaring how thankfully his travails, to their discharge in God's cause bestowed, they reckoned themselves bounden to consider him. And that albeit they could not, according to his deserts so worthily as they gladly would, requite him therefore, but must reserve that only to the goodness of God, yet for a small part of recompense,  
20  
in respect of his estate so unequal to his worthiness, in the name of their whole convocation, they presented unto him that sum, which they desired him to take in good part.

Who, forsaking<sup>3</sup> it, said, that like as it was no small comfort unto him that so wise and learned men so well accepted his simple doings,  
25  
for which he never intended to receive reward but at the hands of God only, to whom alone was the thanks thereof chiefly to be ascribed, so gave he most humble thanks to their honors all for their so bountiful and friendly consideration.

When they, for all their importunate pressing upon him, that few  
30  
would have went<sup>4</sup> he could have refused it, could by no means make

1. *assuredly sustained he* – he maintained with assurance

2. *contentation* – satisfaction

3. *forsaking* – declining

4. *went* – thought

him to take it, then besought they him to be content yet that they might bestow it upon his wife and children. “Not so, my lords,” quoth he, “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 though your offer, 5 my lords, be indeed very friendly and honorable, yet set I so much by my pleasure and so little by my profit that I would not, in good faith, for so much, and much more too, have lost the rest of so many nights’ sleep as was spent upon the same. And yet wish would I, for all that, upon condition that all heresies were suppressed, that all my books 10 were burned and my labor utterly lost.”

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

*Penance without singularity*

This Lord Chancellor, albeit he was to God and the world well known of notable virtue (though not so of every man considered) 15 yet, for the avoiding of singularity, would he appear none otherwise than other men in his apparel and other behavior. And albeit outwardly he appeared honorable like one of his calling, yet inwardly he no such vanities esteeming, secretly next his body wore a shirt of hair, which my sister More, a young gentlewoman, in the summer, as he 20 sat at supper singly in his doublet and hose, wearing thereupon a plain shirt without ruff or collar, chancing to spy it, began to laugh at it. My wife, not ignorant of his manner, perceiving the same, privily told him of it, and he, being sorry that she saw it, presently amended it.

*Meg alerts More*

He used also sometimes to punish his body with whips, the cords 25 knotted, which was known only to my wife, his eldest daughter, whom for her secrecy above all other he specially trusted, causing her, as need required, to wash the same shirt of hair.

*Consulted on the divorce again*

Now shortly upon his entry into the high office of the Chancellorship, the King yet eftsoons<sup>2</sup> again moved him to weigh and consider 30 his great matter, who, falling down upon his knees, humbly besought His Highness to stand his gracious Sovereign, as he ever since his

1. Anne Cresacre who married More’s son, John, in 1529.

2. *eftsoons* – soon afterwards

entry into His Grace's service had found him, saying there was nothing in the world had been so grievous unto his heart as to remember that he was not able, as he willingly would, with the loss of one of his limbs, for that matter anything to find whereby he could, with his conscience, safely serve His Grace's contentation,<sup>1</sup> as he that always bore in mind the most godly words that His Highness spake unto him at his first coming into his noble service, the most virtuous lesson that ever prince taught his servant, willing him first to look unto God, and after God to him, as, in good faith, he said he did, or else might His Grace well account him his most unworthy servant. To this the King answered, that if he could not therein with his conscience serve him, he was content to accept his service otherwise, and using the advice of other of his learned Council, whose consciences could well enough agree therewith, would nevertheless continue his gracious favor towards him, and never with that matter molest his conscience after.

But Sir Thomas More, in process of time, seeing the King fully determined to proceed forth in the marriage of Queen Anne, and when he, with the bishops and nobles of the Higher House of the Parliament, were, for the furtherance of that marriage, commanded by the King to go down to the Common House to show unto them both what the universities, as well as of other parts beyond the seas as of Oxford and Cambridge, had done in that behalf, and their seals also testifying the same – all which matters, at the King's request, not showing of what mind himself was therein, he opened to the Lower House of the Parliament – nevertheless, doubting lest further attempts after should follow, which, contrary to his conscience, by reason of his office, he was likely to be put unto, he made suit unto the Duke of Norfolk, his singular dear friend, to be a means to the King that he might, with His Grace's favor, be discharged of that chargeable room<sup>2</sup> of the chancellorship, wherein, for certain infirmities of his body, he

*"The most virtuous lesson that ever Prince taught"*

*The king commands More to address Commons, 30 March 1531*

*More's silence*

*More seeks to resign*

1. *contentation* – satisfaction

2. *room* – office

pretended himself unable any longer to serve.

This Duke, coming on a time to Chelsea to dine with him, fortun'd to find him at the church, singing in the choir, with a surplice on his back; to whom, after service, as they went homeward together, arm in arm, the Duke said, "God body! God body! My Lord Chancellor, a parish clerk, a parish clerk! You dishonor 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 with me, for serving of God his master, be offended, or thereby count his office dishonored."

*Norfolk chides  
More for  
dishonorable  
singing*

5

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*More remains in  
the King's good  
favor*

When the Duke, being thereunto often solicited, by importunate suit had at length of the King obtained for Sir Thomas More a clear discharge of his office, then, at a time convenient, by His Highness's appointment, repaired he to His Grace to yield up unto him the Great Seal. Which, as His Grace, with thanks and praise for his worthy service in that office, courteously at his hands received, so pleased it His Highness further to say unto him that, for the service that he before had done him, in any suit which he should after have unto him that either should concern his honor (for that word it liked His Highness to use unto him) or that should appertain unto his profit, he should find His Highness good and gracious lord unto him.

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*16 May 1532*

*Economic changes*

25

30

After he had thus given over the chancellorship, and placed all his gentlemen and yeomen with bishops and noblemen, and his eight watermen with the Lord Audley, that in the same office succeeded him, to whom also he gave his great barge, then, calling us all that were his children unto him and asking our advice how we might now, in this decay of his ability (by the surrender of his office so impaired that he could not, as he was wont, and gladly would, bear out the whole charge<sup>1</sup> of them all himself) from thenceforth be able to live and continue together, as he wished we should; when he saw us silent, and in that case not ready to show our opinions to him, "Then will I,"

1. *charge* – expense

said he, "show my poor mind unto you. I have been brought up,"  
 quoth he, "at Oxford, at an Inn of Chancery, at Lincoln's Inn and also  
 in the King's Court, and so forth from the lowest degree to the high-  
 est, and yet have I in yearly revenues at this present left me little above  
 an hundred pounds by the year,<sup>1</sup> so that now must we hereafter, if we  
 like to live together, be contented to become contributories together. 5 *Only 100 pounds  
 a year now*  
 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 Lincoln's Inn diet, where many right  
 worshipful and of good years do live full well; which, if we find not  
 ourselves the first year able to maintain, then will we the next year go  
 one step down to New Inn fare, wherewith many an 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, learned and  
 ancient fathers be continually conversant, which if our power stretch  
 not to maintain neither, then may we yet, with bags and wallets, go a  
 begging together, and hoping that for pity some good folk will give us  
 their charity, at every man's door to sing *Salve Regina*, and so still keep  
 company and be merry together." 10 *Oxford fare –  
 the lowest*  
 15 *Begging merrily*

