

Then there seemed to be a staying of the flood, followed by a strange sickening setting of the building. The truth rushed upon her. The water had, indeed, reached its climax, but the peril of its receding was even worse. The subsiding had begun. Could the old, half-rotten floors withstand the suction of the receding flood.

Suddenly the lower end of the large building sank under the pressure. The children screamed and the house gave a terrible lurch—a fraction more and the leaning structure must topple into the current. She shut her teeth and gave the orders.

THE MARTYR

"Mr. Delmers, hand out the babies to me on the flooring, and I'll tie them on."

Before either Delmers or the Sisters could remonstrate, Sister Superior climbed through the open window onto the unsteady raft, which was now within two feet. Delmers' heart fairly bounded with fright.

"Here, you older boys," he shouted, "hold the rope while I pass out the babies."

A dozen willing hands grabbed it. One—two—three babies were passed out to the Sister Superior, who rapidly and skilfully tied them to the flooring, first, with her own cincture, then with those passed out by the other Sisters.

A fourth baby, a tiny tot of two, was passed out and Sister Joseph reached to get him, when a sudden lurch of the flooring pulled the rope away from the boys.

Loud cries of despair arose as all observed what had happened. Delmers cried with the anguish of death; "Oh God, spare Sister Superior and those babies and I will gladly give my life."

A moment and the tragedy was over. The rotten flooring had parted where Sister Joseph stood and they saw her pass beneath the waters as the flooring moved furiously up the street with the precious charges.

The house did not collapse, and when the flood subsided two or three days later, Delmers went with the others to find the remains of the heroic Sister Superior. At last, in the debris, the garb of a Religious was discovered, and, after some seconds of feverish digging among water-soaked boards and rubbish, all that was mortal of the Sister Superior was recovered. In her arms was clasped the two-year-old baby and on her face, strangely undistorted, was the peace of God.

Delmars sank to his knees in the mud and prayed as only a reconverted sinner can pray: "Oh, God, was this sacrifice necessary to bring me to my duty? What a Good Friday."

Very early Easter Sunday, a strange man appeared at the door of the rectory in a large Eastern city.

"Father, please," he said awkwardly, "I've no right to ask, but I need to go to the Sacraments as never did mortal man before."

The priest looked at this visitor closely. Then a beautiful smile lit up his features and he pressed the man's hand.

"John," he said, tears of happiness gathering in his eyes, the while, "slip into the sacristy; I'll be in the confessional presently."

At 10 o'clock the great choir was singing "Regina Coeli," and a well-dressed man slipped into a familiar pew beside a little woman whose hair was slightly streaked with gray. Beside her knelt a beautiful girl, who bent her head devoutly in prayer.

The movement of the stranger as he knelt beside them attracted the attention of the girl.

She looked up, then leaned over to her mother, whispering: "Somebody's in our pew."

The mother stared not look—something all unseen told her the happy story—she reached out her hand which joyously closed over a larger one.

"John," she said softly, "you've come back!"

And the choir sang with all the joys of Eastertide—"Haec Dies"—
—O this is the Day that He Hath Made! Alleluia! Alleluia!

BLESSED THOMAS MORE

The following interesting paper on Blessed Thomas More was read by Mrs. James Rigney, of Kingston, at the Monthly Meeting of the Catholic Women's League in London, Ontario, Sunday, March 11th. In the interest of those who were not present we gladly publish the scholarly paper feeling many of our readers will derive not alone considerable pleasure but much valuable information from the account prepared by Mrs. Rigney of this remarkable, outstanding Catholic.

In an age of doubt and materialism when principles are viewed as nebulous abstractions scarce with an argument, much less a sacrifice, when dogma is regarded as the sole touch-stone of a life's success, it is well that we should sometimes pause to regain a truer perspective, a finer sense of values. Of this rarer and finer viewpoint, history does not lack its champions and exemplars. Oftimes the miracle has occurred whereby the camel has penetrated the needle's eye and the rich man has not turned from the Master, sorrowing, because of his great possessions. It is of such an example, I would speak today, of one in whom intellectual pre-eminence was allied with child-like faith, of

one whose name is writ as large on the history of his country as of his church—an imperishable glory for England as for Rome.

