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MARGARET ROPER

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SAINT THOMAS MORE

SAINT JOHN FISHER

THREE CARDINALS
(NEWMAN–WISEMAN–MANNING)

THE MORE FAMILY GROUP:
Pen drawing by Holbein

MARGARET ROPER

Eldest Daughter of St. Thomas More

by
E. E. REYNOLDS

P. J. KENEDY & SONS
NEW YORK

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PREFACE

It is not possible to write a year-by-year biography of Margaret Roper as the materials available are so unevenly distributed over the forty years of her life. This defect in the records may explain why no one has attempted hitherto to give an account of her life. It may also be that she stood so near her father that he has overshadowed her, and it has been difficult to think of her as a personality in her own right.

A careful examination of the records has revealed, however, sufficient matter to justify a separate study. Some of the details needed for a rounded portrait are lacking, but a sketch can have its attraction. It has been of considerable interest to see the life of Saint Thomas More from a fresh point of view; this has brought out some aspects of his personality more clearly, and I hope the reader will share my experience.

The main sources of information are the early lives of Sir Thomas More and his *English Works*. Cresacre More's "Life" is a secondary source; he recorded one or two family traditions that are of value. It is difficult to exaggerate the debt students owe to the editors of the Early English Text Society's editions of the Roper, Harpsfield and Ro. Ba. lives. Thomas Stapleton's "Life" is the source for some of the letters; the "Tower letters", as they may be called, were printed in the 1557 folio of More's works. I have used here the text established by Elizabeth F. Rogers in her *Correspondence of Sir Thomas More* (1947), and for the letters between the Mores and Erasmus, Allen's *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami.*

All the letters by Margaret Roper have been given in full. Those from More to his "school" and the Erasmus correspondence were in Latin. Translations by Father Thomas Bridgett and Mgr. P. E. Hallett (for Stapleton) are the basis of those given in this book, but each has been compared with the original and some changes made, occasionally to get nearer the meaning of the

original, but mostly to bring the style (particularly that of Father Bridgett) more in keeping with present-day usage. Letters in English are given in modern spelling. All dates are New Style.

I have not thought it necessary to give references to the Roper and other lives as any passage can soon be found in them from their indexes. Nor have I particularized references to *Letters and Papers*, *State Papers*, *Patent Rolls*, etc. The dates given will be sufficient guidance for the student to follow up my statements. This has meant avoiding too heavy an array of footnotes; these have been restricted to the less obvious sources, and to pieces of information that, I hope, may add interest for the reader.

This book may be regarded as a pendant to my *Saint Thomas More*, where many matters are treated in greater detail than would be justified in a life of his eldest daughter.

E. E. R.

CHAPTER I

PARENTAGE

In his account of Sir Thomas More's life, William Roper gave only one date, that of the martyrdom; Nicholas Harpsfield and Thomas Stapleton were equally reticent. How much research and argument they could have saved later biographers by giving the dates of More's birth, of his marriage, and of the birth of his first child!

A glance at Holbein's sketch of the More family (Plate I), or at his later miniature of Margaret Roper (Plate V), would seem to give the information we need; on the first the ages are marked and on the second it is stated that it was painted in her thirtieth year, but unfortunately we cannot be certain of the dates when Holbein did these works. He was in England from the autumn of 1526 to the summer of 1528; he returned in 1532 and remained until his death in 1543. The sketch for the large painting of the More family was probably done late in 1526 or during 1527. The note on it gives Margaret's age as twenty-two; she was born then in 1504 or 1505. The miniature does not help us; the thirtieth year of her age suggests 1534 or 1535 for the date of the painting, but those were the years of her deep anxiety for her father and it would seem unlikely that she would consent to sit for her portrait at such a time.

There is, however, a more helpful clue. The title page (Plate III) of Margaret Roper's translation of *A Devout Treatise upon the Paternoster*[1] by Erasmus described her as "a young, virtuous and well-learned gentlewoman of nineteen year of age," and the preface was dated 1 October 1524. From this it can be said that she was born in 1505 before October and that her parents were married in 1504.

At the time of his marriage Thomas More was probably

[1] The Preface is printed in Foster Watson's *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women* (1912).

twenty-six years of age. He had tested his vocation for the cloister and for the priesthood. To quote Erasmus:

> With all his strength he turned towards the religious life, by watching, fasting, prayer, and similar tests, preparing himself for the priesthood; more wisely than the many who rush blindly into that onerous profession without first making trial of themselves. And he had almost embraced this ministry, but being unable to master the desire for a wife, he decided to be a chaste husband rather than an unchaste priest.

His wife was Jane (Joan) Colt, the eldest daughter of John Colt of Netherhall near Roydon in Essex;[1] this was some dozen miles north-east of North Mimms in Hertfordshire where Thomas More's father, John, had a property called Gobions.[2] It is not known how the two families became acquainted, but a possible connection is that Thomas Colt, Jane's grandfather, was a member of Edward IV's Council and his father before him had served that king. John More was warmly attached to the memory of Edward IV, for, when he made his will in 1527, he provided Masses to be said for the soul of a king who had been dead for thirty-six years. It may be that John More had been brought to the notice of Edward IV by one of the Colts. Some personal link of this kind would seem necessary to explain the association between two families that otherwise had little in common. The Colts were a landed family and John Colt owned two manors in Essex as well as many other properties in that county. John More had become a serjeant-at-law in 1503, which, in the hierarchy of the law, placed him just below the judges. In addition to Gobions, he may have had some London property but he was not a wealthy man. His son Thomas had still to complete his training in the law. As a member of the Parliament that sat during the first three months of 1504, he is said to have fallen under the displeasure of Henry VII for opposing the king's request for subsidies; Roper tells us that the king took his revenge by sending John More to the Tower

[1] The ruins of the house can still be seen.

[2] Or Gubbins, also known as More Park. The house was pulled down in 1836 and the estate became part of Brookman's Park.

on a trumped-up charge until he had paid a fine of £100.[1] This would not recommend the Mores to anyone seeking a husband for a daughter.

Whatever it was that brought the two families together, it is clear from the brief accounts given by William Roper and Cresacre More, that John Colt enjoyed the company of Thomas More and decided that this young lawyer, who had still to establish himself, would be a suitable husband for one of his daughters. But which one? It must be remembered that we are not here concerned with a romantic love affair, but with the kind of marriage arrangement that was normal at that period. According to Roper, the second daughter was most favoured by Thomas More, "yet when he considered that it would be a 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 fancy towards her, and soon after married her."

Cresacre More tells us that when Thomas More "determined to marry, he propounded to himself for a pattern in life a singular layman, John Picus, Earl of Mirandola, who was a man most famous for virtue and most eminent for learning." Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) was regarded by his contemporaries as a prodigy of learning both classical and oriental; yet he did not go the way of the pagan-humanists of the day but was a man of deep piety who renounced his possessions and, towards the end of his short, brilliant career, sought to enter the Dominican Order under the patronage of Savonarola. Such a life appealed to the young Thomas More for it reflected his own problem of combining devotion to learning with devotion to the faith, and of reconciling the search for personal sanctity with the duties of a life in the world. About 1504 he translated a short life of Pico and three of his letters, and added verses of his own composition on themes suggested by three series of his hero's apophthegms; the last consisted of "The Twelve Properties or Conditions of a

[1] Roper is the only source of this information. Doubts (which I share) have been expressed as to the accuracy of Roper's story. Thomas More's constituency is not known. It is difficult to believe that it was necessary to send Serjeant John More to the Tower to get £100 out of him.

Lover." In pairs of stanzas, More gave first the worldly, and secondly the religious application of each "Property."

Thus on "To serve his love, nothing thinking of any reward or profit" he wrote:

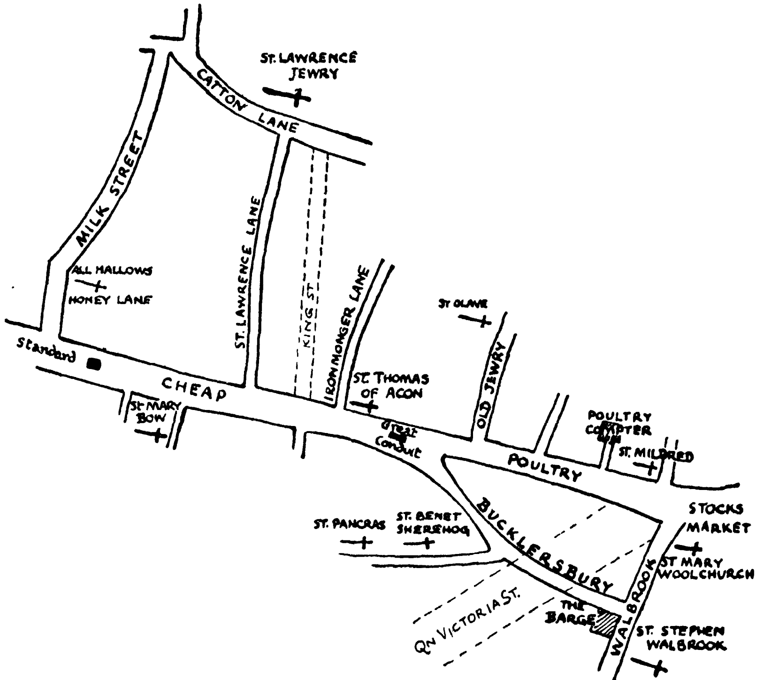
> A very lover will his love obey:
> His joy it is and all his appetite
> To pain himself in all that ever he may,
> That person in whom he set hath his delight
> Diligently to serve both day and night
> For very love, without any regard
> To any profit, guerdon or reward.
>
> So thou likewise that hast thine heart yset
> Upward to God, so well thyself endeavour,
> So studiously that nothing may thee let
> Not for His service any wise dissever:
> Freely look eke thou serve that thereto never
> Trust of reward or profit do thee bind,
> But only faithful heart and loving mind.

This study of Pico della Mirandola is further evidence of the seriousness with which the young Thomas More planned his life. He had proved that his true vocation was not for the cloister but for the married state, and for him the Church's teaching that marriage is a sacrament was of deep significance. This conviction was to affect his attitude towards married life and the upbringing of his children.

The exact date and place of the marriage of Thomas More and Jane Colt are not known. They were to make their home in Bucklersbury but whether they did so on their marriage or later is not clear from Roper's account. It would have been in keeping with the custom of the time for them to have lived first with Serjeant John More in Milk Street, where, according to Stow, "there be many fair houses for wealthy merchants and others." The earliest record of More leasing a house in Bucklersbury is dated 12 December 1513, but that does not necessarily mean that he and his wife were not already living there. It was a house called The Barge and was the property of the Hospital of St Thomas of

Acon where the Mercers had their chapel. More had been admitted to the freedom of that Company in March 1509.

The Barge was on the south side of Bucklersbury and next to the Walbrook. Stow in 1603 described it as "one great house builded of stone and timber, called the Old Barge because barges out of the river Thames were rowed up so far." The Walbrook was covered over in More's time and the houses along the old



banks were noted for their gardens. That of The Barge probably extended over the area where, in 1954, a temple of Mithras was uncovered. It would be in this garden that More kept the strange collection of animals that was one of his delights.

Erasmus saw much of Thomas More in 1505 and 1506; the two men had quickly become friends when Erasmus came to England for the first time in 1499, and now on this second visit they amused themselves translating some of the dialogues of Lucian. What did the young wife make of their guest? He was ten years older than her husband and did not speak English; in fact, he never did learn

the language even during his years at Cambridge. It must have been a trial for her to listen to the two men exchanging jokes in Latin. Moreover, Erasmus was fussy about his food and his comforts; all his portraits show him muffled up in furs as if he could never be warm enough. We owe him one or two glimpses of Jane More. In the account of Thomas More which Erasmus wrote in 1519, he said:

> He married a young girl of good family, who had been brought up with her sisters in their parents' home in the country; choosing her, yet undeveloped, that he might more readily mould her to his tastes. He had her taught literature, and trained her in every kind of music; and she was just growing into a charming life's companion for him, when she died young, leaving him with several children: of whom three girls are still living, Margaret, Elizabeth, and Cecily, and one son, John.