And whereas you have heard before, he was by the King from a  
 very worshipful living taken into His Grace's service, with whom, in  
 all the great and weighty causes that concerned His Highness or the  
 realm, he consumed and spent with painful cares, travels and troubles,  
 as well beyond the seas as within the realm, in effect the whole sub-  
 stance of his life, yet with all the gain he got thereby, being never  
 wasteful spender thereof, was he not able, after the resignation of his  
 office of Lord Chancellor, for the maintenance of himself and such  
 as necessarily belonged unto him, sufficiently to find meat, drink, fuel,  
 apparel, and such other necessary charges. All the land that ever he  
 purchased, which also he purchased before he was Lord Chancellor,  
 was not, I am well assured, above the value of twenty marks by the  
 20  
 25  
 30

1. Sir Thomas retained his salary of 100 pounds a year as Counselor until March 1534.

Only 100 pounds  
in goods left

year. And after his debts paid, he had not, I know, his chain excepted, in gold and silver left him the worth of one hundred pounds.

And whereas upon the holy days during his High Chancellorship, one of his gentlemen, when service at the church was done, ordinarily used to come to my lady his wife's pew and say unto her, "Madame, my lord is gone," the next holy day after the surrender of his office and departure of his gentleman, he came unto my lady his wife's pew himself, and making a low curtsy, said unto her, "Madame, my lord is gone."

"Madame, my  
lord is gone."

Preparing the  
family for  
suffering

In the time somewhat before his trouble, he would talk with his wife and children of the joys of heaven and the pains of hell, of the lives of holy martyrs, of their grievous martyrdoms, of their marvelous patience, and of their passions and deaths that they suffered rather than they would offend God. And what an happy and blessed thing it was, for the love of God, to suffer loss of goods, imprisonment, loss of lands, and life also. He would further say unto them that, upon his faith, if he might perceive his wife and children would encourage him to die in a good cause, it should so comfort him that, for very joy thereof, it would make him merrily run to death. He showed unto them afore what trouble might after fall unto him, wherewith and the like virtuous talk he had so long before his trouble encouraged them, that when he after fell into trouble indeed, his trouble to them was a great deal the less. *Quia spicula previsa minus laedunt.*<sup>1</sup>

Advice to  
Cromwell on  
lions

Now upon this resignation of his office, came Master Thomas Cromwell, then in the King's high favor, to Chelsea to him with a message from the King. Wherein when they had thoroughly communed together, "Master Cromwell," quoth he, "you are now entered into the service of a most noble, wise, and liberal prince. If you will follow my poor advice, you shall, in your counsel-giving unto His Grace, ever tell him what he ought to do, but never what he is able to do. So shall you show yourself a true faithful servant and a right wor-

1. "Because spears foreseen hurt less."

thy Councillor. For if a lion<sup>1</sup> knew his own strength, hard were it for any man to rule him.”

Shortly thereupon was there a commission directed to Cranmer, then Archbishop of Canterbury, to determine the matter of the matrimony between the King and Queen Katherine, at St. Albans, where, according to the King's mind, it was thoroughly determined, who, pretending he had no justice at the Pope's hands, from thenceforth sequestered himself from the See of Rome, and so married the Lady Anne Boleyn; which, Sir Thomas More understanding, said unto me, “God give grace, son, that these matters within a while be not confirmed with oaths.” I, at that time seeing no likelihood thereof, yet fearing lest his forespeaking it would the sooner come to pass, waxed therefore for his so saying much offended with him.

It fortun'd not long before the coming of Queen Anne through the streets of London from the Tower to Westminster to her coronation, that he received a letter from the bishops of Durham, Bath and Winchester, requesting him both to keep them company from the Tower to the coronation, and also to take twenty pounds that by the bearer thereof they had sent him to buy him a gown with, which he thankfully receiving, and at home still tarrying, at their next meeting said merrily unto them:

My lords, in the letters which you lately sent me, you required two things of me, the one whereof, since I was so well content to grant you, the other therefore I thought I might be the bolder to deny you. And like as the one, because I took you for no beggars, and myself I knew to be no rich man, I thought I might the rather fulfill, so the other did put me in remembrance of an emperor that had ordained a law that whosoever committed a certain offense (which I now remember not) except it were a virgin, should suffer the pains of death, such a reverence had he for virginity. Now so it happened that the first committer of that offense was indeed a virgin, whereof the

5 *Cranmer declares  
marriage void,  
23 May 1533*

10 *Henry marries  
Anne*

15 *Bishops invite  
More to the  
coronation*

20

25

*Of deflowered  
virgins*

30

Emperor hearing was in no small perplexity, as he that by some example fain would have had that law to have been put in execution. Whereupon when his Council had sat long, solemnly debating this case, suddenly arose there up one of his Council, a good plain man, among them, and said, “Why make you so much ado, my lords, about  
5 so small a matter? Let her first be deflowered, and then after may she be devoured.” And so though your lordships have in the matter of the matrimony hitherto kept yourselves pure virgins, yet take good heed, my lords, that you keep your virginity still. For some there be  
10 that by procuring your lordships first at the coronation to be present, and next to preach for the setting forth of it, and finally to write books to all the world in defense thereof, are desirous to deflower you; and when they have deflowered you, then will they not fail soon after to devour you. “Now my lords,” quoth he, “it lieth not in my  
15 power but that they may devour me; but God being my good lord, I will provide that they shall never deflower me.”

*More will not be deflowered*

*Henry seeks More's indictment*

In continuance, when the King saw that he could by no manner of benefits win him on his side, then, lo, went he about by terrors and threats to drive him thereunto. The beginning of which trouble grew  
20 by occasion of a certain nun dwelling in Canterbury, for her virtue and holiness among people not a little esteemed; unto whom, for that cause, many religious persons, doctors of divinity, and divers others of good worship<sup>1</sup> of the laity used to resort; who, affirming that she had revelations from God to give the King warning of his wicked life, and of the abuse of the sword and authority committed unto him by  
25 God, and understanding my Lord of Rochester, Bishop Fisher, to be a man of notable virtuous living and learning, repaired to Rochester, and there disclosed to him all her revelations, desiring his advice and counsel therein; which the Bishop perceiving might well stand with  
30 the laws of God and His holy Church, advised her (as she before had warning and intended) to go to the King herself, and to let him un-

*The Nun of Kent*

1. *worship* – renown

derstand the whole circumstance thereof. Whereupon she went to the King, and told him all her revelations, and so returned home again. And in short space after, she, making a voyage to the nuns of Sion, by means of one Master Reynolds, a father of the same house, there fortun'd concerning such secrets as had been revealed unto her (some part whereof seemed to touch the matter of the King's supremacy and marriage, which shortly thereupon followed) to enter into talk with Sir Thomas More, who, notwithstanding he might well, at that time, without danger of any law (though after, as himself had prognosticated before, those matters were established by statutes and confirmed by oaths) freely and safely have talked with her therein; nevertheless, in all the communication between them (as in process<sup>1</sup> appeared) had always so discreetly demeaned himself that he deserved not to be blamed, but contrariwise to be commended and praised.

