

INTRODUCTION

THE modern visitor to Norwich who has found his way through steep, winding streets or staircased alleys into the most romantic of English market-places is within a stone's throw of the spot in which the famous physician whose tercentenary East Anglia was celebrating lately spent the greater part of his long and fortunate life. A very ordinary house, distinguished, however, with a memorial tablet, occupies the site. The garden, too, with its rareties, which Evelyn, when he visited Browne in 1671, thought "a paradise," has long since disappeared. But close at hand towers the great east window of St. Peter Mancroft, the magnificent church in which the *medicus religiosus* worshipped; and Old Norwich affords not a few glimpses from crowded streets into venerable courtyards with vistas of greenery beyond, which make it easy to imagine the circumstances of his abode.

Although Norwich took the lead in commemorating his birth, he was not, as is often imagined, born there. His father, also a Thomas, came of a stock of Cheshire squires. He was a younger son, and had gone up to London to push his fortune in trade. At the beginning of the century we find him settled in or near Cheapside as a mercer. Here, on October 19, 1605, the author of the *Religio Medici* was born. Of his early years almost nothing is known, beyond the fact that he passed his schooldays at Winchester, and thence, in 1623, entered as a fellow-commoner at Pembroke (then known as Broadgates Hall), Oxford—the college in which, a hundred years later, his great eighteenth-century devotee, Samuel Johnson, passed fourteen months of proudly