In one of his early *Colloquies*, entitled "The Uneasy Wife", Erasmus described an incident which was evidently based on his knowledge of the newly married Mores. It develops the statement just quoted that Thomas More chose his wife "yet undeveloped, that he might more readily mould her to his tastes."

> I am intimate with a gentleman of good family, learned, and of particularly keen wit. He married a young woman, a maiden of seventeen, who had been brought up entirely in the country at her father's house, as men of his position prefer to live in the country most of the time for the sake of hunting and fowling. My friend wished to have a simple, unaffected maid so that he might the more easily train her in his own tastes. He began by instructing her in literature and music, and to accustom her by degrees to repeat the discourses she heard, and to teach her other things that would afterwards be of use to her. Now as all this was completely new to a girl who had been brought up at home to do nothing but chatter and amuse herself, she soon grew weary of this life and would no longer submit to her husband's wishes. When he expostulated with her, she would weep day after day, and sometimes throw herself flat on the ground, beating her head as if she wished for death.

> As there seemed to be no way of ending this, he concealed his annoyance, and invited his wife to spend a holiday with him at his father-in-law's house in the country; to this she most willingly agreed. When they got there, the husband left his wife with her mother and sisters and went hunting with his father-in-law; he took the opportunity of taking him apart from any witnesses and of telling him that whereas he had hoped his daughter would prove an agreeable companion for life, he now had one who was always weeping and moaning, nor could she be cured by scolding; he begged his father-in-law to help him in curing her distemper.

The upshot was that the father-in-law talked his daughter into a better frame of mind, and all was well.

We must not take this story as literal truth, but it no doubt had a basis in fact, and we may feel rather sorry for Jane More's early trials without accepting Erasmus's story in every detail. It suggests that Thomas More was a little heavy-handed as a young husband and that his sense of proportion was temporarily dulled.

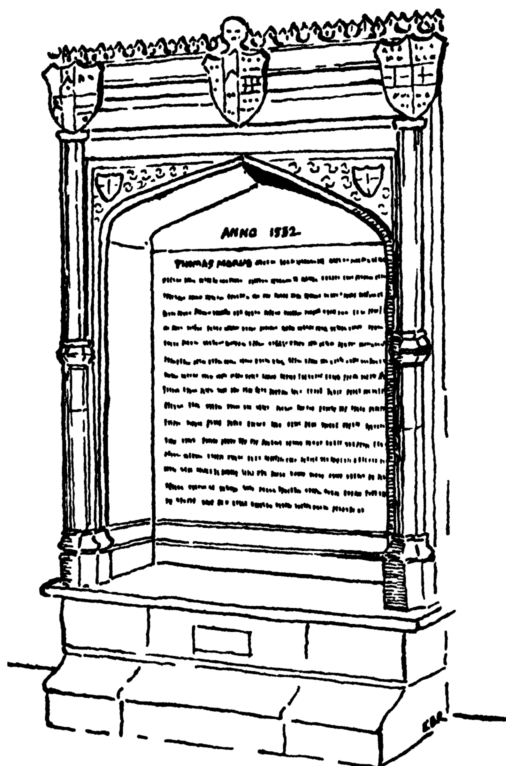
Another reference to Jane More comes in a letter to Erasmus from Henry VIII's Latin Secretary, Andrew Ammonio, who was lodging with the Mores. On 19 May 1511 he wrote, "Our dearest More and his gentle (*facillima*) wife who never thinks of you without a kind wish, with her children and all the household are in very good health."

That note has a pathetic interest for when Ammonio wrote again on 27 October he made a veiled reference to another hostess. "I have moved at last into St. Thomas's College, where I am more housed according to my ideas than I was with More. I do not see *the hooked beak of the harpy*, but there are many other things that offend me, so that I really do not know how I can still go on living in England."

Jane More had died during the period between those two letters. Four children survived her: Margaret aged seven, Elizabeth aged six, Cecily aged five and John aged two. Those ages may not be correct within a year, but they are near enough to show that Thomas More was left with four very young children. The

account written by Erasmus, from which an extract has been quoted, suggests that other children had died; perhaps Jane More died in childbirth.

Twenty years later, Thomas More placed in Chelsea Old Church a monument with a long inscribed epitaph; the body of Jane More was then reburied in the vault. The epitaph ends with



some lines of verse commemorating his first wife, Jane, and his second wife, Alice. The following is a literal translation.

> Here lies Jane the dear little wife of Thomas More who intends this tomb for Alice and for me [himself]. The first, united to me in my youthful years, gave me a boy and three girls to call me father. The second—a rare quality in a step-mother—was as affectionate as if her step-children were her own. It is hard to say if the first lived with me more beloved than the

> second does now. O how blessed if fate and religion had permitted us all three to live together! I pray the tomb and heaven may unite us; thus death will give what life could not give.

The needs of these young children were doubtless foremost in his mind when Thomas More decided to marry a second time, against the advice of his friends, according to Erasmus. Though in the manner of the period it was a cool-headed arrangement, it proved a wise decision, and the references to Alice More in the epitaph just quoted are evidence of her husband's deep regard. This second marriage took place within a month of the death of Jane More. We learn this from a letter written in 1535 by Father John Bouge, who, before entering the Charterhouse at Axholme, had been priest at St. Stephen's, Walbrook. He wrote:

> As for Sir Thomas More, he was my parishioner in London. I christened him two goodly children. I buried his first wife, and within a month after he came to me on a Sunday at night late and there he brought me a dispensation to be married the next Monday without any banns asking.

The second wife was Alice, the widow of John Middleton, a prosperous merchant who had died in 1509: her maiden name is not known, but she was presumably an Arden as the arms of that family are in the More Chapel at Chelsea. In his account of Thomas More, Erasmus wrote:

> Within a few months he married a widow, more for the care of his children than for his own pleasure; "neither a pearl nor a girl," as he facetiously describes her, but a shrewd and careful mistress of a house. Yet his life with her is as blithe and sweet as if she had all the attractiveness of youth, and with his buoyant gaiety he wins her to more compliance than severity could command. Surely a striking conquest to persuade a woman, middle-aged, set in her ways, and much occupied with her home, to learn to sing to the lyre or the lute, the monochord or the flute, and to do a daily task fixed by her husband.

The reference to music is supported by More's friend Richard Pace who noted that she played duets with her husband.[1]

[1] *De fructu* (1517), p. 35.

She was evidently a most capable housewife; she had a reputation for blunt speech, and this may explain the phrase (if in fact it refers to her) in the second letter to Erasmus from Ammonio; *the hooked beak of the harpy* is a rude comment; perhaps she decided that Ammonio was a nuisance, as he may have been, and used her tongue to get him out of the house. He added that "there are many other things that offend me" and that suggests a troublesome person. The tribute Erasmus paid in 1519 carries more weight since three years earlier he had cut short a visit to The Barge because he felt that Alice More had had enough of him. It has already been noted that he was pernickety, and our sympathies may lie with his hostess.

It is true that some references to her, including one or two made by her husband in his bantering fashion, suggest that she was a woman of ordinary intelligence and had a sharp tongue, but against this must be set the praise given her when More composed the epitaph for the monument. Dr. Johnson remarked that "in lapidary inscriptions a man is not upon oath," but there is no reason to think that Thomas More did not mean what he said of his second wife: "the second—a rare quality in a step-mother—was as affectionate as if her step-children were her own." Whatever Alice More's limitations may have been in the eyes of visitors —and it is easy to make too much of chance remarks—she proved a second mother to four young children. She brought with her a daughter, Alice Middleton, who became as much one of the family as the other children. There was another little girl, Margaret Giggs. The note on Holbein's sketch gives her the same age as Margaret More and describes her as "cognata"; this indicates relationship by birth, but it has been suggested[1] that she was the daughter of Margaret's nurse. The second Margaret became, in More's phrase, "as dear as though she were a daughter." She was to prove one of the most notable members of the More circle.

It was certainly a very lively household. Thomas More was fond of children, and nephews and nieces and the children of friends came in and out as if they belonged to the family. His own

[1] By Dr. A. W. Reed in *Roper*, p. 128. He noted that, at a later date, a Thomas Gygs was the occupant of a small tenement next to The Barge.

quick sense of fun must have made life "merry"—to use one of his favourite words. He welcomed guests and visitors, but the more staid may have found this bevy of children somewhat trying.

We should not regard the Bucklersbury House of to-day as a desirable home for children, but four centuries ago The Barge must have been a pleasantly situated house.

> Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
> Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
> Forget the spreading of the hideous town,
> Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
> And dream of London, small and white and clean,
> The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green.[1]

London within its walls, with a population of present-day Bath, was a city to fascinate a child. There was so much to look at and enjoy; so much to excite wonder: Goldsmith's Row in Cheapside, or the open workshops of carpenters and stonemasons; the constant stream of traffic, or the bustle of trade in half-a-dozen markets; processions on the great Feast Days or on state occasions with public rejoicings on the birth of a prince or princess, or to receive important people; the pageants of the City Companies. There were the fine houses of the great nobles with their gardens and orchards. Ninety or more churches were dominated by the five-hundred foot spire of St. Paul's, and the sound of bells must have been constant, from the bell at Prime rung at St. Thomas of Acon when the wicket gates of the City were opened until the Vesper bell when traffic was supposed to end. Away to the east was the Tower from which Henry VIII had ridden through the City to his coronation at Westminster in 1509. London Bridge, with its grim relics of traitors, straddled the river and made a perilous passage for wherries and barges. Along the quays and wharves lay the ships of many countries carrying on a ceaseless trade, with foreign merchants and sailors to excite curiosity and sometimes enmity. All this must be seen as the background of the lives of the Mores at The Barge. Margaret lived in the heart of the City until she was twenty-one and was a married woman with a family of her own.

[1] William Morris, Prologue to *Earthly Paradise.*

CHAPTER II

EDUCATION

THOMAS STAPLETON recorded that "as soon as More's children were old enough to begin their education, he taught them personally or by a tutor." Until Margaret was about twelve years old, she and her sisters and brother had their father as their companion at home. His legal work up to 1517 was in the City or at Westminster, and when he became an Under-Sheriff of London in 1510, his court (police-court as we should call it) was at the Compter in the Poultry a few minutes away from Bucklersbury. When he reluctantly became a member of the King's Council in 1517, he found that the king made so many demands on his time that he could rarely get home. Both Henry and Catherine enjoyed his company so much that they were reluctant to part with him even for a few days. He was in attendance when the king went on progress, and official and personal letters from More were addressed from Woodstock, Abingdon, Woking, Hertford, Windsor and other royal manors during the years 1518 to 1529. It must have been particularly irksome to him to be kept away so much from his family just at the period when his children most needed his guidance. Indeed Roper tells us that More deliberately "began somewhat to dissemble his nature, and so by little and little from his former mirth to disuse himself" so that the king found his company less attractive and gave him leave for more frequent absences.

Fortunately the letters written by More to his children were lovingly preserved, and when Thomas Stapleton came to write his biography of Thomas More for his *Tres Thomae* (1588), he copied the originals taken into exile by members of the More household. Stapleton described these letters as "almost worn to pieces."

We know the names of some of the tutors chosen by More.

