

**THE LIFE OF SIR
THOMAS
MORE, KNT.**

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The life of Sir Thomas More, Knt. by William Roper

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WILLIAM ROPER

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MORE, KNT.**



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LIFE OF SIR THOMAS
MORE, KNT.

BY HIS SON-IN-LAW
WILLIAM ROPER

WITH A FOREWORD BY
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FOREWORD

By SIR JOSEPH WALTON, KNT.

Some books are valuable for what they teach us and others we prize for what they are. William Roper's book about Sir Thomas More may justly claim a place amongst the select few which are no less rich in matter than pleasing in form. In a style which may seem involved sometimes, but has nevertheless all the charm that belongs to our language in the vigour of its literary youth, he tells a story of the deepest human interest, and he tells of things which he himself had seen and heard, and remembered.

No figure which passes across the stage of English history has a more fascinating interest than that of Thomas More; especially to those of us who profess the ancient faith for which he died, and now revere him as Blessed. And his life is something more than interesting. It appears to have been set up as an example and guide to those who from his time onward were

to find their way through the difficulties of these latter days of intellectual enterprise and self-confidence, and of religious unrest.

In considering the true significance of the life and death of More it is well to recall the circumstances of the time in which he lived. The condition of the Church at the beginning of the 16th century has been much misrepresented, and there has been gross exaggeration of the abuses in its religious life and government. But what we ought to remember for our present purpose is (in the words of one of the most learned of living Catholic historians *) that "it may be admitted that the Church in life and discipline was not all that could be desired" and "that in many things there was need of reform in its truest sense."

This was appreciated by no one more truly or justly or with a keener insight than by Sir Thomas More. His delightful and never-failing sense of humour must not be forgotten. And we know that the pupil of Linacre and Grocyn, the close friend of Erasmus, the hospitable patron of Holbein rejoiced in all that was good and true and beautiful in the Renaissance of art and learning. But he gave up all—and life to him offered every attraction—and went cheerfully to death rather than be in any way a party to the revolt against the spiritual supremacy of the Pope.

This is the story which William Roper has to tell.

* Abbot Gasquet

Has it not, if we think of it, many lessons for all of us, whether we be of those whose impulse it is to look with confidence, and sometimes perhaps with too little patience, to the future, or of those whose nature it is to cling piously to the past and to resist perhaps even that inevitable movement by which the old order is ever changing giving place to the new? Sir Thomas More teaches us always, and in all events, patience and good temper and at the same time the strictest and most perfect loyalty to faith and conscience.

PREFACE

The First Edition

The Mirrour of Vertue in Worldly Greatnes, or The Life of Sir Thomas More, Knight, sometime Lord Chancellor of England, was first imprinted in the year 1626, at Paris, according to the title-page, though it has been suggested, without any definite proof, that the book was not really printed abroad.

The author of the *Life*, William Roper, Sir Thomas More's son-in-law, died in 1578; he had possibly not completed his book at the end of Queen Mary's reign. It is noteworthy that in 1557 Sir Thomas More's English works were first collected together and published, at the Queen's command, under the editorship of More's nephew, Justice Rastell, the elder son of the printer, John Rastell. In 1555 and 1556 the Latin works were published

at Louvain. William Roper's precious memoir, described as *A Brief History of the Life, Arraignment, and Death of that Mirrour of all True Honour and Vertue, Syr Thomas More*, must have circulated in MS. for well-nigh seventy years, until at length "T. P." gave it to the press. Unfortunately the text he found was very faulty. "T. P." has not yet been identified, but may be Thomas Plowden. It is an interesting coincidence that a writer with the same initials, Thomas Paynell, the learned translator, added a table of contents to the afore-mentioned edition of More's English works. But this Thomas Paynell died in 1567, and "T. P." was the contemporary of Lady Elizabeth, Countess of Banbury, the second wife of William Knollys, upon whom Charles I conferred the Earldom of Banbury in August, 1626.

Other Biographies

Before the *Life* appeared in print the MS. version had already been utilised by various biographers of Sir Thomas More, notably by Stapleton, whose *Tres Thomæ* appeared at Antwerp in 1588; by Nicholas Harpsfield, whose work is preserved in Harleian MS. 6253; and by Cresacre