Sir Thomas More! How clearly his figure detaches itself from the brilliant Tudor Court in which he moved, always a little aloof from its rivalries and sycophancies and intrigues; the ascetic in him, the philosopher, the humorist, appraising and disdaining its hollownes. Faithfully and well he served Caesar, while the service of God and Caesar were compatible, unhesitatingly he made his choice when the roads forked, though one led to wealth, honors and all the world's most prizes, and one to Tyburn and the headsman's axe.

Let us retrace our steps and learn what manner of man it was who stood at that cross-road of his own fate and England's; that great Lord Chancellor whose plain "Nay" ringing down the ages, has shown us not how zealot and visionary, but how England's greatest legal mind viewed Henry's arrogation of a power that was not his, but Rome's. Thomas More was born in London in 1478, of a family belonging to the professional classes. His father, a lawyer who was eventually elevated to the bench, amassed a modest fortune which enabled him to bestow excellent educational opportunities on his gifted son. He was sent to the best day-school in London where Latin was the main study, as also the medium of instruction. Through his father's influence he was received into the household of the Archbishop of Canterbury where boys of good family served as pages, receiving meanwhile instruction from the learned chaplains of the Archbishop. On festivals, little plays and pageants were presented, on which occasions, we are told, young More would mingle with the masquers, and extemporize witty speeches and amusing plays, more diverting to the on-lookers than the actor's carefully rehearsed efforts. The Archbishop, much impressed by the intellectual powers of his young protege, would predict of him to the frequenters of his palace—"This child sitting writing at the table, whoever shall live to see it, will prove a great man."

The Prelate arranged with his father to send him to Oxford. There his slender means, no less than his natural bent, debarred him from participation in the amusements of his rich and highborn school fellows. His mind naturally quick and receptive was thus concentrated upon the pursuit of learning, the study of the Greek language and rich literature, but lately introduced into the Oxford curriculum, arousing his especial interest. In Latin he had already attained remarkable facility, and French he spoke with fluency and ease. His father knowing no Greek, and fearing the effect of his pagan philosophy on his son's faith, decided upon withdrawing him from Oxford and placing him in the Inns of Court to follow his own profession—the Law. Ill-grounded indeed were his fears for his son's orthodoxy. Oxford, with its traditions of unswerving fidelity to the faith, had kindled in him a glowing zeal for his religious heritage. Certain hours of the day he devoted to religious exercises—he fasted, prayed, practised great austerities and for awhile seemed almost persuaded of a call to the religious life. Providence had however reserved for him a different testimony, towards which his life began to shape itself.

The abandonment of all thought of a religious vocation did not result in any abatement of pious observances, nor did they in their turn militate against his intellectual development, or render him less diligent in practical matters, or the pursuit of legitimate worldly advantages. He made rapid progress in his profession and entered Parliament when he was soon known as a fearless and independent speaker. His first notable Parliamentary achievement was the defeat of a measure for the levying of heavy and oppressive taxation on the people of Henry VII. This monarch, we are told, was divided between sentiments of anger and amazement that a beardless boy should successfully assail a royal prerogative—for that royal prerogative from which each century has shorn a margin, was, in the days of Tudor absolutism, a thing of wide and far-reaching scope to be questioned only at the greatest peril. There is a consistency in the fact that Thomas More entered the lists to tilt his first lance in the cause in which he subsequently waged his last struggle—the limitation of royal prerogative to that which justice admitted to be its province.

Meanwhile he had married, and something of the mental attitude of the scholarly celibate seems to have characterized his wooing. He had become intimate with an Essex gentleman named Cote, whose household included three daughters. The second of these being "fairest" and "best favored," seems to have enlisted More's preference, but discerning it discourteous to the eldest sister that her junior should precede her to the altar, he constrained his fancy towards the eldest whom he married in 1505. Their union was happy but of brief duration, for six years later his wife died, leaving a family of four children. Feeling the need of a guiding hand over his young family, More married a second time. This time his choice fell upon a widow whom he had declared to be neither learned nor beautiful, but whom seems in com-

parison to have been richly gifted with domestic virtues often lacking in those more showily endowed. Ideally happy in a patriarchal family life, his professional success was steadily augmenting. A small legal position of honor, shortly brought him in touch with the London merchants who, greatly impressed by his quick-wittedness, entrusted him with a mission to Flanders—the object of which was the improvement of trade relations between the London and Flemish merchants.