And had he not been one that in all his great offices and doings for the King and the realm, so many years together, had from all corruption of wrong-doing or bribes taking kept himself so clear that no man was able therewith once to blemish him or make just quarrel against him, it would, without doubt, in this troublous time of the King's indignation towards him, have been deeply laid to his charge, and of the King's Highness most favorably accepted, as in the case of one Parnell it most manifestly appeared; against whom, because Sir Thomas More, while he was Lord Chancellor, at the suit of one Vaughan, his adversary, had made a decree. This Parnell to His Highness most grievously complained that Sir Thomas More, for making the same decree, had of the same Vaughan (unable for the gout to travel abroad himself) by the hands of his wife taken a fair great gilt cup for a bribe. Who thereupon, by the King's appointment, being called before the whole Council, where that matter was heinously laid to his charge, forthwith confessed that forasmuch as that cup was, long after the aforesaid decree, brought him for a New Year's gift, he,

*Charges of  
corruption fail*

*Parnell accuses  
More of bribery*

1. *in process* – in course of time

upon her importunate pressing upon him therefore, of courtesy, refused not to receive it.

Then the Lord of Wiltshire<sup>1</sup> (for hatred of his religion preferer of this suit) with much rejoicing said unto the lords, “Lo, did I not tell you, my lords, that you should find this matter true?” Whereupon Sir Thomas More desired their lordships that as they had courteously heard him tell the one part of his tale, so they would vouchsafe of their honors indifferently to hear the other. After which obtained, he further declared unto them that, albeit he had indeed, with much work, received that cup, yet immediately thereupon he caused his butler to fill it with wine, and of that cup drank to her, and that when he had so done, and she pledged him, then as freely as her husband had given it to him, even so freely gave her the same unto her again, to give unto her husband as his New Year’s gift, which, at his instant request, though much against her will, at length yet she was fain to receive, as herself, and certain other there, presently before them deposed. Thus was the great mountain turned scant to a little molehill.

So I remember that at another time, upon a New Year’s day, there came to him one Mistress Crocker, a rich widow, for whom with no small pain he had made a decree in the Chancery against the Lord Arundel, to present him with a pair of gloves, and forty pounds in angels<sup>2</sup> in them for a New Year’s gift. Of whom he thankfully receiving the gloves, but refusing the money, said unto her, “Mistress, since it were against good manners to forsake a gentlewoman’s New Year’s gift, I am content to take your gloves, but as for your money I utterly refuse.” So, much against her mind, enforced he her to take her gold again.

And one Master Gresham likewise, having at the same time a cause depending in the Chancery before him, sent him for a New Year’s gift a fair gilt cup, the fashion whereof he very well liking, caused one of his own (though not in his fantasy of so good a fashion, yet better in

*Another bribery attempt*

*And yet another*

1. Sir Thomas Boleyn, who was father of Queen Anne.

2. *angels* – gold coins

value) to be brought him out of his chamber, which he willed the messenger, in recompense, to deliver to his master, and under other conditions would he in no wise receive it.

Many things more of like effect, for the declaration of his innocency and clearness from all corruption or evil affection, could I rehearse besides, which for tediousness omitting, I refer to the readers by these few before remembered examples, with their own judgments wisely to weigh and consider the same.

At the Parliament following, was there put into the Lords' House a bill to attain the Nun and divers other religious persons of high treason, and the Bishop of Rochester, Sir Thomas More and certain others, of misprision of treason,<sup>1</sup> the King presupposing of likelihood that this bill would be to Sir Thomas More so troublous and terrible that it would force him to relent and condescend to his request – wherein His Grace was much deceived. To which bill Sir Thomas More was a suitor personally to be received in his own defense to make answer. But the King, not liking that, assigned the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Chancellor, the Duke of Norfolk and Master Cromwell, at a day and place appointed, to call Sir Thomas More before them. At which time, I, thinking that I had a good opportunity, earnestly advised him to labor unto those lords for the help of his discharge out of that Parliament bill. Who answered me he would.

And at his coming before them, according to their appointment, they entertained him very friendly, willing him to sit down with them, which in no wise he would. Then began the Lord Chancellor to declare unto him how many ways the King had showed his love and favor towards him, how fain he would have had him continue in his office, how glad he would have been to have heaped more benefits upon him, and finally how he could ask no worldly honor nor profit at His Highness's hands that were likely to be denied him, hoping, by the declaration of the King's kindness and affection towards him, to

5  
10 *Accused of high treason, Jan. 1534*

15 *More asks to defend himself*

20 *Roper's plea*

25 *Interrogation by members of the Privy Council, March 1534*

30

1. *misprision of treason* – an offense akin to treason but not liable to death

provoke him to recompense His Grace with the like again, and unto those things that the Parliament, the bishops and the universities had already passed, to add his consent.

*More's reply* 5 To this Sir Thomas More mildly made answer, saying, "No man living is there, my lords, that would with better will do the thing that should be acceptable to the King's Highness than I, which must needs confess his manifold goodness and bountiful benefits most benignly bestowed on me. Howbeit, I verily hoped that I should never have heard of this matter more, considering that I have, from time to time, 10 always from the beginning, so plainly and truly declared my mind unto His Grace, which His Highness to me ever seemed, like a most gracious prince, very well to accept, never minding, as he said, to molest me more therewith; since which time any further thing that was able to move me to any change could I never find, and if I could, 15 there is none in all the world that would have been gladder of it than I."

*Terror tried* 20 Many things more were there of like sort uttered on both sides. But in the end, when they saw they could by no manner of persuasions remove him from his former determination, then began they more terribly to touch him, telling him that the King's Highness had given them in commandment, if they could by no gentleness win him, in his name with his great ingratitude to charge him, that never was there servant to his sovereign so villainous, nor subject to his prince so traitorous as he, for he, by his subtle sinister slights most 25 unnaturally procuring and provoking him to set forth a book of *The Assertion of the Seven Sacraments* and maintenance of the Pope's authority, had caused him, to his dishonor throughout all Christendom, to put a sword into the Pope's hands to fight against himself.

*"terrors be . . . for children"* 30 When they had thus laid forth all the terrors they could imagine against him, "My lords," quoth he, "these terrors be arguments for children, and not for me. But to answer that wherewith you do chiefly

burden me, I believe the King's Highness of his honor will never lay that to my charge. For none is there that can in that point say in my excuse more than His Highness himself, who right well knoweth that I never was procurer nor counselor of His Majesty thereunto. But after it was finished, by His Grace's appointment and consent of the makers of the same, only a sorter-out and placer of the principal matters therein contained. Wherein when I found the pope's authority highly advanced and with strong arguments mightily defended, I said unto His Grace, 'I must put Your Highness in remembrance of one thing, and that is this. The Pope, as Your Grace knoweth, is a prince as you are, and in league with all other Christian princes. It may hereafter so fall out that Your Grace and he may vary upon some points of the league, whereupon may grow breach of amity and war between you both. I think it best therefore that that place be amended, and his authority more slenderly touched.'

5

*The pope's authority*

10

15

"'Nay,' quoth His Grace, 'that shall it not. We are so much bounden unto the See of Rome that we cannot do too much honor unto it.'