The first was John Clement. He had been a pupil at Dean Colet's new school of St. Paul's under William Lilly; he was a close friend of Thomas More and it was presumably on Lilly's recommendation that Clement became tutor. The earliest reference to him comes in More's prefatory letter to Peter Gilles in *Utopia;* there he speaks of "my boy, John Clement, who, as you know, was with us . . . . I never allow him to miss any conversation that may benefit him, as I hope much from the promise he shows in his Greek and Latin studies." This was in 1515. A year later More told Erasmus that Clement was helping Dean Colet to learn Greek—surely a unique instance of a pupil acting as instructor to the founder of a school! He remained with the Mores until the spring of 1518 when he entered the household of Cardinal Wolsey, even as Thomas More, thirty years earlier, had entered that of Cardinal Morton.

John Clement was followed by William Gonell who was recommended to More by Erasmus. Gonell was a native of Landbeach, some five miles out of Cambridge, where he kept a school; he did copying work for Erasmus who found Landbeach a pleasant retreat when he wished to get away from the University. Gonell was given the living of Conington in Cambridgeshire in 1517, and he wrote to his friend Henry Gold of St. Neot's asking him to find a preacher for Conington; he mentioned that "Clement is well, and so is More's whole family", and asked if he could borrow Cicero's Letters for More's use.

In a letter to his children which may be dated in 1521, More referred to two other tutors. "I am glad that Master Drew has returned safely, for, as you know, I was anxious about him. Did I not love you so warmly, I should really envy your good fortune in that so many and such excellent tutors have fallen to your lot. But I think you no longer need Master Nicholas, as you have learned whatever he had to teach you in astronomy."

Nothing certain is known of Master Drew; he may have been the Roger Drew who became a Fellow of All Souls, Oxford, in 1512. Master Nicholas Kratzer was a German scholar who in 1519 became astronomer to Henry VIII; there is a fine portrait of him by Holbein in the Louvre. Kratzer was one of the visiting tutors,

and, though his formal instruction may have ended about 1521, he remained a friend of the family and there is good reason to believe that it was he who wrote the notes on Holbein's sketch of the More family.

The last of the tutors of whom there is any record was Richard Hyrde who may have been educated at More's expense, for in the dedicatory epistle to his translation of Vives' *Instruction of a Christian Woman* he referred to Thomas More as "my singular good master and bringer-up." Hyrde took his degree at Oxford in 1519; nine years later he accompanied Stephen Gardiner and Edward Foxe when they were sent by Wolsey on a mission to the Pope. Gardiner described him as "a young man learned in physic, Greek and Latin." Hyrde died in Italy of a fever caught in fording a stream in flood during a storm. It is possible that Richard Hyrde was not a full-time tutor in the More household; perhaps he gave instruction in medicine, a subject which, as we shall see, More commended to Margaret.

Doubtless there were other tutors, both occasional and regular, whose names have not been recorded—"many and excellent" as More noted. Erasmus tells us how Mistress Alice More did her part in seeing that the children did the work set for them. Their education was planned by their father on considered principles. These were explained in a letter in Latin he wrote to William Gonell; the year is not stated but the opening lines suggest that Gonell had settled down to his task, so perhaps 1518 would be a fair conjecture for the date. In that year Margaret was about thirteen, Elizabeth, twelve, Cecily, eleven, and John, nine years old. As companions in their studies they had Margaret Giggs and Alice Middleton and perhaps their cousin Frances Staverton, the daughter of More's elder sister. Another member of the household was Anne Cresacre, of Barnbrough, Yorkshire, who had become More's ward after the death of her father in 1512; in 1518 she was about seven years old.

THOMAS MORE TO WILLIAM GONELL:

I have received, my dear Gonell, your letter, elegant as your letters always are, and full of affection. From it I perceive your

devotion to my children, and I argue their diligence from their own. Every one of their letters pleased me, but I was particularly pleased because I notice that Elizabeth shows a gentleness and self-command in the absence of her mother which some children would not show in her presence. Let her understand that such conduct delights me more than all possible letters I could receive from anyone. Though I prefer learning joined with virtue to all the treasures of kings, yet renown for learning when it is not united with a good life, is nothing else than manifest and notorious infamy; this would be particularly the case in a woman. Since erudition in women is a new thing and a reproach to the indolence of men, many will gladly attack it, and impute to scholarship what is really the fault of nature, thinking to get their own ignorance esteemed as a virtue by contrast with the vices of the learned. On the other hand, if a woman—and this I desire and hope with you as their teacher for all my daughters—should add to eminent virtue even a moderate knowledge of letters, I think she will have more real profit than if she had obtained the riches of Croesus and the beauty of Helen. I do not say this because of the glory that will be hers, though glory follows virtue as a shadow follows a body, but because the reward of wisdom is too solid to be lost like riches or to decay like beauty, since it depends on the consciousness of what is right, not on the talk of men, than which nothing is more foolish or mischievous.

A good man, no doubt, should avoid infamy, but to lay himself out for renown is the conduct of a man who is not only proud, but ridiculous and miserable. A soul which is ever fluctuating between elation and disappointment at the opinions of others, must be without peace. Among the outstanding benefits that learning bestows on men, none is more excellent than that by the study of books we are taught in that very study to seek not praise, but usefulness. Such has been the teaching of the most learned men, especially of philosophers, who are the guides of human life, although some may have abused learning, like other good things, simply to court empty glory and popular renown.

I have dwelt so much on the craving for glory, my dear Gonell, because you say in your letter that Margaret's high-minded disposition should not be impaired. In this judgment I quite agree with you, but to me, and no doubt to you also, that man would seem to ruin a generous character who should accustom it to admire what is vain and low. He, on the contrary, enhances the character who rises to what is virtuous and good, and who, in contemplating the sublime despises those shadows of the good which almost all mortals, through ignorance of truth, greedily snatch at as if they were the good.

Therefore, my dear Gonell, since we must walk by this road, I have often begged not only you, who, out of affection for my children, would do it of your own accord, but my wife, who is sufficiently induced by her maternal love for them, which has been proved to me in so many ways, and also all my friends, to warn my children to beware the dangers of pride and haughtiness, and rather to walk in the pleasant meadows of modesty; not to be dazzled at the sight of gold; not to lament that they do not possess what they erroneously admire in others; not to think more of themselves for gaudy trappings, nor less for the want of them; neither to deform the beauty that nature has given them by neglect, nor to try to heighten it by artifice; to put virtue in the first place, learning in the second, and in their studies to esteem most whatever may teach them piety towards God, charity to all, and Christian humility in themselves. By such means they will receive from God the reward of an innocent life, and in the assured expectation of it, will view death without horror, and meanwhile possessing solid joy, will neither be puffed up by the empty praise of men, nor dejected by evil tongues. These I consider the genuine fruits of learning, and though I admit that not all scholars possess them, I would maintain that those who give themselves to study with such views, will easily attain their end and become perfect. Nor do I think that the harvest will be affected whether it is a man or a woman who sows the field. They both have the same human nature, and the power of reason differentiates them from the beasts; both, therefore, are equally suited for those studies by

which reason is cultivated, and is productive like a ploughed field on which the seed of good lessons has been sown. If it be true that the soil of woman's brain be bad, and more likely to bear bracken than corn (and on this account many keep women from study), I think, on the contrary, that on the same grounds a woman's wit is to be cultivated all the more diligently, so that nature's defect may be redressed by industry. This was the opinion of the ancients, of those who were most prudent as well as most holy. Not to speak of the rest, St. Jerome and St. Augustine not only exhorted most worthy matrons and most honourable maidens to study, but also, in order to assist them, diligently explained the abstruse meanings of Holy Scripture, and wrote for tender girls letters full of so much erudition, that nowadays old men, who call themselves professors of sacred science, can scarcely read them correctly, much less understand them. Do you, my learned Gonell, have the kindness to see that my daughters study thoroughly the works of those holy men. From them they will learn in particular what end they should propose to themselves in their studies and what is the fruit of their endeavours, namely the witness of God and a good conscience. Thus peace and calm will abide in their hearts and they will be neither disturbed by fulsome flattery nor by the stupidity of those ignorant men who despise learning.

I fancy that I hear you object that these precepts, though true, are beyond the capacity of my young children, since you will scarcely find a man, however old and advanced, whose mind is so firmly set as not to be tempted sometimes by the desire of glory. But, dear Gonell, the more I see the difficulty of getting rid of this pest of pride, the more do I see the necessity of dealing with it from childhood. For I find no other reason for evil clinging so to our hearts, than that, almost as soon as we are born, it is sown in the tender minds of children by their nurses, it is cultivated by their teachers, and brought to its full growth by their parents; no one teaching even what is good without, at the same time, awakening the expectation of praise, as the proper reward of virtue. Thus we grow accustomed to make so much of praise, that while we study how to please the major-

ity, who will always be the worst, we grow ashamed of being good with the minority. So that this plague of vainglory may be banished far from my children, I do desire you, my dear Gonell, and their mother and all their friends, to harp on the theme, reiterate it, and pound away at it, that vainglory is a vile thing, and to be treated with contempt, and that there is nothing more sublime than that humble modesty so often praised by Christ, and this your prudent charity will so enforce as to teach virtue rather than reprove vice, and make them love good advice instead of hating it. To this purpose nothing will more conduce than to read to them the lessons of the ancient Fathers, who, they know, cannot be angry with them; and, as they honour them for their sanctity, they must needs be much moved by their authority.

If you will teach something of this sort, in addition to their lesson in Sallust, to Margaret and Elizabeth, as being more advanced than John and Cecily, you will bind me and them still more to you. And thus you will bring about that my children, who are dear to me by nature, and still more dear by learning and virtue, will become most dear by their advance in knowledge and good conduct.

From the Court on the Vigil of Pentecost.

This letter repays careful study. More set as the aim of learning "piety towards God, charity to all, and Christian humility"; in this he separated himself from those humanists who, in their enthusiasm for the new learning, forgot the true end of man and became little better than pagans in their outlook. In teaching his daughters and his son he made no distinction in the education of a girl and a boy. His explanation for following this course reads as if he wanted to put into Gonell's hands a reasoned statement of his views; perhaps someone had objected to Gonell that it was nonsense to teach girls Latin and Greek when they would have to cook and sew, bring up children and look after their husbands. More's statement that "erudition in women is a new thing" was a plain truth, for he himself was a pioneer in the education of women. He was, of course, familiar with the idea as put

forward by Plato, but its practical interpretation was something new. Within his own memory, the Lady Margaret Beaufort,[1] grandmother of Henry VIII, had been a patroness of learning, but she herself was not a scholar though of wider culture than was usual in her day. Catherine of Aragon had benefited from the education that had been planned by her mother, Isabella of Castile, and when she considered how her own daughter, the Princess Mary, should be educated, she called to her aid her countryman, J. L. Vives, who arrived in England in 1523. His *Instruction of a Christian Woman* is rightly regarded as a landmark in the education of women, but by that time Margaret More and her sisters were already good scholars. Again, Roger Ascham's name is associated with progress in educational methods in the sixteenth century, but he was ten years younger than Margaret More. One of his suggestions was the use of double-translation in the teaching of Latin, that is, first translating a passage into English, and after an interval, translating it back into Latin. As we shall see, this was a method used by More with his children when Ascham was still a boy.

Erasmus declared that he had been convinced that girls should receive a classical education as a result of his discussions with More and the results obtained with Margaret, Elizabeth and Cecily.

More's letters to his "school" reveal other aspects of his methods. It will be noticed that he gave importance to the letters they wrote to him regularly; these were not only for the affection between them and for their news of progress but were evidence of their increasing skill in the use of Latin. Unfortunately none of the letters they wrote to him has survived.