It is a point worth stressing that the life which at the zenith of its fame was to be surrendered for a principle, an ideal, was not that of a mere fanatic or visionary. To none but a man of shrewdness, sagacity and practical acumen, would these hard-headed London merchants have entrusted their interests. The appointment was confirmed by Cardinal Wolsey, then at the apex of his power. How interesting, did time permit to trace these parallel lives, to contrast More's unswerving honesty of purpose with the unworthy concessions of Wolsey's shifting policy, continually trimmed to catch the wind of royal favor. History offers few sadder pictures than the prostitution of such high gifts to such ignoble uses. Bankrupt of honor, recreant to his faith, the tragedy of his wasted life wrung from his dying lips that poignant utterance which must find its echo in the hearts of all who build the structure of their lives on the shifting sands of time—"Had I served my God as faithfully as I have served my King, He would not have abandoned me in my grey hairs."

From his Flemish travels More returned with the germ of his epoch-making book, the "Utopia." In this work he sketched an ideal country in the new world, where the wrongs and oppressions of the old did not exist. In the England of his day he had frequently deplored the greed and callousness of the rich, their indifference to the surrounding unemployment and poverty which had its natural sequel in lawlessness and desperation. As one called upon to administer the laws, he had been horrified by the injustice which pronounced the death sentence alike on thief and murderer, so that England had not sufficient gibbets for its malefactors.

In More's imaginary country, the prevention, more than the punishment of crime, was the legislator's task. Labor was compulsory for all, certain hours being apportioned to the practice of a craft or trade, certain others to tilling the soil, and the remainder to recreation and intellectual pursuits. Much care and time was devoted to the education of the children, and families were housed in pleasant dwellings surrounded by gardens—all this at the expense of the State. Enlightened sanitary regulations safeguarded the public health—in short all the reforms of modern social workers were foreshadowed in this wonderful book, where deepest thought and airiest fancy so happily mingle.

Shortly after the publication of the "Utopia" More was recalled from the speculative to the actual by the religious upheaval in Germany. Luther, the apostate monk, was laboring to overthrow papal supremacy, a principle in defence of which More was prepared to make any sacrifice. Henry VIII, himself no mean theologian, wrote a refutation of Luther's heresies in a tract which earned for him from the Pope the title "Defender of the Faith," a title which he inconspicuously retained even after he had committed a whole nation to schism. More's reputation as lawyer and diplomatist kept pace with his literary fame. Wolsey, with much astuteness, recognized and availed himself of his abilities, conferring upon him new posts and honors, secure in the knowledge that the great esteem in which More was held by all classes made them as popular as they were politic appointments. Gradually he was drawn into the circle of the court whence, a contemporary tells us, he was as eager to escape as others to penetrate.

More's charming personality, his ready wit, his breadth of outlook, his sense of humor, his courtesy and his love for the favor of a monarch himself, learned, gay, affable, with the personal bravery of his race and a certain appreciation of life's higher things which enhances the tragedy of his subsequent downfall. Henry's Tudor shrewdness must have taught him how to appraise the rare service of a man indifferent to rewards and honors. More's transparent honesty and sturdy independence of speech and action in a court where men had their price, must have kindled some answering gleam, in those brighter days of Henry's reign before the scholar and soldier were submerged in the libertine.

In 1529 Wolsey forfeited the royal favor, to maintain which he has sacrificed so much, and greatly to More's surprise he was called upon to fill the vacant post. More's father, Sir John More, was still a Judge when his son was raised to the highest legal post in England, and it is related of him that during the first year of his chancellorship and the last of his father's life, he daily passed at the lower court where Sir John More presided, to ask his father's blessing as he passed on to the Superior Court of Chancery. There was something very beautiful and simple and tender in all his family relations.