"Then did I further put him in remembrance of the Statute of Praemunire, whereby a good part of the pope's pastoral cure<sup>1</sup> here was pared away.

20

"To that answered His Highness, 'Whatsoever impediment be to the contrary, we will set forth that authority to the uttermost. For we received from that See our crown imperial' – which, till His Grace with his own mouth told it me, I never heard of before. So that I trust, when His Grace shall be once truly informed of this, and call to his gracious remembrance my doing in that behalf, His Highness will never speak of it more, but clear me thoroughly therein himself."

25

*Henry on pope's uttermost authority*

And thus displeasantly departed they.

Then took Sir Thomas More his boat towards his house at Chelsea, wherein by the way he was very merry, and for that I was nothing sorry, hoping that he had got himself discharged out of the Parlia-

30

*More's joy*

1. *cure* – charge or jurisdiction

ment bill. When he was landed and come home, then walked we twain alone in his garden together, where I, desirous to know how he had sped, said, "I trust, sir, that all is well because you be so merry."

*More speaks with  
Roper*

- 5 "It is so indeed, son Roper, I thank God," quoth he.  
 "Are you then put out of the Parliament bill?" said I.  
 "By my troth, son Roper," quoth he, "I never remembered it."  
 "Never remembered it, sir?!" said 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."  
 10 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 a foul fall, and that with those lords I had gone so far, as without great shame I could never go back again."  
 15 At which words waxed I very sad, for though himself liked it well, yet liked it me but a little.

*The offended  
King wants to  
proceed against  
More*

- Now upon the report made by the Lord Chancellor and the other lords to the King of all their whole discourse had with Sir Thomas More, the King was so highly offended with him that he plainly told  
 20 them he was fully determined that the aforesaid Parliament bill should undoubtedly proceed forth against him. To whom the Lord Chancellor and the rest of the lords said that they perceived the lords of the Upper House so precisely bent to hear him, in his own defense, make answer himself, that if he were not put out of the bill, it would with-  
 25 out fail be utterly an overthrow of all. But, for all this, needs would the King have his own will therein, or else he said that at the passing thereof, he would be personally present himself.

*Lords on their  
knees*

- Then the Lord Audley and the rest, seeing him so vehemently set thereupon, on their knees most humbly besought His Grace to for-  
 30 bear the same, considering that if he should, in his own presence receive an overthrow, it would not only encourage his subjects for-

ever after to condemn him, but also throughout all Christendom redound to his dishonor forever, adding thereunto that they mistrusted not in time against him to find some meeter matter to serve his turn better. For in this case of the Nun, he was accounted, they said, so innocent and clear, that for his dealing therein, men reckoned him far worthier of praise then reproof. Whereupon at length, through their earnest persuasion, he was content to condescend to their petition. 5

*The King relents*

And on the morrow, Master Cromwell, meeting me in the Parliament House, willed me to tell my father that he was put out of the Parliament bill. But because I had appointed to dine that day in London, I sent the message by my servant to my wife to Chelsea. Whereof when she informed her father, "In faith, Meg," quoth he, "*Quod differtur, non aufertur.*"<sup>1</sup> 10

After this, as the Duke of Norfolk and Sir Thomas More chanced to fall in familiar talk together, the Duke said unto him, "By the Mass, Master More, it is perilous striving with princes. And therefore I would wish you somewhat to incline to the King's pleasure, for, by God's body, Master More, *Indignatio principis mors est.*"<sup>2</sup> 15

*More unmoved by  
ominous threat*

"Is that all, my lord?" quoth he. "Then in good faith is there no more difference between Your Grace and me, but that I shall die to-day and you tomorrow." 20

So fell it out, within a month or thereabouts after the making of the statute for the Oath of the Supremacy and Matrimony, that all the priests of London and Westminster, and no temporal man but he, were sent for to appear at Lambeth before the Bishop of Canterbury, the Lord Chancellor, and Secretary Cromwell, commissioners appointed there to tender the oath unto them. 25

*Administering  
the Oath*

*The only layman  
summoned,  
13 April 1534*

Then Sir Thomas More, as his accustomed manner was always, ere he entered into any matter of importance, as when he was first chosen of the King's Privy Council, when he was sent ambassador, appointed Speaker of the Parliament, made Lord Chancellor, or when 30

1. "What is put off is not put aside."

2. "The indignation of the prince is death."

he took any like weighty matter upon him, to go to church and be confessed, to hear Mass and be houseled<sup>1</sup> so did he likewise in the morning early the selfsame day that he was summoned to appear before the lords at Lambeth. And whereas he evermore used before at his departure from his wife and children, whom he tenderly loved, 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 he his boat towards Lambeth. Wherein sitting still sadly a while, at last he suddenly rounded<sup>2</sup> me in the ear, and said, "Son Roper, I thank Our Lord, the field is won." What he meant thereby I then wist<sup>3</sup> not, yet loath to seem ignorant, I answered: "Sir, I am thereof glad." But as I conjectured afterwards, it was for that the love he had to God wrought in him so effectually that it conquered all his carnal affections utterly.

Before Privy  
Council,  
13 April 1534

"The field is  
won"

Conscience  
conquered natural  
affection

Now at his coming to Lambeth, how wisely he behaved himself before the commissioners, at the ministration of the oath unto him, may be found in certain letters sent to my wife remaining in a great book of his works.<sup>4</sup> Where, by the space of four days he was betaken to the custody of the Abbot of Westminster, during which time the King consulted with his Council what order were meet to be taken with him. And albeit in the beginning they were resolved that with an oath not to be acknowledged whether he had to the Supremacy been sworn, or what he thought thereof, he should be discharged, yet did Queen Anne, by her importunate clamor, so sore exasperate the King against him, that contrary to his former resolution, he caused the said Oath of the Supremacy to be administered unto him. Who, albeit he made a discreet qualified answer, nevertheless was forthwith committed to the Tower.

More imprisoned  
in the Tower,  
17 April 1534

Whom, as he was going thitherward, wearing, as he commonly did,

1. *be houseled* – receive the Eucharist

2. *rounded* – whispered

3. *wist* – knew

4. More's 1557 *English Works*.

a chain of gold about his neck, Sir Richard Cromwell, that had the charge of his conveyance thither, advised him to send home his chain to his wife, or to some of his children. "Nay, sir," quoth he, "that I will not, for if I were taken in the field by my enemies, I would they should somewhat fare the better by me."

*Wears chain of gold to jail*

At whose landing Master Lieutenant at the Tower Gate was ready to receive him, where the porter demanded of him his upper garment. "Master Porter," quoth he, "here it is," and took off his cap and delivered it him saying, "I am sorry it is no better for you." "No, sir," quoth the porter, "I must have your gown."

*Jesting with the jailor*

And so was he by Master Lieutenant conveyed to his lodging, where he called unto him one John a Wood, his own servant, there appointed to attend upon him, who could neither write nor read, and sware him before the Lieutenant that if he should hear or see him, at any time, speak or write any manner of thing against the King, the Council, or the state of the realm, he should open it to the Lieutenant, that the Lieutenant might incontinent<sup>1</sup> reveal it to the Council.