Stapleton printed some of More's letters in full, and gave extracts from others. Some he did not transcribe. "These letters," he wrote, referring to those not given, "I will omit, for already my account has become longer than I expected." Would that he had preserved all of them for us! It is difficult to date those he

[1] Was Margaret More named after the Lady Margaret Beaufort? The name Margaret is not found previously in the More and Colt families. A fanciful conjecture, but a pleasing thought!

has given; some have the month, but none has the year stated, so it is only by internal evidence that they can be placed in what may be their chronological order. These letters were written in Latin. The earliest is probably the one that follows.

THOMAS MORE TO MARGARET, ELIZABETH, CECILY HIS DEAREST DAUGHTERS, AND TO MARGARET GIGGS AS DEAR AS THOUGH SHE WERE A DAUGHTER.

I cannot express, my dearest children, the very deep pleasure your eloquent letters gave me especially as I see that in spite of travel and the frequent change of your abode you have not neglected your usual studies, but have continued your exercises in logic, rhetoric and poetry. I am now fully convinced that you love me as you should since I see that, although I am absent, yet, with the greatest eagerness, you do what you know gives me pleasure when I am present. When I return you shall see that I am not ungrateful for the delight your loving affection has given me. I assure you that I have no greater solace in all the vexatious business in which I am immersed than to read your letters. They prove to me the truth of the laudatory reports your kind tutor sends of your work, for if your own letters did not bear witness to your zealous study of literature, it might be suspected that he had been influenced by his good nature rather than by truth. But now by what you write you bear out his opinion, so that I am ready to believe what would otherwise be his incredible reports upon the eloquence and cleverness of your essays.

So I am longing to return home that I may place my pupil by your side and compare his progress with yours. He is, I fear, slow to believe that you are really as advanced as your teacher's praise would imply. Knowing how persevering you are, I have a great hope that soon you will be able to overcome your tutor himself, if not by force of argument, at any rate by never confessing yourselves beaten.

Farewell, my most dear children.

It would be interesting to know more of the "frequent change of your abode" mentioned at the beginning of this letter; it may

refer to a series of visits to relatives but there is no other information. Who was "my pupil" of the last paragraph? Perhaps he was More's son John as his name is not mentioned in the greeting; it would, however, seem unlikely that More would take his young son to Court with him, nor on a journey abroad. The reference to "vexatious business" suggests one of his embassies, perhaps the one at Calais in the second half of 1517. "My pupil" may have been a young protégé who was with More just as John Clement had been his companion on the embassy to Flanders two years earlier when *Utopia* was conceived.

Stapleton gave passages from two letters to Margaret from her father. The first reads:

> I was delighted to receive your letter, my dearest Margaret, informing me of Shaw's[1] condition. I should have been still more delighted if you had told me of the studies you and your brother are engaged in, of your daily reading, your pleasant discussions, your essays, of the swift passage of days made enjoyable by literary pursuits. For although everything you write gives me pleasure, yet the most exquisite delight of all comes from reading what none but you and your brother could have written [Here Stapleton omitted part of the letter, and gave only the last paragraph]. I beg you, Margaret, tell me about the progress you are making in your studies. For I assure you that, rather than allow my children to be idle and slothful, I would make a sacrifice of wealth, and bid adieu to other cares and business, to attend to my children and my family, among whom none is more dear to me than yourself, my beloved daughter.

The extract from the second letter is a further testimony to the affection More felt for his eldest daughter who, Stapleton recorded, "more than all the rest of his children, resembled her father, as well in stature, appearance and voice, as in mind and in general character."

> You ask, my dear Margaret, for money with too much bashfulness and timidity, since you are asking from a father who

[1] Shaw was probably one of the servants as the "Master" is omitted.

is eager to give, and since you have written to me a letter such that I would not only repay each line of it with a gold coin, as Alexander did the verses of Cheorilos, but, if my means were as great as my desire, I would reward each syllable with two ounces of gold. As it is, I send only what you have asked, but would have added more, only that as I am eager to give, so am I desirous to be asked and coaxed by my daughter, especially by you, whom virtue and learning have made so dear to my soul. So the sooner you spend this money well, as you are wont to do, and the sooner you ask for more, the more you will be sure of pleasing your father. Good-bye, my dearest child.

Among the letters More wrote to his children there is one in Latin verse, in elegiac couplets. This can be dated with more confidence than the other letters. The poem was first published in the 1520 edition of his *Epigrammata;* it was not in the 1518 edition. Allowing for time for sending the copy to Basle and for the printing, the date of composition must have been 1518 or 1519. There is no hint in the poem of his whereabouts; it would apply to any of the foul roads of England or of any other country of the period.

The poem opens by telling his "beloved children, Margaret, Elizabeth, Cecily and John" that it was composed on horseback when he was soaked by the rain and his small horse was often stuck in the mud. He tells them of his love for them and reminds them that he could not bear to see them weep but gave them cake and apples and pears, and that, on the rare occasions when he whipped them, he used a birch of peacock's feathers. He praises their manners, their pleasant way of speaking and their nicety in the choice of words.

There are two more letters to his children; both probably belong to the period 1519 to 1521 when More was out of London with the Court.

THOMAS MORE TO HIS WHOLE SCHOOL, GREETING.

See what a compendious salutation I have found to save both time and paper, which would otherwise have been wasted in reciting the names of each one of you, and my labour would have been to no purpose, since, though each of you is dear to

me by some special title, of which I could have omitted none in a set and formal salutation, no one is dearer to me by any title than each of you by that of scholar. Your zeal for knowledge binds me to you almost more closely than the ties of blood.

I rejoice that Master Drew has returned safely, for I was anxious, as you know, about him. Did I not love you so warmly I should really envy your good fortune in that so many and such excellent tutors have fallen to your lot. But I think you no longer need Master Nicholas as you have learned whatever he had to teach you in astronomy. I hear you are so far advanced in that science that you can point out the pole-star or the dog-star or any of the constellations, but also are able—which requires a skilful and profound astrologer—among all those heavenly bodies, to distinguish the sun from the moon! Go forward then in that new and admirable science by which you ascend to the stars. But while you gaze on them assiduously consider that this holy time of Lent warns you, and that beautiful and holy poem of Boethius keeps singing in your ears, to raise your mind also to heaven, lest the soul look downwards to the earth, after the manner of brutes, while the body looks upwards.

Farewell, my dearest ones.

From Court, the 23rd March.

Master Drew and Master Nicholas Kratzer have been mentioned earlier in this chapter. In the painted version of Holbein's picture of the More family, a copy of Boethius is seen on the buffet. Perhaps the reference is to the peom *O stelliferi conditor orbis.*[1]

The last letter to all his children again shows the importance More attached to Latin composition; his own letter was an example of how he wanted them to write.

THOMAS MORE TO HIS DEAREST CHILDREN AND TO MARGARET GIGGS WHOM HE NUMBERS AMONG HIS OWN.

The Bristol merchant brought me your letters the day after he left you, with which I was extremely delighted. Nothing

[1] Loeb edition, p. 154.

can come from your workshop, however rude and unfinished, that will not give me more pleasure than the most accurate thing another can write. So much does my affection for you recommend whatever you write to me. Indeed without any recommendation your letters are capable of pleasing by their own merits, their wit and pure Latinity. There was not one of your letters that did not please me extremely; but, to confess frankly what I feel, the letter of my son John pleased me best, both because it was longer than the others, and because he seems to have given to it more labour and study. For he not only put out his matter neatly and composed in fairly polished language, but he plays with me both pleasantly and cleverly, and turns my jokes on myself wittily enough. And this he does not only merrily, but with due moderation, showing that he does not forget that he is joking with his father, and that he is cautious not to give offence at the same time that he is eager to give delight.

Now I expect from each of you a letter almost every day. I will not admit excuses—John makes none—such as want of time, sudden departure of the letter-carrier, or want of something to write about. No one hinders you from writing, but, on the contrary, all are urging you to do it. And that you may not keep the letter-carrier waiting, why not anticipate his coming, and have your letters written and sealed ready for anyone to take? How can a subject be wanting when you write to me, since I am glad to hear of your studies or of your games, and you will please me most if, when there is nothing to write about, you write about that nothing at great length. Nothing can be easier for you, since you are girls, chatterboxes by nature, who have always a world to say about nothing at all. One thing, however, I admonish you, whether you write serious matters, or the merest trifles, it is my wish that you write everything diligently and thoughtfully. It will be no harm if you first write the whole in English, for then you will have much less trouble in turning it into Latin; not having to look for the matter, your mind will be intent only on the language. That, however, I leave to your own choice, whereas I strictly

enjoin you that whatever you have composed you carefully examine before writing the fair copy; and in this examination first scrutinise the whole sentence and then every part of it. Thus, if any grammatical errors have escaped you, you will easily detect them. Correct these, write out the whole letter again, and even then examine it once more, for sometimes, in rewriting, faults slip in again that one had removed. By this diligence your little trifles will become serious matters; for while there is nothing so neat and witty that will not be made insipid by silly and inconsiderate wordiness, so also there is nothing in itself so insipid that you cannot season it with grace and wit if you give a little thought to it.

Farewell, my dear children.

From the Court, the 3rd September.

While More was in attendance at the Court at Abingdon in 1518, a preacher before Henry VIII was foolish enough to attack the teaching of Greek at Oxford—he was foolish because he himself had no knowledge of the language. Probably at the request of the king, Thomas More wrote a letter to the University defending classical studies. Stapleton wrote, "I have seen another Latin version of this made by one of his daughters, and an English version by another."

The dialectical disputation which had such a large place in medieval education was a method favoured by More. He used it himself as a young scholar, and when Erasmus was staying with him in 1505–6 each translated Lucian's *Tyrannicida* and then wrote a declamation on the same theme. Erasmus wrote, "I very much wish this sort of exercise to be introduced into our schools, where it would be of the greatest utility." J. L. Vives gives us a glimpse of the same method being used in the "school".

More had told the story of Quintilian's first declamation to his little boy John and to his daughters Margaret, Elizabeth and Cecily, the worthy offspring of their father. He had discoursed in such a way as to lead them all by his eloquence the more easily to the study of wisdom. He then begged me to write an answer to the declamation which he had expounded, so that

> the art of writing might be disclosed more openly by contradiction, and, as it were, by conflict.[1]

The children were not being asked to consider some abstract problem in conduct or philosophy. The first declamation of Quintilian was based on the following imaginary situation. A gentleman had a blind son whom he had made his heir, but marrying a second time, he set aside a room for the blind youth in a remote part of his house. The father was murdered in the night as he was sleeping in his bed, and, the next morning, his son's sword was found in the body and the wall from the bedroom to his son's room was marked with the prints of a bloodstained hand. Had the murder been committed by the son or by the wife?

This might be described in to-day's slang as a Whodunit. Quintilian's declamation was largely a defence of the son's innocence. The problem would certainly capture the interest of any children and would provide them with a pleasant exercise for their wits, though the clues would not meet the standards of modern detective fiction.

Here may be added the tribute paid by Vives to the encouragement More gave to the education of women. The passage comes from *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* in Richard Hyrde's translation which was made at More's suggestion.

> Now if a man may be suffered among queens to speak of more mean folks, I would reckon among this sort the daughters of Sir Thomas More, Knight—Margaret, Elizabeth, Cecilia and with them their kinswoman Margaret Giggs—whom their father not content only to have them good and very chaste, would also they should be well learned, supposing that by that means they should be more truly and surely chaste. Wherein neither that great, wise man is deceived, nor none other that are of the same opinion. For the study of learning is such a thing that it occupieth one's mind wholly and lifteth it up into the knowledge of most goodly matters, and plucketh it from the remembrance of such things as be foul.

[1] Foster Watson, *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women*, p. 17.