"Kisses I have given you in plenty and stripes but seldom," he wrote to one of his children in an age when great austerity characterized the relation of parent to child.

Shortly after More's elevation to the Chancellorship, the King consulted him upon the subject of his divorce from his wife, Catherine of Aragon. More frankly confessed his opposition to the King's design and for the time the matter was left in abeyance though no power could long deflect Henry from what was now a settled purpose. True he still hoped for the sanction of the Pope, but failing that he had already considered his course. Lutheranism hitherto discouraged in his realms would be fostered; its opposition to papal authority was a weapon ready forged to his hand. Unwillingly also he would play upon the national spirit of patriotism, by clever sophistries confusing the issues, till the unlearned gathered that it was more than spiritual supremacy Rome claimed and that, were the national liberties not safeguarded, the country might soon groan beneath the yoke of foreign oppression. At such a juncture we may imagine what the sanction of Sir Thomas More would have meant to Henry's design. Famed throughout Europe as a lawyer, an author, an advanced and clear thinker, his adherence would have been a tremendous endorsement of Henry's cause that would have carried weight in court and cottage. What rewards and emoluments would not such complaisance have reaped from a grateful monarch! Failing his endorsement, Henry for a time was left down to his scheme, was ready with enactments to abolish papal supremacy in England and remove all obstacles to the royal divorce. But all his life More had avoided the easy paths of compromise. To remain in office when Parliament was committed to heresy was to do violence to his conscience. Translated into terms of today, we might say he voted a lack of confidence in the Government when he laid down the seals of his high office, his brief tenure of which had been memorable and brilliant one in the annals of English jurisprudence. Of his resignation he wrote to a friend "Erasmus,"—"That which I have from a child to this day continually wished, that being freed from the troublesome business of public affairs I might live some while only to God and myself. I have now, by the special grace of Almighty God and the favor of my most indulgent prince, obtained."

His retirement left a vacancy in public life difficult to fill. So impartially had he administered the law that we are told "the poorest suitor obtained ready access to him and speedy trial while the richest offered presents in vain and the claims of kindred found no favor." Not only in court did he dispense justice but his son-in-law tells us "it was his wont every afternoon to sit in his open hall to the intent that if any person had any suit unto him he might the more boldly come into his presence and there open complaint before him."

More employed his new found leisure in his library and chapel philosophically reducing his scale of living to suit his altered fortunes and striving to avoid all political discussion, but events were conspiring to withdraw him from his scholarly seclusion. England was at the time greatly stirred by the pretensions of Elizabeth Barton, called the Holy Maid of Kent; claiming divine inspiration she declared that the King had lost his soul and prophesied his speedy end as a punishment for his divorce. More was interested in her revelations, upon whose authenticity he however did not pronounce, and impressed by her religious fervor, but wisely counselled her to devote herself to pious exercises and not meddle in political matters. Inter-course, however casual with the maid, was fraught with grave danger. She was brought to trial for treasonable utterances and by way of defence her adherents declared Sir Thomas More, the late Lord Chancellor, to be one of her disciples. More was able to exonerate himself in the matter and at once admitted that he had been the momentary dupe of a foolish imposture. But at the trial, striking proofs of More's popularity and influence aroused the suspicions and jealousy of the King. Henry was ready at any time to welcome his ex-archbishop back to court at the price of the concession More would never make. His resolute withdrawal was a tacit criticism which Henry could not brook. His divorce from Catherine of Aragon had been swiftly followed by the announcement of his marriage to Anne Boleyn and Parliament had passed a bill vesting the rights of succession to the crown in the children of this union. Commissioners were appointed to administer this oath throughout the Kingdom with in some cases, the additional clause by which the subscribers renounced all allegiance to foreign rulers; this being of course another blow aimed at papal supremacy. In this extended form the document was submitted to More for signature—the old issue in new guise—but as clear cut for that keen mind as on the day when he sacrificed fame and fortune on the decision. Fidelity to the Queen's children he could promise, with the royal succession Parliament was competent to deal, but he could not subscribe to the extension of the

act of succession whereby the first marriage of the King was declared to be illegal, for on this question Rome had spoken in no uncertain tones.