Now when he had remained in the Tower a little more than a month, my wife, longing to see her father, by her earnest suit at length got leave to go to him. At whose coming, after the Seven Psalms and litany said (which, whensoever she came to him, ere he fell in talk of any worldly matters, he used accustomably to say with her) among other communication he said unto her, "I believe, Meg, that they that put me here, ween<sup>2</sup> they have done me a high displeasure. But I assure thee, on my faith, my own good daughter, if it had not been for my wife and you that be my children, whom I account the chief part of my charge, I would not have failed long ere this to have closed myself in as strait a room, and straiter too. But since I am 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 my lack among you. I find no cause, I thank God, Meg, to reckon myself in worse case

*Meg's first prison visit, c. May 1534*

*More on God's special care*

1. *incontinent* – immediately

2. *ween* – think

*Patience and  
profit in  
adversity*

5

here than in my own house. For me thinketh God maketh me a wanton,<sup>1</sup> and setteth me on His lap and dandleth me.” Thus by his gracious demeanor in tribulation appeared it that all the troubles that ever chanced unto him, by his patient sufferance thereof, were to him no painful punishments, but of his patience, profitable exercises.

*Fall of Anne  
Boleyn foretold*

10

And at another time, when he had first questioned with my wife a while of the order of his wife, children, and state of his house in his absence, he asked her how Queen Anne did. “In faith, father,” quoth she, “never better.” “Never better! Meg,” quoth he. “Alas! Meg, alas! It pitieth me to remember into what misery, poor soul, she shall shortly come.”

15

After this, Master Lieutenant, coming into his chamber to visit him, rehearsed the benefits and friendship that he had many ways received at his hands, and how much bounden he was therefore friendly to entertain him and make him good cheer, which, since the case standing as it did, he could not do without the King’s indignations, he trusted, he said, he would accept his good will, and such poor cheer as he had. “Master Lieutenant,” quoth he again, “I verily believe, as you may, so you are my good friend indeed, and would, as you say, with your best cheer entertain me, for the which I most heartily thank you, and assure yourself, Master Lieutenant, I do not mislike my cheer, but whensoever I do, then thrust me out of your doors.”

20

*More jesting with  
the jailor*

*Wording of oath  
changed*

25

30

Whereas the oath confirming the supremacy and matrimony was by the first statute in few words comprised, the Lord Chancellor and Master Secretary did of their own heads add more words unto it, to make it appear unto the King’s ears more pleasant and plausible. And that oath, so amplified, caused they to be ministered to Sir Thomas More, and to all other throughout the realm. Which Sir Thomas More perceiving, said unto my wife, “I may tell thee, Meg, they that have committed me hither, for refusing of this oath not agreeable to the statute, are not by their own law able to justify my imprisonment.<sup>2</sup>

1. *wanton* – spoiled child

2. As Reynolds points out, “Here Roper confuses the question of the Supremacy and that of the Succession,” p. 41.

And surely, daughter, it is great pity that any Christian prince should by a flexible Council<sup>1</sup> ready to follow his affections, and by a weak clergy lacking grace constantly to stand to their learning, with flattery<sup>2</sup> be so shamefully abused.” But at length the Lord Chancellor and Master Secretary, espying their own oversight in that behalf, were fain afterwards to find the means that another statute should be made for the confirmation of the oath so amplified with their additions.<sup>3</sup>

*The danger of flattery*

5

After Sir Thomas More had given over his office and all other worldly doings therewith, to the intent he might from thenceforth the more quietly settle himself to the service of God, then made he a conveyance for the disposition of all his lands, reserving to himself an estate thereof only for the term of his own life, and after his decease assuring some part of the same to his wife, some to his son's wife for a jointure in consideration that she was an inheritrix in possession of more than an hundred pounds land by the year, and some to me and my wife in recompense of our marriage money, with divers remainders over. All which conveyance and assurance was perfectly finished long before that matter whereupon he was attainted was made an offense, and yet after by statute clearly avoided.<sup>4</sup> And so were all his lands, that he had to his wife and children by the said conveyance in such sort assured, contrary to the order of law, taken away from them, and brought into the King's hands, saving that portion which he had appointed to my wife and me, which, although he had in the foresaid conveyance reserved, as he did the rest, for term of life to himself, nevertheless, upon further consideration, two days after, by another conveyance, he gave the same immediately to my wife and me in possession. And so because the statute had undone only the first conveyance, giving no more to the King but so much as passed by that, the second conveyance, whereby it was given to my wife and me, being dated two days after, was without the compass of the statute. And so was our portion to us by that means clearly reserved.

*More's care in disposing of his property*

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1. Compare this concern for good counsel with the statement reported by the *Paris Newsletter*, p. 287 of this *Source Book*.

2. About the problems associated with flattery, see also pages 93, 100-11, 118, 176.

3. More could have obeyed the statute but not the “additions” to the oath by Cromwell and Audley.

4. *avoided* – made void

*More and Meg  
watch as monks  
are led to  
execution,  
4 May 1535*

5 Tower to execution, he, as one longing in that journey to have accom-  
panied them, said unto my wife, then standing there beside him, “Lo,  
dost thou not see, Meg, that these blessed fathers be now as cheer-  
fully going to their deaths as bridegrooms to their marriage? Where-  
fore mayest thou see, mine own good daughter, what a great differ-  
10 ence there is between such as have in effect spent all their days in a  
straight, hard, penitential, and painful life religiously, and such as have  
in the world, like worldly wretches, as thy poor father hath done, con-  
sumed all their time in pleasure and ease licentiously. For God, con-  
sidering their long-continued life in most sore and grievous penance,  
15 will no longer suffer them to remain here in this vale of misery and  
iniquity, but speedily hence taketh them to the fruition of His ever-  
lasting deity, whereas thy silly father, Meg, that like a most wicked  
caitiff<sup>1</sup> hath passed forth the whole course of his miserable life most  
sinfully, God, thinking him not worthy so soon to come to that eter-  
20 nal felicity, leaveth him here yet still in the world, further to be plunged  
and turmoiled with misery.”

*Cromwell  
promises  
King's favor,  
30 April 1535*

25 Within a while after, Master Secretary,<sup>2</sup> coming to him into the Tower  
from the King, pretended much friendship towards him, and for his  
comfort told him that the King's Highness was his good and gracious  
lord, and minded not with any matter wherein he should have cause  
of scruple, from henceforth to trouble his conscience. As soon as  
Master Secretary was gone, to express what comfort he conceived of  
his words, he wrote with a coal, for ink then had he none, these verses  
following:

*More's poem on  
flattering fortune*

30 Eye-flattering fortune, look thou never so fair,  
Nor never so pleasantly begin to smile,

1. *caitiff* – wretch  
2. Thomas Cromwell

As though thou wouldst my ruin all repair,  
 During my life thou shalt not me beguile.  
 Trust I shall God, to enter in a while  
 His haven of heaven, sure and uniform;  
 Ever after thy calm, look I for a storm.