The letters printed in this chapter may have given the impression that Latin was almost the only subject taught to the More children. They also learned Greek, Logic, Philosophy, Theology, Mathematics and Astronomy. We have seen how Nicholas Kratzer was brought in to teach the last subject, and other tutors, "so many and excellent" as More called them, were employed for their own subjects. Mathematics at that period meant Geometry; we should expect Arithmetic to be the first step but the working of sums was then regarded as the business of tradesmen and merchants. Perhaps the More children had this subject added to their time-table through the influence of Bishop Cuthbert Tunstall. When he and Thomas More were on the embassy to Flanders in 1515, they had difficulty in checking the transactions of the money changers, and they suspected that they were being swindled, but they were so ignorant of arithmetic that they were helpless. On their return Tunstall, who was himself a considerable scholar, decided to study the subject, and, as a result, wrote, in Latin, the first book on arithmetic to be printed in England. *De Arte Suppatandi*, published in 1522, was dedicated to More. Part of the dedicatory epistle reads:

> you, who can pass the book on to your children for them to read—children whom you take care to train in liberal studies.

We do not know if this suggestion was followed, but it is interesting to note that with the last letter of his life from the Tower, More sent back to Margaret Giggs (who had become Mistress Margaret Clement) "her algorism stone"—this was a slate on which calculations were made.

It may be felt that this scheme of education was a heavy one to impose on children, but it is clear that these children were well above average in intellectual ability, and their devotion to their father and his delightful personality must have robbed the hard work of much of its irksomeness. We must not forget the cakes and apples and the peacock's feathers.

How successful the system was with Margaret may be judged from the following extract from a letter her father wrote to her not later than February 1521. This date is fixed by the reference

to Reginald Pole who left England for Italy in that month. His family represented the Yorkist claim to the throne, but Henry was most friendly to him at this period.

> I cannot put down on paper, indeed I can hardly express in my own mind, the deep pleasure that I received from your very well-expressed letter, my dearest Margaret. As I read it there was with me a young man of the noblest rank and of the widest attainments in literature, one, too, who is as conspicuous for his piety as he is for his learning—Reginald Pole. He thought your letter nothing short of miraculous, even before he understood how you were pressed for time and distracted by ill-health, whilst you managed to write so long a letter. I could scarce make him believe that you had not been helped by a master until I told him in all good faith that there was no such master at our house, nor would it be possible to find any man who would not need your help in composing letters rather than be able to give any assistance to you.

This is the language of a proud father; what effects this and other letters of praise had upon Margaret's character is not known, but she would have been less than human if she had not been tempted to fall into that sin of pride on which her father had so much to say in his letter to William Gonell.

Erasmus added his tribute of admiration; this comes in a letter to the famous scholar Guillaume Budé, who had contributed an introductory epistle to the Paris edition of *Utopia* in 1517. Erasmus was writing in September 1521.

> A year ago it occurred to More to send me a specimen of their progress in learning. He told them all to write to me, each without any help, nor did he suggest the subject nor make any corrections. When they offered their papers to their father for him to correct, he affected to be displeased with the bad handwriting, and made them copy their letters out more neatly and accurately. When they had done so, he sealed the letters and sent them to me without changing a syllable. Believe me, my dear Budé, I never was more surprised; there was nothing

whatever either silly or girlish in what they said, and the style was such that you could feel they were making daily progress.

That was a letter written to a friend; sometimes it is necessary to make allowance for some special motive behind a letter from Erasmus, but here we can accept what he said as a genuine opinion.

Chapter III

MARRIAGE

In 1521 the Bishop of London issued a licence for the marriage on 2 July of "William Roper of St. Andrew, Holborn, and Margaret More of St. Stephen's, Walbrook." She was then in her sixteenth year. According to the two Holbein miniatures (which may reasonably be assumed to have been painted as a pair) William Roper was twelve years older than his wife; this would give the year of his birth as about 1493. This does not agree with other information. His epitaph in St. Dunstan's, Canterbury, stated that he was eighty-two at the time of his death on 4 January 1578; this would give his birth year as 1496. A third source, a Chancery deposition of 14 May 1562, gave his age as sixty-four; according to this he was born in 1498. The exact year of Roper's birth is not of great importance; we can take our choice within the range 1493 to 1498; the fact that matters is that he was about ten years older than Margaret More.

The Mores and the Ropers had been associated in the law at Lincoln's Inn and in the Courts for over a quarter of a century. John Roper, William's father, and Sir John More were old friends and they often served together on the commission of the peace for Kent, the county with which the Roper family had been long connected. "You come of a worthy pedigree," wrote Harpsfield of William Roper, "both by the father's and the mother's side; by the father's side of ancient gentlemen of long continuance; and by the mother's side of the Apulderfields, one of the chiefest and ancient families of Kent." John Roper owned lands at Eltham and in St. Dunstan's parish, Canterbury. He was sheriff of the county in 1521, the year of his eldest son's marriage, and was for many years Prothonotary, or chief clerk of the King's Bench Court, an office to which William succeeded. He died in 1524, and William inherited the property at Eltham and St. Dunstan's. The will was

so complicated that it took an Act of Parliament in 1529 to get it settled.

In the opening paragraph of his notes on the life of Sir Thomas More, Roper stated that "I was continually resident in his house by the space of sixteen years and more." This implies that he was a member of the More household for three or four years before his marriage to Margaret.

The Black Books of Lincoln's Inn contain the entry:

> 1518. Christmas Day. William Roper, son of Master John Roper, was admitted to the Society by George Treheyon, then the Marshal, and Feb. 26, 1520, he was pardoned all vacations, past and future, he may be at repasts at his pleasure.

The date of his admission to the Inn would seem to be a convenient time for the young law student to lodge at the Mores; presumably his father had no town house but lived at Well Hall, Eltham, the family home.

Nicholas Harpsfield revealed that William Roper, at the time of his marriage, was "a marvellous zealous Protestant." This information must have been given to Harpsfield by Roper himself. The use of the term "Protestant" is an anachronism; so too, when Harpsfield says that Roper "got to him a Lutheran Bible", he is predating the facts. Luther's attack on Indulgences was made in 1517, but there was no suggestion of the schism at that time. His translation of the New Testament into German did not appear until 1522. Roper must have used a copy of the Lollard Bible. He also read Luther's two books, *The Babylonish Captivity of the Church*, and, *The Liberty of a Christian Man*, both of which were published in 1520. As these were written in Latin it was possible for an educated man to study them. Many of the copies sold were brought into the country by the German merchants of the Steelyard. One wonders if Roper was one of the secret Society of Christian Brethren who arranged for the distribution of Lutheran books. He did not conceal his sympathy with the new ideas, and this got him into trouble as Harpsfield related.

> Who, for his open talk and companying with divers of his own sect, of the Steelyard and other merchants, was with them

> before Cardinal Wolsey convented of heresy, which merchants for their opinions were openly for heresy at Paul's Cross abjured; yet he, for love borne by the Cardinal to Sir Thomas More, his father-in-law, was with a friendly warning discharged.

Harpsfield added that on account of these opinions, Roper had come to dislike his father-in-law, "whom then of all the world he did, during that time, most abhor, though he was a man of most mildness and notable patience." More tried arguing with Roper, but could not get him to change his views.

> Until upon a time Sir Thomas More privately talked in his garden with his daughter Margaret, and amongst other his sayings said, "Meg, I have borne a long time with thy husband; I have reasoned and argued with him in those points of religion, and still given him my poor fatherly counsel, but I perceive none of all this able to call him home, and therefore, Meg, I will no longer argue nor dispute with him, but will clean give him over, and get me another while to God and pray for him." And soon after, as he verily believed, through the great mercy of God, at the devout prayer of Sir Thomas More, he perceived his own ignorance, oversight, malice and folly, and turned him again to the Catholic faith, wherein, God be thanked, he hath hitherto continued.

This must have been a period of acute mental and spiritual distress for Margaret Roper, but there is no record of her thoughts and feelings.

The following is the translation of a letter from her father which was probably written in 1522, and the reference to William Roper in the last paragraph suggests that, by this time, all was well.

THOMAS MORE TO HIS MOST DEAR DAUGHTER MARGARET:

There was no reason, my most sweet child, why you should have put off writing for a day, because in your great distrust you feared lest your letter should be such that I could not read it without being upset. Even had it not been perfect, yet the honour of your sex would have gained you pardon from any

fault, while to a father even a blemish will seem beautiful in the face of a child. But indeed, my dear Margaret, your letter was so elegant and polished and gave so little cause for you to dread the judgment of an indulgent parent, that you might have despised the censorship even of an angry Momus.[1]

You tell me that Nicholas [Kratzer] who is so fond of you and so learned in astronomy, has begun instruction again with you on the system of the heavenly bodies. I am grateful to him, and I congratulate you on your good fortune; for in the space of one month, with only a slight labour, you will thus learn thoroughly those sublime wonders of the Eternal Workman, which so many men of illustrious and almost superhuman intellect have, through the ages, only discovered with so much hard toil and study, or rather with such shiverings and nightly vigils in the open air.

I am therefore delighted to read that you have now made up your mind to give yourself diligently to philosophy, and to make up by your earnestness in future for what you have lost in the past by neglect. My darling Margaret, I indeed have never found you idling, and your unusual knowledge of almost every kind of literature shows that you have been making progress. So I take your words as an example of the great modesty that makes you prefer to accuse yourself falsely of sloth, rather than to boast of your diligence, unless your meaning is that you will give yourself so earnestly to study that your past industry will seem like indolence by comparison. If this is your meaning, as I am quite sure it is, nothing could be more delightful to me, or more fortunate, my dear Margaret, for you.

Though I earnestly hope that you will devote the rest of your life to medical science and sacred literature, so that you may be well furnished for the whole range of human life, which is to have a healthy soul in a healthy body, and though I know that you have already laid the foundations of these studies, and that there will be always opportunity to continue the building, yet I am of opinion that you may with great advantage give some years of your yet flourishing youth to humane letters and

[1] The personification in Greek mythology of fault-finding.

liberal studies. And this both because youth is more fitted for struggles with difficulties, and because it is uncertain whether you will ever in future have the benefit of such a diligent, affectionate and learned teacher. I need not say that by such studies a good judgment is formed or perfected.

It would be a delight, my dear Margaret, to me to converse long with you on these matters, but I have just been interrupted and called away by the servants who have brought in supper. I must have consideration for others else to sup is not so sweet as to talk with you.

Farewell, my dearest child, and salute for me my most gentle son your husband. I am extremely glad that he is following the same course of study as yourself. I have been accustomed to urge you to yield in everything to your husband, now, on the contrary, I give you full leave to strive to get before him in the knowledge of the celestial system. Farewell again. Salute your whole company, but especially your tutor.

This letter shows the interest More had in medical studies; it suggests that it may have been at his instigation that John Clement and Richard Hyrde both studied the medical science of the day; nor should it be forgotten that Margaret Giggs, who married John Clement, was also skilled in medical lore. It has already been suggested that Richard Hyrde may have given instruction in the subject.

The Ropers continued to live at The Barge after their marriage. When her two sisters were married in 1525 they too remained with their husbands in the More household. Elizabeth married William Daunce, and Cecily married Giles Heron on 29 September of that year; the licence of the Bishop of London (Cuthbert Tunstall) permitted the marriages to be celebrated in the private chapel of Giles Alington; he was the second husband of Alice Middleton, More's step-daughter; her first husband was Thomas Elrington of Hitchin who died in September 1523. Giles Heron, son and heir of Sir John Heron, Treasurer of the Chamber to Henry VIII, had become a ward of More's on his father's death in 1522. William Daunce was the son of Sir John Daunce, a member

of the King's Council. It must have been about this time that John Clement and Margaret Giggs were married; Clement had entered the service of the king and in 1528 was described as a physician.