When he was called upon to take this oath, More knew full well that the stage was set for his final tragedy. To one whose every keen sense was attuned to life's richest harmonies, there must have come at that moment of supreme decision a well nigh overmastering sense of the richness and variety of that life to which he must say farewell. Thoughts of the philosophic problems to be unravelled, and the mental vistas to be explored—homelier memories of the warmth of summer suns and the fragrance of spring breezes of the dearness of friends and the nearness of kindred, must have stirred his nature to its profoundest depths. It was the shaken but resolute one that the morning when the boat dropped silently from his garden steps bearing him to Lambeth palace. With his final denial still to make, he could say confidently—"I thank the Lord that the field is won." The temper of the man had been too often proven for Cranmer and Latimer to entertain any hope of his subscribing to the oath. However, upon his first refusal they urged him to walk in the garden and reconsider his decision. The day being warm he sat at the open window gazing into the courtyard below. Memory must have peopled the scene for him with other and nobler figures than those who crowded the courtyard jostling one another in their eagerness to take the oath which he found harder than death. In this palace, beneath the benevolent tutelage of saintly Archbishop Morton, much of his boyhood had been spent. One fancy that in those fateful moments, the spirit of his old patron was very near. Time had verified his prophecy; the boy who had aroused his affectionate interest had indeed done marvellous things. From Lambeth More was taken to the Tower where he faced the end with unruffled serenity. His was the temperament for which "stone walls do not a prison make." In reading, in correspondence, in visits from his family and friends whom he received with such unaffected gaiety as to win them to brief forgetfulness of his impending doom; thus passed his numbered days.

The original sentence of hanging, was committed to beheading, a favor which More, with a flash of his old ironic humor, "prayed that his friends might be spared the need of asking." His son-in-law and earliest biographer has left us this touching picture of his last meeting with his favorite daughter. The language is the language of another day, but the emotions it depicts are as old as time—unchangable as eternity. "When Sir Thomas More came from Westminster to the Tower ward again, his daughter, my wife, desirous to see her father whom she thought she would never see in this world, and also to have his final blessing, gave attendance about the Tower. Where where she knew he should pass before he could enter the Tower. There, tarrying his coming, after his blessing upon her knees reverently received, she, hasting towards him without consideration or care of herself pressing in amongst the midst of the throng and company of the guard that with halberds and bills went round about him, hastily ran to him and took him about the neck and kissed him. Who well liking her most natural and dear daughterly affection towards him gave her his fatherly blessing and many Godly words of comfort besides. From whom, after he was departed not satisfied, with the former sight of him she suddenly turned back again and ran to him as before, took him about the neck and divers times kissed him lovingly and at last with a full and heavy heart was fain to depart from him, the beholding whereof was to many that were present so lamentable that it made them for very sorrow thereof to weep and mourn." For More we may imagine all the bitterness of death was in that moment.

His high courage carried him unflinchingly through the final scenes. Ascending the frail steps of the scaffold on Tower Hill, he jestingly begged the officer in charge to see him safely up and as for coming down he could shift for himself. "Pluck up thy spirit man, be not afraid to do thine office," he admonished the faltering headsman, then with the high serenity of one with soul at peace he declared that he died in and for the Catholic Faith and prayed God to send the King good counsel. There is a fine line written of the Jesuit martyrs who in a subsequent reign suffered for the Faith. More prized above all else—"They learned at Douay how to die—at Tyburn how to live." With More, as with these other martyrs it was the habit of a lifetime that gave courage for the final ordeal. It was that courage strengthened by a thousand small decisions before which royal tyranny went down to its defeat. Exterior circumstances Henry might bend to his will, but the inner citadel of More's great soul was never in his power. Ultimate victory remains with him who serene in the consciousness of the justice of the cause for which he died, greeted the headsman with a smile and irradiated with a jest the gloom of Tyburn.

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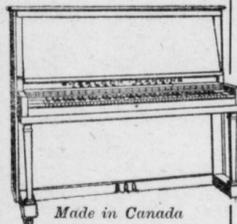
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