5

When Sir Thomas More had continued a good while in the Tower, my lady, his wife, obtained license to see him, who, at her first coming, like a simple ignorant woman, and somewhat worldly too, with this manner of salutation bluntly saluted him:

*Lady Alice's first visit*

“What the good year,<sup>1</sup> Master More,” quoth she, “I marvel that you, that have been always hitherto taken for so wise a man, will now so play the fool to lie here in this close, filthy prison, and be content thus to be shut up amongst mice and rats, when you might be abroad at your liberty, and with the favor and good will 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, your library, your books, your gallery, your garden, your orchard, and all other necessaries so handsome 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 thus fondly<sup>2</sup> to tarry.”

10

15

20

After he had a while quietly heard her, with a cheerful countenance he said unto her, “I pray thee, good Mistress Alice, tell me one thing.”

*More responds to Lady Alice*

“What is that?” quoth she.

“Is not this house,” quoth he, “as nigh<sup>3</sup> heaven as my own?”

25

To whom she, after her accustomed homely fashion, not liking such talk, answered, “Tilly-vally, tilly-vally!”<sup>4</sup>

“How say you, Mistress Alice,” quoth he, “is it not so?”

“*Bone deus, bone deus*, man, will this gear<sup>5</sup> never be left?” quoth she.

“Well then, Mistress Alice, if it be so,” quoth he, “it is very well. For I see no great cause why I should much joy either of my gay

30

1. An expression that connotes impatience.

2. *fondly* – foolishly

3. *nigh* – near

4. “An exclamation of impatience: Nonsense!” (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

5. *gear* – nonsense

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 doors, and tell me it were none of mine. What cause have I then to  
5 like such an house as would so soon forget his master?"

So her persuasions moved him but a little.

*Further  
interrogations*

Not long after came there to him the Lord Chancellor, the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk with Master Secretary, and certain other of the Privy Council, at two several times, by all policies possible procur-  
10 ing<sup>1</sup> him, either precisely to confess the Supremacy, or precisely to deny it; whereunto, as appeareth by his examinations in the said great book,<sup>2</sup> they could never bring him.

*Richard Rich's  
visit to the Tower,  
12 June 1535*

Shortly hereupon, Master Rich (afterwards Lord Rich), then newly made the King's Solicitor, Sir Richard Southwell, and one Master  
15 Palmer, servant to the Secretary, were sent to Sir Thomas More into the Tower to fetch away his books from him. And while Sir Richard Southwell and Master Palmer were busy in the trussing up of his books, Master Rich, pretending friendly talk with him, among other things, of a set course, as it seemed, said thus unto him:

20 "Forasmuch as it is well known, Master More, that you are a man both wise and well-learned as well in the laws of the realm as otherwise, I pray you therefore, sir, let me be so bold as of good will to put unto you this case. Admit there were, sir," quoth he, "an act of Parliament that all the realm should take me for King. Would not you, Mas-  
25 ter More, take me for King?"

"Yes, sir," quoth Sir Thomas More, "that would I."

"I put case further," quoth Master Rich, "that there were an act of Parliament that all the realm should take me for pope. Would not you then, Master More, take me for pope?"

30 "For answer, sir," quoth Sir Thomas More, "to your first case, the Parliament may well, Master Rich, meddle with the state of temporal

1. *procuring*—endeavoring to get

2. More's 1557 *English Works*.

princes. But to make answer to your other cause, I will put you this case: Suppose the Parliament would make a law that God should not be God. Would you then, Master Rich, say that God were not God?"

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

5

"No more," said Sir Thomas More, as Master Rich reported him, "could the Parliament make the king supreme head of the Church."

Upon whose only report was Sir Thomas More indicted of treason upon the statute whereby it was made treason to deny the King to be supreme head of the Church. Into which indictment were put these heinous words – "maliciously, traitorously, and diabolically."

10

When Sir Thomas More was brought from the Tower to Westminster Hall to answer the indictment, and at the King's Bench bar before the judges thereupon arraigned, he openly told them that he would upon that indictment have abidden in law, but that he thereby should have been driven to confess of himself the matter indeed, that was the denial of the King's Supremacy, which he protested was untrue. Wherefore he thereto pleaded not guilty; and so reserved unto himself advantage to be taken of the body of the matter, after verdict, to avoid that indictment, and moreover added that if those only odious terms, "maliciously, traitorously, and diabolically," were put out of the indictment he saw therein nothing justly to charge him.

15

20

And for proof to the jury that Sir Thomas More was guilty of this treason, Master Rich was called forth to give evidence unto them upon his oath, as he did. Against whom thus sworn, Sir Thomas More began in this wise to say, "If I were a man, my lords, that did not regard an oath, I needed not, as it is well known, in this place, at this time, nor in this case, to stand here as an accused person. And if this oath of yours, Master Rich, be true, then pray I that I never see God in the face, which I would not say, were it otherwise, to win the whole world." Then recited he to the court the discourse of all their communication

25

30

*More's trial  
before the  
King's bench,  
1 July 1535*

*More denies  
Rich's testimony  
against him*

in the Tower, according to the truth, and said:

*More answers  
Rich's charge*

5

In good faith, Master Rich, I am sorrier for your perjury than for my own peril. And you shall understand that neither I, nor no man else to my knowledge, ever took you to be a man of such credit as in any matter of importance I, or any other, would at any time vouchsafe to communicate with you. And I, as you know, of no small while have been acquainted with you and your conversation, who have known you from your youth hitherto. For we have long dwelled both in one parish together, where, as yourself can tell (I am sorry you compel me so to say) you were esteemed very light of your tongue, a great dicer, and of no commendable fame. And so in your house at the Temple,<sup>1</sup> where hath been your chief bringing up, were you likewise accounted.

10

*Is the charge  
plausible?*

15

Can it therefore seem likely unto your honorable lordships that I would, in so weighty a cause, so unadvisedly overshoot myself as to trust Master Rich, a man of me always reputed for one of so little truth, as your lordships have heard, so far above my Sovereign Lord the King, or any of his noble councillors, that I would unto him utter the secrets of my conscience touching the King's Supremacy, the special point and only mark at my hands so long sought for, a thing which I never did, nor never would, after the statute thereof made, reveal either to the King's Highness himself, or to any of his honorable councillors, as it is not unknown to your honors, at sundry several times sent from His Grace's own person unto the Tower unto me for none other purpose? Can this in your judgments, my lords, seem likely to be true? And yet, if I had so done indeed, my lords, as Master Rich hath sworn, seeing it was spoken but in familiar secret talk, nothing affirming, and only putting of cases, without other displeasent circumstances, it cannot justly be taken to be spoken maliciously, and where there is no malice, there can be no offense. And over this I can never think, my lords, that

20

25

*Even if he did,  
no malice was  
involved*

30

1. The Middle Temple, one of the inns of court.

so many worthy bishops, so many honorable personages, and so many other worshipful, virtuous, wise, and well-learned men as at the making of that law were in Parliament assembled, ever meant to have any man punished by death in whom there could be found no malice, taking "*malitia*" for "*malevolentia*." For if "*malitia*" be generally taken for "sin," no man is there then that can thereof excuse himself. *Quia si dixerimus quod peccatum non habemus, nosmet ipsos seducimus, et veritas in nobis non est.*<sup>1</sup> And only this word "maliciously" is in the statute material, as this term "forcible" is in the statute of forcible entries, by which statute, if a man enter peaceably, and put not his adversary out forcibly, it is no offense. But if he put him out forcibly, then by that statute it is an offense, and so shall he be punished by this term "forcibly."