It is difficult to date the following Latin letter from More to his eldest daughter; the reference to John Veysey, Bishop of Exeter, gives 1519, the year of his consecration, as the earliest date; he carried out a visitation of his diocese in that year, but was at the Field of Cloth of Gold with More in June 1520. If the letter was not written that September its date must be postponed until 1522, as More was on an embassy at Bruges from July to October 1521.

THOMAS MORE TO HIS DEAREST DAUGHTER MARGARET:

I will refrain from telling you, my dearest daughter, the extreme pleasure your letter gave me. You will be able to judge better how much it pleased your father when you learn what delight it caused to a stranger. I happened this evening to be in the company of his lordship, John, Bishop of Exeter, a man of deep learning and of a wide reputation for holiness. Whilst we were talking I took out from my desk a paper that bore on our business and by accident your letter appeared. He took it into his hand with pleasure and examined it. When he saw from the signature that it was the letter of a lady, he read it the more eagerly because it was such a novelty to him. When he had finished he said he would never have believed it to have been your work unless I had assured him of the fact, and he began to praise it in the highest terms (why should I hide what he said?) for its Latinity, its correctness, its erudition, and its expressions of tender affection. Seeing how delighted he was, I showed him your declamation. He read it, and your poems as well, with a pleasure so far beyond what he had hoped that although he praised you most effusively, yet his expression showed that his words were all too poor to express what he felt. He took out at once from his pocket a gold coin which you will find enclosed in this letter. I tried in every possible way to decline it, but was unable to refuse to send it to you as a pledge and token of his goodwill towards you. This hindered me from

showing him the letters of your sisters, for I feared that it would seem as though I had shown them to obtain for the others too a gift which it annoyed me to have to accept for you. But, as I have said, he is so good that it is a happiness to be able to please him. Write to thank him with the greatest care and delicacy. You will one day be glad to have given pleasure to such a man.

From the Court, just before midnight, September 11th.

The reference to "your declamation" will be understood from what has been said in the previous chapter. Perhaps this was the one referred to by Stapleton in the following passage:

> I have in my possession a declamation of hers. It is eloquent, clever, and perfect in its use of oratorical devices. It is in imitation, or rather in rivalry, of Quintilian's declamation on the destruction of the poor man's bees through the poison that had been sprinkled upon the flowers in the rich man's garden. Quintilian defends the cause of the poor man: Margaret the rich. The more difficult such a defence is, the greater the scope for Margaret's eloquence and wit. If it were not that I fear to be tedious and to digress too much from the task I have undertaken of writing More's life, I would print the speeches both of Margaret and Quintilian.

Would that he had.

Her poems have not survived; they may have been translations such as More himself had made in his earlier days, or have been more in the nature of exercises than original compositions.

The next letter can be dated with some precision as it mentions Margaret's first confinement; the child was born in 1523. Stapleton did not give the whole letter but only the following portion.

> Meanwhile something I once said to you in joke came back to my mind, and I realized how true it was. It was to the effect that you were to be pitied because the incredulity of men would rob you of the praise you so richly deserved for your laborious vigils, as they would never believe when they read what you had written that you had not often availed yourself of another's help, whereas of all writers you least deserved to be

thus suspected. Even when a tiny child you could never endure to be decked out in another's finery. But, my dearest Margaret, you are all the more deserving of praise on that account. Although you cannot hope for an adequate reward for your labour, yet nevertheless you continue to unite to your singular love of virtue the pursuit of literature and art. Content then with the approbation of your conscience, in your modesty you do not seek for the praise of the public, nor value it over much even if you do receive it, but because of the great love you bear us, that is your husband and myself, as a sufficiently large circle of readers for all that you write.

In your letter you speak of your approaching confinement. We pray most earnestly that all may go happily and successfully with you. May God and our Blessed Lady grant you happily and safely a little one like to his mother in everything except sex. Yet let it by all means be a girl, if only she will make up for the inferiority of her sex by her zeal to imitate her mother's virtue and learning. Such a girl I would prefer to three boys. Good-bye, my dearest child.

The sentence, "you could never endure to be decked out in another's finery" is one of the few glimpses we have of Margaret's disposition.

In the year of the birth of this first child, Erasmus published his Commentary on the Christmas Hymn of Prudentius, and dedicated it to Margaret Roper. The following passage records the birth of the child but does not say whether it was a boy or a girl.

William Roper, who is gifted with such nobility and gentleness of character that, were he not your husband, he might seem to be your brother, has given you (or if you prefer it, you have given him) the most fortunate first-fruits of your union, or to put it better, each has given to the other a child—to whom a kiss is to be sent; I send you another child . . .

The child he sent was the book dedicated to her. The letter ends, "A warm farewell to you who are not a lesser light of the age and

of Britain. Greet also for me the whole of your choir." For "choir" we may here read "school."

Erasmus had earlier inscribed to his godson John More a commentary on the poem *Nux*, a complaint to a nut-tree, attributed to Ovid. This was one of the small works that Erasmus designed for the teaching of children; apart from its connection with the Mores, it has little significance.

Something more will be said later about the children of William and Margaret Roper. Here it may be noted that the eldest surviving son at Margaret's death was Thomas, who, according to his own evidence in a lawsuit, was born in 1534. He was "your little boy" to whom More sent his blessing on the eve of his execution.[1] Another son, Anthony, and three daughters, Elizabeth, Mary and Margaret, also survived their mother; the dates of their births are not known. The fact that the eldest surviving son was not born until thirteen years after his parents' marriage suggests that one or more of the daughters were older than the sons and other children may have died in infancy—such, of course, was the normal experience of Tudor families.

It was during the early years of her marriage that Margaret Roper made her translation of Erasmus's *Precatio dominica in septem portiones distributa*, which was published at Basle in 1523; it was a popular little work. Margaret's translation was published at the beginning of 1525 with the title *A Devout Treatise upon the Paternoster*. Richard Hyrde wrote an introduction which he dedicated to one of his pupils "the studious and virtuous young maid Frances S." This was Frances Staverton, Margaret's cousin. A phrase in this introduction on Margaret's age was quoted in the opening pages of this book. One passage refers to the "school."

> Howbeit, I have no doubt in you, whom I see naturally born into virtue, and having so good bringing up of a babe, not only among your honourable uncle's children, of whose conversation and company they that were right evil, might take occasion of goodness and amendment...

[1] In his last letter, More referred to "your good husband and your little boy and all yours and all my children"; this surely implies that in addition to the son there were other children.

MARGARET ROPER : Painting by Holbein

¶ A devout treatise vpon the Pater no-
ster, made fyrst in latyn by the moost fa-
mous doctour mayster Erasmus
Roterodamus/ and tourned
in to englisshe by a yong
vertuous and well
lerned gentylwoman of .xix.
yere of age.

Title page of
"A DEVOUT TREATISE UPON THE PATERNOSTER"

A longer passage gives Hyrde's account of Margaret Roper.

> ... this gentlewoman, which translated this little book, hereafter following: whose virtuous conversation, living, and sad demeanour may be proof evident enough what good learning doth, where it is surely rooted; of whom other women may take example of prudent, humble and wifely behaviour, charitable and very Christian virtue, with which she hath, with God's help, endeavoured herself, no less to garnish her soul than it hath liked his goodness, with lovely beauty and comeliness, to garnish and set out her body; and undoubted is it that to the increase of her virtue, she hath taken and taketh no little occasion of her learning, besides her other manifold and great commodities, taken of the same; among which commodities, this is not the least, that with her virtuous, worshipful, wise and well learned husband, she hath by the occasion of her learning and his delight therein, such especial comfort, pleasure and pastime, as were not well possible for one unlearned couple either to take together or to conceive in their minds, what pleasure is therein.

Margaret Roper's little book bore the imprint:

> Imprinted at London in Fleetstrete in the house of Thomas Berthelet nere to the Conduit at the Sign of Lucrece.
>
> *Cum privilegio a rege indulto*

On the back of the title page is a large cut of the arms of Cardinal Wolsey. It might be thought that the *Cum privilegio* and the Cardinal's arms were a safeguard against trouble, but the royal privilege was a grant of the sole right to print and not the equivalent of *nihil obstat*, as Berthelet was to discover. In March 1525 he was summoned before the Vicar-General for not "exhibiting" the book to the Bishop of London. Probably the Vicar-General was being over-officious, especially as Berthelet was warned at the same time for having printed a sermon by Bishop John Fisher without first submitting it to Bishop Cuthbert Tunstall. The Bishop had tightened up the regulations for printing books in

order to prevent the circulation of Lutheran doctrines; Berthelet was not accused of printing heretical books, but of having failed to comply with the regulations for censorship.

Richard Hyrde's effusiveness is not acceptable to modern taste; we are eager, perhaps too eager, to seek out imperfections, and so reduce people of exceptional goodness or attainments to the level of our own ordinariness. Or, to quote Dr. Johnson, "to see the highest minds thus levelled with the meanest, may produce some solace to the consciousness of weakness." No doubt her contemporaries had their criticism to make of Margaret Roper, but no such censures have come down to us. All known references speak of her in the warmest praise, and, as we shall see, the records of her conduct in her time of greatest trial, bear out the esteem with which she was held.

One work of hers has been lost. When about 1521-2, her father was writing his unfinished *Treatise of the Four Last Things*, he suggested to Margaret that she should take the same subject and deal with it independently of him. His pleasure at the result has been recorded, but, though she preserved his manuscript, her own has not survived.

There is considerable evidence for the high standard of her scholarship. The opinions of Erasmus will be given later; here two tributes will be quoted.

The first was paid by John Coke, of whom nothing further seems to be known than that he wrote a curious small book entitled *The Debate*, published in 1550. This is an imaginary discussion between a representative of England and one of France with Lady Prudence in the chair; the author, it is hardly necessary to say, easily demonstrates the superiority of his own country. One of his arguments was that England had produced a number of learned ladies.

> Also we have divers gentlewomen in England, which be not only well studied in holy Scripture, but also in the Greek and Latin tongues. As Mistress More, Mistress Anne Coke, Mistress Clement, and other being estrange thing to you and other nations.

Mistress Anne Coke, born in 1528, was the mother of Francis Bacon. It is unusual to see Margaret Roper referred to under her maiden name; Mistress Clement was, of course, the other Margaret.

In 1552 the scholar John Coster of Louvain edited the works of St. Vincent de Lérins. The following passage occurs among the notes.

> At one time an English Doctor of Medicine, named Clement, a man of great eminence and a first-rate Greek scholar, used very kindly to talk over literary matters with me. He spoke much of Sir Thomas More, with whom he lived on terms of intimacy, of his gentleness, his piety, his wisdom and his learning. Often, too, he spoke of Margaret, More's daughter, whose talents and attainments he highly extolled. "To show you," he said, "the truth of what I say, I will quote you a very corrupt passage from St. Cyprian, which she, without any help from the text, restored most happily. This was the sentence. *Absit enim ab ecclesia Romana vigorem suum tam prophana facilitate dimittere, et nisi vos severitatis, eversa fidei majestate dissolvere.* This text was so corrupt as to be meaningless, but Margaret, by proposing *nervos* for *nisi vos*, gave to the passage an easy and obvious sense, thus: *Far be it from the Roman Church to relax its vigour with such culpable negligence or to weaken the bonds of severity in a manner so unbefitting the dignity of the faith.*

This conversation must have taken place in the early years of the first period of exile of the Clements and Rastells; they left England in 1549 and returned when Mary Tudor became queen.

Appendix

The following extract from Margaret Roper's translation is a specimen of her work:

The Seventh petition.
Sed libera nos a malo.