Besides this, the manifold goodness of the King's Highness himself, that hath been so many ways my singular good lord and gracious sovereign, that hath so dearly loved and trusted me, even at my very first coming into his noble service with the dignity of his honorable Privy Council vouchsafing to admit me, and to offices of great credit and worship most liberally advanced me, and finally with that weighty room of His Grace's High Chancellor (the like whereof he never did to temporal man before), next to his own royal person the highest officer in this noble realm, so far above my merits or qualities able and meet therefore, of his incomparable benignity honored and exalted me, by the space of twenty years and more showing his continual favor towards me, and (until at my own poor suit, it pleased His Highness, giving me license, with His Majesty's favor, to bestow the residue of my life for the provision of my soul in the service of God, of his especial goodness thereof to discharge and unburden me) most benignly heaped honors continually more and more upon me – all this His Highness's goodness, I say, so long thus bountifully extended towards me, were in

*Only malicious denial is punishable*

*The King's clear favor to More shows that no malice was involved*

1. Alif we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us® (1 John 1:8).

my mind, my lords, matter sufficient to convince this slanderous surmise by this man so wrongfully imagined against me.

*Southwell and  
Palmer refuse to  
support Rich*

5 Master Rich, seeing himself so disproved, and his credit so foul defaced, caused Sir Richard Southwell and Master Palmer, that at the time of their communication were in the chamber, to be sworn what words had passed between them. Whereupon Master Palmer, upon his deposition, said that he was so busy about the trussing up of Sir Thomas More's books in a sack, that he took no heed to their talk. Sir Richard Southwell likewise, upon his deposition, said that because he  
10 was appointed only to look unto the conveyance of his books, he gave no ear unto them.

*More pronounced  
guilty*

15 After this were there many other reasons, not now to my remembrance, by Sir Thomas More in his own defense alleged, to the discredit of Master Rich's aforesaid evidence, and proof of the clearness of his own conscience. All which notwithstanding, the jury found him guilty. And incontinent upon<sup>1</sup> their verdict, the Lord Chancellor, for that matter chief commissioner, beginning to proceed in judgment against him, Sir Thomas More said to him: "My lord, when I was toward the law, the manner in such case was to ask the prisoner  
20 before judgment, why judgment should not be given against him." Whereupon the Lord Chancellor, staying his judgment, wherein he had partly proceeded, demanded of him what he was able to say to the contrary. Who then in this sort most humbly made answer:

*More interrupts  
the proceedings  
and argues that  
the indictment is  
invalid*

25 "Forasmuch as, my Lord," quoth he, "this indictment is grounded upon an act of Parliament directly repugnant to the laws of God and His Holy Church, the supreme government of which, or of any part whereof, may no temporal prince presume by any law to take upon him, as rightfully belonging to the See of Rome, a spiritual pre-eminence by the mouth of Our Savior himself, personally  
30 present upon the earth, only to St. Peter and his successors, bishops of the same See, by special prerogative granted, it is therefore

1. *incontinent upon* – immediately after

in law amongst Christian men insufficient to charge any Christian man.”

And for proof thereof, like as, among divers other reasons and authorities, he declared that this realm, being but one member and small part of the Church, might not make a particular law disagree- 5  
able with the general law of Christ's universal Catholic Church, no more than the city of London, being but one poor member in respect of the whole realm, might make a law against an act of Parliament to bind the whole realm. So farther showed he that it was contrary both to the laws and statutes of our own land yet unrepealed, as they might 10  
evidently perceive in Magna Carta, *Quod ecclesia Anglicana libera sit, et habeat omnia iura sua integra et libertates suas illaesas*.<sup>1</sup> And also contrary to that sacred oath<sup>2</sup> which the King's Highness himself and every other Christian prince always with great solemnity received at their coronations, alleging moreover that no more might this realm of England 15  
refuse obedience to the See of Rome than might a child refuse obedience to his own natural father. For as St. Paul said to the Corinthians, “I have regenerated you, my children in Christ.”<sup>2</sup> So might St. Gregory, Pope of Rome, of whom by St. Augustine, his messenger, we first received the Christian faith, of us Englishmen truly say, “You are 20  
my children, because I have given to you everlasting salvation, a far higher and better inheritance than any carnal father can leave to his child, and by regeneration made you my spiritual children in Christ.”

*More appeals to the Magna Carta and the Coronation Oath*

Then was it by the Lord Chancellor thereunto answered that seeing all the bishops, universities, and best learned of this realm had to this act agreed, it was much marveled that he alone against them all would so stiffly stick thereat, and so vehemently argue there against. 25

*Audley's challenge to More*

To that Sir Thomas More replied, saying, “If the number of bishops and universities be so material as your lordship seemeth to take it, then see I little cause, my lord, why that thing in my conscience should 30  
make any change. For I nothing doubt but that, though not in this

1. “That the English Church may be free, and that it may exist with all its laws uncorrupted and its liberties unviolated” is the first right listed in the Magna Carta.  
2. This coronation oath required the king to confirm “especially the laws, customs, and liberties granted the clergy and the people.”  
3. 1 Corinthians 3:1

*More claims to be  
in the majority*

5

realm, yet in Christendom about, of these well-learned bishops and virtuous men that are yet alive, they be not the fewer part that be of my mind therein. But if I should speak of those which already be dead, of whom many be now holy saints in heaven, I am very sure it is the far greater part of them that, all the while they lived, thought in this case that way that I think now. And therefore am I not bound, my lord, to conform my conscience to the Council of one realm against the General Council of Christendom.”

*A moment of  
conscience*

10

Now when Sir Thomas More, for the voiding of the indictment, had taken as many exceptions as he thought meet, and many more reasons than I can now remember alleged, the Lord Chancellor, loath to have the burden of that judgment wholly to depend upon himself, there openly asked advice of the Lord Fitz-James, then Lord Chief Justice of the King’s Bench, and joined in commission with him, whether this indictment were sufficient or not. Who, like a wise man, answered, “My lords all, by St. Julian” (that was ever his oath), “I must needs confess that if the act of Parliament be not unlawful, then is not the indictment in my conscience insufficient.”

15

*Conditional  
clause with triple  
negative*

*The verdict  
against More*

20

Whereupon the Lord Chancellor said to the rest of the lords: “Lo, my lords, you hear what my Lord Chief Justice saith,” and so immediately gave he judgment against him.

*More hopes that  
he and his judges  
will be merry  
together in  
heaven.*

25

After which ended, the commissioners yet further courteously offered him, if he had anything else to allege for his defense, to grant him favorable audience. Who answered, “More have I not to say, my lords, but that like the blessed apostle St. Paul, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, was present, and consented to the death of St. Stephen, and kept their clothes that stoned him to death, and yet be they now both twain holy saints in heaven, and shall continue there friends forever, so I verily trust, and shall therefore right heartily pray, that though your lordships have now here in earth been judges to my condemnation, we may yet hereafter in heaven merrily all meet together, to our

30

everlasting salvation.”