O almighty father, it hath pleased thy mere and liberal goodness once when we were rid from sin, to deliver us by thy son

Jesus Christ out of the hands of our most foul and unclean father the devil, and to elect and take us into the honour both of thy name and thine inheritance: but yet of this condition that all the while we live here in earth we should be in continual battle with our enemy which leaveth no ways unassayed whereby he might draw and pluck us again into his power and authority. We quake and tremble in heart as often times as we remember how shameful a father we had when we were thrall and bond to sin and to how wretched and unhappy inheritance we were appointed and how currish and ungentle a master we served. And we know well enough his obstinate and froward malice and evil will which always layeth wait and hath ready bent to our destruction not only with violence and strong hand but also with trains [snares] and subtle wiles he never sleepeth nor resteth but always runneth up and down hither and thither like a ravenous lion lying in wait seeking and hunting about whom he may devour. Verily father he is far unlike thee for thou art naturally good and gentle; thou carriest home again to the flock the wandering and straying sheep; thou curest and makest whole the sick and scab sheep and relievest [raisest] the dead, yea, and thine enemies also and blasphemers of thy holy name thou preventest with thy love and callest most graciously to everlasting health; but he of an unreasonable and unsatiable hatred towards us, which never did him displeasure, laboureth and goeth about nothing else than to bring with him as many as he can into destruction. It is a sign and token of an exceeding malice, one for nought and without any commodity of his own to endeavour to destroy him of whom he has never wronged, but this even with his own hurt waiteth those hurt and damage whom thou hast taken aside under thy protection; thou madest him not such but he fell into this great malice after time he began to stand in his own conceit and refused to be subject and obedient to your majesty: wherefore he being pricked all with envy by crafty besieging enticed to destruction our first progenitors, envying them the joys of paradise for as much as he had deprived himself of the gladness and mirth of heaven, but now he is of far greater envy because thou carriest them out of paradise into heaven, and whereas they were afore

appointed to death and damnation, thou by reason of the faithful trust which they have put in thy son Jesus callest them to everlasting bliss, and also that thou turnest his own malice into the increase of thy glory and our health whereof, though not without a cause, he is of many to be feared, yet thy goodness doth comfort us which is able to do more to our health and salvation than all his malice to our destruction. We acknowledge our own imbecility and feebleness but yet we fear not our enemy's assault whether we live or die. All the while we deserve to have ye our protector and defender, we fear no destruction of that evil and wicked devil all the while it is our chance to stick to him that is good.

These desires and petitions of thy children O immortal father, if they be good and after the form and order appointed of thy son Jesus then be nothing mistrust but that thou wilt perform that which we desire of thee. Amen.

Chapter IV

CHELSEA

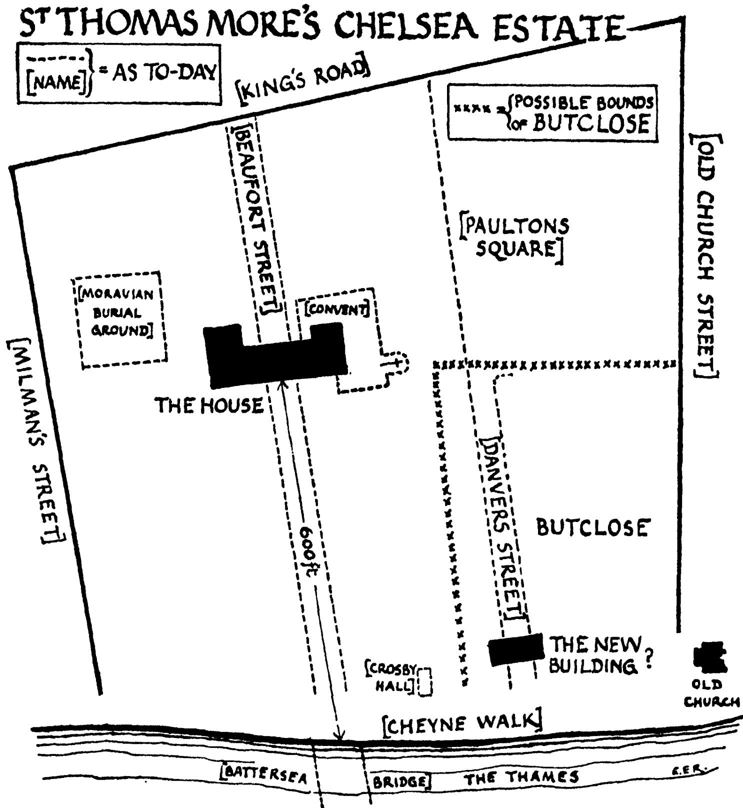
THE increasing size of his household with the marriages of his daughters may have been the reason for More's decision to leave London for the country nearby. The Barge was a biggish house, but it would not be large enough for the growing families of his children. There was nothing unusual at that time for married sons and daughters remaining with one or other of their parents at least for a few years, but there was something patriarchal in More's desire to keep his children and grandchildren under his own roof.

In June 1523 he bought the lease of Crosby Place, described by Stow as "a large and sumptious building" in Bishopsgate; it is not known if he had thoughts of moving there; there is, however, no evidence that he did so. Six months later he sold the lease to his old friend Antonio Bonvisi, and, at about that time, or possibly earlier, he began to buy land in Chelsea. He bought a messuage (site for a house) and some thirty-four acres. The date of the removal is not known, but Richard Hyrde's Introduction to Margaret Roper's little book is dated "At Chelcheth, the year of our Lord God, a thousand five hundred xxiiii, the first day of October." If that means the family was already settled there, then the building of the large mansion must have been carried out with remarkable speed, unless More had bought some land earlier than the extant records suggest.

The northern end of the present Battersea Bridge occupies the position of the landing stage or quay for More's house. No remains of the house exist[1]; it was pulled down by Sir Hans Sloane after 1737 when he bought the lands. Fortunately there is

[1] The walls of the Moravian Burial Ground (entered from Moravian Close at the top of Milman's Street) contain Tudor brickwork. Perhaps some part is a relic of outbuildings of More's time.

at Hatfield House a plan, carefully drawn to scale, of the house and estate as it was when it came into the possession of Lord Burghley in 1597. This shows the original ground-plan except for a later extension of the east wing. The house was 600 feet from



the river bank and had a frontage of 250 feet; the Beaufort Street of to-day passes over the centre of the site. No view of the exterior has survived, but Holbein's sketch for the family portrait shows the interior of the hall, and this gives the impression of a house suited to a man of position or substance of that period. This is borne out by the reference to it made by Dame Alice More when she visited her husband in the Tower. "A right fair house, your library, your books, your gallery, your garden, your

orchard, and all other necessaries so handsome about you." The present King's Road, Old Church Street, and Milman's Street give approximately the boundaries of the main estate. More seems to have owned other small properties in Chelsea. The parish church (the Old Church, as we know it) was off the south-west corner. It was here that Margaret Roper worshipped for twenty years. More added a chapel in 1528,[1] and four years later he erected in the chancel near the altar a monument with a large inscribed tablet; part of the inscription has been quoted on an earlier page. At the same time he moved the body of his first wife to the vault beneath the chancel.

With the increasing size of the household, it must have been difficult for More to enjoy much solitude. Therefore, as Roper recorded, "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." After More's death this building became the home, no doubt with extensions, of the Ropers. The exact position cannot be determined with the same certainty as that of the great house; it was near the river. Danvers Street passes over the site.

In a letter written in 1532 to his friend John Faber, Bishop of Vienna, Erasmus told him of More's Chelsea home.

> More had built for himself on the banks of the Thames not far from London a country house that is dignified and adequate without being so magnificent as to excite envy. Here he lives happily with his family, consisting of his wife, his son and daughter-in-law, three daughters with their husbands and already eleven grandchildren. It would be difficult to find a man more fond of children than he ... You would say that Plato's Academy had come to life again. But I wrong More's home in comparing it to Plato's Academy, for in the latter the chief subjects of discussion were arithmetic, geometry and

[1] The More chapel was the only part of the church that remained intact after the air raid of 16–17 April, 1941. The More Monument was broken and has been repaired. The church has been restored on its old foundations, and was reconsecrated in 1958. The bombing revealed the king post at the west end of the More chapel; this has been left uncovered. There was no tower in More's time.

occasionally ethics, but the former rather deserved the name of a school for the knowledge and practice of the Christian faith.[1]

This letter has misled some, including J. A. Froude, to assume that Erasmus must have visited More at Chelsea. He did not return to England after 1517, and the two friends met for the last time, as far as is known, at Calais in June 1520. Erasmus was using information given him by Hans Holbein (of whose visit more will be said), or by one of the scholar's secretaries who went to Chelsea in the course of tours of his friends, such as Quirin Talesius at the end of 1529.

Nothing need be added to what has been said in previous chapters about the regular studies that were part of the daily life of the More household. As the grandchildren grew up, the mothers and aunts no doubt acted as their tutors, but the children must have been impressed by the fact that their own tutors went on learning under the direction of such scholars as Nicholas Kratzer. The religious life of the household was the primary concern of the master. There is no reference to a resident chaplain; William Gonell was a priest but he was engaged as a tutor and had left before the move to Chelsea; the other tutors were not priests. The Mores went to Mass at their parish church (the Old Church) and made their confessions to their parish priest, who, when they moved to Chelsea, was Robert Dandie; nothing further is known of him. It was in 1530 that Sir Thomas presented John Larke to the living. Besides attendance at Mass on Sundays and Feast Days, the whole household were present at midnight Mass at Christmas and Easter. Morning prayers at the house consisted of the seven Penitential Psalms[2] followed by the Litanies of the Saints; night prayers were Psalms 24, 61 and 50 followed by the *Salve Regina* and the *De profundis*.

At meals John More or one of his sisters or Margaret Giggs read a passage of Scripture; this was followed by some comments on what had been read. Then More would turn to lighter topics; Henry Patenson, who appears in Holbein's sketch, would do his part as domestic fool or entertainer.

[1] Allen x, 2750.
[2] Vulgate: 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, 142.

Each grown-up member of the family had his or her special work of charity; thus Margaret had the care of an alms house in Chelsea which her father maintained for the aged and poor. She also undertook the washing of the hair shirt he wore at times for penance. She was the only one of the children to know that he wore this, until one warm summer evening when More had doffed his jerkin, Anne Cresacre noticed the hair shirt that showed above the plain shirt which had no collar. She was amused at this. "My wife," wrote William Roper, "not ignorant of his manner, perceiving the same, privily told him of it, and he, being sorry that she saw it, presently amended it." When they lived in Bucklersbury, Mistress Alice More had urged their parish priest, John Bouge, to persuade her husband to give up the use of this "habergeon"[1] but without success.

The Thames became the highway for the Mores and their visitors. When Sir Thomas More's barge, pulled by his watermen in their livery, bore him to Westminster, to the City, or perhaps as far as Greenwich down the river or to Hampton Court up the river, his family would come to the quay to see him off. As Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, an appointment made in 1525, and still more as Lord Chancellor, it would be necessary for him to keep state in accordance with his high office. There were many visitors to Chelsea. Some were scholars bearing introductions from his friends, students from Oxford and Cambridge are mentioned, others were ecclesiastics or councillors who sought his advice. The Duke of Norfolk was a familiar visitor, and it was he who rebuked the Lord Chancellor for singing in the choir of his parish church. "God's body, my Lord Chancellor, a parish clerk!" King Henry himself "took such pleasure in his company that he would sometime, on a sudden, come to his house at Chelsea to be merry with him. Whither on a time, unlooked for, he came to dinner with 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." More appreciated the unusual honour but this

[1] 'Habergeon' is a better word than 'shirt' as the garment was sleeveless. A portion of it is now in the care of the Canonesses of St. Augustine at Newton Abbot. The weave and texture are very coarse.

did not blind him to the character of the king. After this visit, he said to Roper, "If my head could win him a castle in France, it should not fail to serve his turn." The reference to France suggests that this royal visit to Chelsea took place before the battle of Pavia, February 1525, possibly as early as the beginning of 1524.