This much touching Sir Thomas More's arraignment, being not thereat present myself, have I by credible report, partly of the right worshipful Sir Anthony St. Leger, knight, and partly of Richard Heywood and John Webbe, gentlemen, with others of good credit, at the hearing thereof present themselves, as far as my poor wit and memory would serve me, here truly rehearsed unto you.

*Roper's sources*

5

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 an heavy heart, the tears running down by his cheeks, bade him farewell. Sir Thomas More, seeing him so sorrowful, comforted him with as good words as he could, saying: “Good Master 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.”

10

*More comforts  
Sir Kingston*

15

Soon after, Sir William Kingston, talking with me of Sir Thomas More, said, “In good faith, Master 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, which should rather have comforted him.”

20

When Sir Thomas More came from Westminster to the Towerward again, his 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 pass by, before he could enter into the Tower, there tarrying for his coming home. As soon as she saw him, after his blessing on her knees reverently received, she hastening towards him, and, without consideration or care of herself, pressing in among the midst of the throng and company of the guard, that with halberds and bills<sup>1</sup>

25

*Father and  
daughter meet for  
the last time*

30

1. *halberds and bills* – battle axes and broad swords

went round about him, hastily ran to him, and there openly, in the sight of all, 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 goodly words of comfort besides. From whom after she was departed, she, not satisfied with the former sight of him, and like one that had forgotten herself, being all ravished with the entire love of her dear father, having respect neither to herself, nor to the press of the 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 together most lovingly kissed him, and at last, with a full heavy heart, was fain to depart from him. The beholding whereof was to many of them that were present thereat so lamentable that it made them for very sorrow thereof to mourn and weep.

*Meg's second  
farewell*

So remained Sir Thomas More in the Tower more than a seven-night<sup>1</sup> after his judgment. From whence, the day before he suffered, he sent his shirt of hair (not willing to have it seen) to my wife, his dearly beloved daughter, and a letter written with a coal, contained in the foresaid book of his works,<sup>2</sup> plainly expressing the fervent desire he had to suffer on the morrow, in these words following:

*Last letter to Meg*

*More longs to die  
on eve of  
Thomas Becket's  
feast*

*More's execution,  
6 July 1535*

I cumber<sup>3</sup> you, good Margaret, much, but I would be sorry if it should be any longer then tomorrow, for tomorrow is St. Thomas's Even, and the Utas of St. Peter.<sup>4</sup> And therefore tomorrow long I to go to God; it were a day very meet and convenient for me, etc. I never liked your manner towards me better than when you kissed me last. For I like when daughterly love and dear charity have no leisure to look to worldly courtesy.

And so upon the next morrow, being Tuesday, St. Thomas's Eve, and the Utas of St. Peter, in the year of Our Lord, one thousand five hundred thirty and five (according as he in his letter the day before had wished) early in the morning came to him Sir Thomas Pope, his

1. Here Roper errs. More's trial was July 1 and his execution, July 6.

2. This is Roper's third reference to the 1557 edition of More's *English Works*.

3. *cumber* – trouble

4. July 7th was the popular feast of St. Thomas Becket and the octave of St. Peter's feast.

singular friend, on message from the King and his Council, that he should before nine of the clock the same morning suffer death, and that therefore forthwith he should prepare himself thereunto.

“Master Pope,” quoth he, “for your good tidings I most heartily thank you. I have been always much bounden to the King’s Highness for the benefits and honors that he hath still from time to time most bountifully heaped upon me, and yet more bound 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 so help me, God, most of all, Master Pope, am I bound to His Highness that it pleaseth him so shortly to rid me out of the miseries of this wretched world. And therefore will I not fail earnestly to pray for His Grace, both here and also in another world.”

5 *Grateful to the King*

10

“The King’s pleasure is further,” quoth Master Pope, “that at your execution you shall not use many words.”

15

*Commanded to use few words*

“Master Pope,” quoth he, “you do well to give me warning of His Grace’s pleasure, for otherwise I had 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. Nevertheless, whatsoever I intended, I am ready obediently to conform myself to His Grace’s commandments. And I beseech you, good Master Pope, to be a mean<sup>1</sup> unto His Highness that my daughter Margaret may be at my burial.”

20

*Parting obedience*

“The King is content already,” quoth Master Pope, “that your wife, children, and other your friends shall have liberty to be present thereat.”

“O, how much beholden then,” said Sir Thomas More, “am I to His Grace that unto my poor burial vouchsafeth to have so gracious consideration.”

25

Wherewithal Master Pope, taking his leave of him, could not refrain from weeping. Which Sir Thomas More perceiving, comforted him in this wise, “Quiet yourself, good Master Pope, and be not discomforted, for I trust that we shall, once in heaven, see each other full

30

*Comforts Sir Thomas Pope*

1. *mean* – intermediary

merrily, where we shall be sure to live and love together, in joyful bliss eternally.”

*More plans to wear his best apparel to his death*

5 Upon whose departure, Sir Thomas More, as one that had been invited to some solemn feast, changed himself into his best apparel, which Master Lieutenant espying, advised him to put it off, saying that he that should have it was but a javel.

10 “What, Master Lieutenant,” quoth he, “shall I account him a javel that shall do me this day so singular a benefit? Nay, I assure you, were it cloth of gold, I would account it well bestowed on him, as St. Cyprian did, who gave his executioner thirty pieces of gold.” And albeit at length, through Master Lieutenant’s importunate persuasion, he altered his apparel, yet after the example of St. Cyprian, did he, of that little money that was left him, send one angel of gold to his executioner.

*Good cheer on the scaffold*

15 And so was he by Master Lieutenant brought out of the Tower, and from thence led towards the place of execution. Where, going up the scaffold, which was so weak that it was ready to fall, he said merrily to Master Lieutenant, “I pray you, Master Lieutenant, see me safe up, and for my coming down, let me shift for myself.”

20 Then desired he all the people thereabout to pray for him, and to bear witness with him that he should now there suffer death in and for the faith of the holy Catholic Church. Which done, he knelt down, and after his prayers said, turned to the executioner and with a cheerful countenance spake thus to him: “Pluck up thy spirits, man, and be not afraid to do thine office; my neck is very short; take heed there-  
25 fore thou strike not awry, for saving of thine honesty.”

So passed Sir Thomas More out of this world to God, upon the very same day in which himself had most desired.

*Response of Emperor Charles*

30 Soon after whose death came intelligence thereof to the Emperor Charles. Whereupon he sent for Sir Thomas Elyot, our English am-

bassador, and said unto him: "My Lord Ambassador, we understand that the King, your master, hath put his faithful servant and grave wise councillor, Sir Thomas More, to death." Whereunto Sir Thomas Elyot answered that he understood nothing thereof. "Well," said the Emperor, "it is too true. And this will we say, that if we had been 5  
master of such a servant, of whose doings our self have had these many years no small experience, we would rather have lost the best city of our dominions than have lost such a worthy councillor." Which matter was by the same Sir Thomas Elyot to myself, to my wife, to Master Clement and his wife, to Master John Heywood and his wife, 10  
and unto divers other his friends accordingly reported.

*Finis. Deo gratias.*

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