It must have been about the same time that the three daughters of Sir Thomas More were engaged in a formal disputation before the king. Our knowledge of this comes from a letter to More from John Palsgrave, who, about 1525, was appointed tutor to the six-year-old Duke of Richmond, the natural son of Henry VIII. Palsgrave wrote to enlist More's support in favour of giving the boy-duke a more thorough classical education than others thought desirable. The last sentence reads, "and when your daughters disputed in philosophy before the King's Grace, I would it had been my fortune to be present." One of the king's visits to Chelsea would have been an appropriate occasion.

When we try to picture the life of Margaret More we must see in the background this crowd of visitors, some of no position in society but earnest in their scholarship, some seeking favours, and others of the highest rank who enjoyed her father's company. There was another side to life at Chelsea much less formal or severe. In 1520 More engaged as his personal servant Walter Smyth who remained with his master for nine years, when, at the personal request of More, he was appointed Sword-Bearer to the Lord Mayor. John Rastell, More's brother-in-law, published in 1525 *Twelve Merry Jests of one called Edyth, the lying widow which still liveth.*[1] This was the work of Walter Smyth, but it is safe to say that the More family, even More himself, had a share in its composition. Not that Walter Smyth was illiterate like John á Wood who was More's servant in his last years. In his will dated 1538, Walter Smyth left his copies of Chaucer and Boccaccio "to John More, his master's only son", and he left other books to no less than three widows of his acquaintance. It would seem that he was not only a man of books but that he had a partiality for widows.

[1] Reprinted in *Shakespeare's Jest Books*, Vol. III, ed. by W. Carew Hazlitt (1864). See also Chapter VI of A. W. Reed's *Early Tudor Drama* (1926).

It is impossible to say how far the story was based on facts, but it is notable that in each of the "Jests" many of the personal names can be identified. Incidental references occur to nobles such as the Earls of Wiltshire and of Oxford, and ecclesiastics such as Cardinal Wolsey and Bishop John Fisher; named members of their households get involved in the plot. It is also possible to identify others such as a scrivener of London and several yeomen. Indeed so many mentioned were real people whose names can be traced in official records that it is probable that all the characters were from life.

We need not be concerned with eleven of the roving widow's adventures. She left her husband in Exeter and made her way to Andover in Hampshire where her series of deceptions began. Her usual tale of distress was that she was a woman of property who was temporarily in difficulties owing to the machinations of her enemies; on the strength of this she obtained lodging and money from her dupes. At the first sign of disclosure, she disappeared and resumed her travels. These took her all over the home counties and, as she passed, she left a trail of disillusioned and angry victims who had hoped to marry her and enjoy her faerie money.

The ninth Merry Jest ends with the lines,

> And when she saw her time, on an holy day,
> She walked to a thorp called Battersea;
> And, on the next day after, she took a wherry,
> And over Thames she was rowed full merry.

The tenth Jest begins,

> At Chelsea was her arrival,
> Where she had best cheer of all,
> In the house of Sir Thomas More.

She seems to have been welcomed with the kindness that any other wayfarer would receive in that friendly household. Her story this time was that she had a substantial property at Eltham, with fifteen men employed on her farm and in her mills, as well as seven women servants. Her adoption of Eltham as her supposed domicile seems maladroit as the Ropers had property there;

perhaps she did not know that William Roper lived at Sir Thomas More's house.

> She recounted her family and household so great
> That three young men she cast in a heat,
> Which servants were in the same place,
> And all they wooed her a good pace.
>
> One of them had to name Thomas Croxton,
> And servant he was to Master Alington.
>
> And of the second wooer I shall you tell,
> Which had to name Thomas Arthur,
> And servant he was to Master Roper.

There was much merrymaking and horseplay in the servants' quarters as the pursuit of the widow became a household joke.

> There was the revel and the gossiping,
> The general bumming, as Margaret Giggs said;
> Everybody laughed, and was well a-paid.

The widow Edyth decided to go on foot to the Benedictine Convent at Clerkenwell; perhaps she thought this would impress the Mores. The third pretender considered it a favourable opportunity to advance his suit.

> She roamed in the cloister to and fro,
> Till a young man saw where she did go,
> And Walter Smyth was this young man's name,
> One of her lovers, and I might tell for shame.

Meantime Thomas Arthur had been making some inquiries, so that by the time the Widow and Walter got back the fraud had been discovered.

> To Chelsea she came the same night,
> But all that world was changed; all was come to light;
> Her substance was known and herself also,
> For Thomas Arthur that day had ridden too and fro,
> And tried her not worth the sleeve lace of a gown
> In all England, in city nor yet in town.

In revenge the servants doctored her beer with a strong purgative. Did Sir Thomas More now step in as the local magistrate? Perhaps so, for she was sent to gaol for three weeks. Walter Smyth plaintively ended his poem with the line,

God save the Widow, wherever she wend.

Walter Smyth would not have used the names of Giles Alington, William Roper and Margaret Giggs had there been any offence in the verses, nor, one would think, without their consent. Thomas More had in his young days written *A merry jest how a sergeant would learn to play the friar*, so he may have taken an interest in his servant's *Twelve Merry Jests*. It is tempting to suggest that this rough ballad was a kind of family production, and, as it was printed by John Rastell, it would certainly have had More's approval. Its main interest, however, is the glimpse it gives us of the Chelsea household, and of the high spirits that were as characteristic as its piety.

A very different kind of visitor came to Chelsea in October 1526—the twenty-nine-year-old painter Hans Holbein. He had already painted at least three portraits of Erasmus, who gave him, when he left Basle, introductions to friends in the Low Countries and in England. One of these letters, to Peter Gilles (who is best known to us as one of the characters in *Utopia*), included the sentence, "Here the arts are coldly treated, so he makes for England (Angliam) in the hope of collecting some golden angels (Angelatos)." The English gold coin, the angel-noble, gave the scholar the chance to make his little pun. Holbein went on to England with letters of introduction to Archbishop Warham and to Sir Thomas More. Holbein's fine portrait of the Archbishop is in Lambeth Palace. More wrote to Erasmus in December, "Your painter, my dearest Erasmus, is a wonderful artist; but I fear he will not find England the rich and fertile field he had hoped; however, lest he find it quite barren, I will do what I can."

The immediate way of helping Holbein was to commission him to paint a picture of the family grouped in the hall at Chelsea. The sons-in-law were, regrettably, not included. The result was the first conversational picture of its kind painted north of the

Alps; it had been customary to treat such subjects in a religious setting, in, for instance, an act of adoration, but the More group, with its life-size figures, showed them as a family in their own home.

After he had planned the composition of the group, Holbein made a series of individual sketches in chalks; eight of these have survived and are in the Royal Collection at Windsor; there are two of Sir Thomas More, one for the group and the other for the well-known portrait which is now in New York. Unfortunately these preliminary studies do not include one of Margaret Roper, but there is a separate painting of her (Plate II), which is either a copy of one made by Holbein or is based on her portrait in the family painting. Holbein's original pen sketch (Plate I) for the large painting is now at Basle. He took it with him on his return there in the summer of 1528 and gave it to Erasmus. Of this sketch a modern critic has written, "The brilliant characterization in the drawing of each individual is, even to-day, among the most outstanding achievements of Holbein's art." Anyone who has seen the original will agree with that judgment; a small reproduction cannot do justice to the artist's skill. Margaret Roper is shown seated in the foreground with her sister Cecily by her side.

Holbein would be the bearer of letters from Erasmus's friends but these are not extant, and the earliest reference to the sketch made by the scholar comes in a letter to More dated 5 September 1529 from Freiburg. At the end he wrote, "Would that it were possible to see once more friends so dear to me—those whom Holbein has presented in his picture, which I have studied with such intense delight." On the following day he wrote to Margaret one of his most single-minded letters.

ERASMUS ROTERODAMUS TO MARGARET ROPER, GREETINGS.

I cannot find words, Margaret Roper, ornament of Britain, to express the delight I felt when Holbein's picture showed me your whole family almost as faithfully as if I had been among you. I often wish that, before my last day, I may look even once more on that most dear company to which I owe a great part of whatever little fortune or glory I possess, and to none could I be more willingly indebted. The gifted hand of the painter

has given me no small portion of my wish. I recognize you all, but no one better than yourself. I seem to behold through all your beautiful household a spirit shining that is still more beautiful. I congratulate you all in that family happiness, and most of all your excellent father . . . I am writing in the midst of overwhelming work and in poor health, therefore I must leave it to your skill to convince all your sisters that this is a fair letter and is written to each one of them no less than to yourself. Convey my respectful and affectionate salutations to the honoured Lady Alice, your mother; since I cannot kiss her, I kiss her picture. To my godson John More, I wish every happiness, and you will give a special greeting on my part to your most worthy husband Roper, so rightly dear to you. May God keep you all safe, and, by his all-powerful Grace give you every prosperity.

These letters were brought to Chelsea by Quirin Talesius,[1] one of the series of young scholars who acted as secretaries and amanuenses to Erasmus. From time to time he sent these young men on tours to visit his patrons and his many friends and to exchange letters and news. Talesius, who had carried out a similar mission to More early in 1528, reached Chelsea near the end of October 1529, and took back with him letters from the Mores, Cuthbert Tunstall, and other friends. He returned to Freiburg, where Erasmus was then living, early in January 1530.

More's own letter to his old friend was of necessity brief as he had been appointed Lord Chancellor only three days before he wrote it; he referred to his new responsibilities, though without naming his office, and added that Talesius would tell all the news. Margaret's letter has the special interest of being the only holograph document of hers extant (see Plate IV).

MARGARET ROPER TO THE MOST LEARNED THEOLOGIAN DES. ERASMUS ROTERODAMUS, GREETINGS.

How a good thing can become most welcome when one enjoys it suddenly and unexpectedly, I recently, O most learned

[1] He became burgomaster of Haarlem, and was hanged in 1572 for being a Catholic.

Margareta Ropera Eruditiss. Theologo D. Erasmo Ro. S.P.D.

Quum illud boni plerumque accidere soleat gratissimum quo
subito quis atque insperato fruatur, id ego nuper
vir omnium eruditissime verissimum experta sum
quum literas tuas non minus elegantes quam aman-
tes certosque studiosi animi tui erga patrem omne-
omnemque eius familiam testes Quirinus tuus mihi
traderet, quae quanto magis venerunt insperatae
tanto merito maiorem menti meae voluptatem
attulere. neque enim aut sperare aut expectare
poteram ut tam multis necessariis studiis assidue
occupatissimus, morbis tum acribus misere perpetuo
agitatus, semperque molestia confectus mihi [illegible]

HOLOGRAPH LETTER
From Margaret Roper to Erasmus

Above MARGARET ROPER
Below WILLIAM ROPER
Miniatures by Holbein

of men, found by experience to be quite true when your letter, no less elegant than affectionate, and a sure witness to your devotion to my father and all his family, was brought to me by your Talesius. As it came unexpectedly, so it brought the greater pleasure to my mind. For I have never dared to hope or to expect that you, so fully occupied with so much important work, miserably and continually distressed by grievous sickness, and worn out by the burden of age, that you should ever deem me worthy of the honour to which I have been raised by the favour of your letter. As often as I show it to anyone, I realize that from it no small praise will accrue to my reputation, which cannot be made more notable in any other way than by your letter. For what can be compared with that honour of which I am counted worthy, whom the glory of the whole world has honoured with this letter? Wherefore, as your kindness has bestowed on me something far beyond my humble desert, so I indeed rightly acknowledge myself quite unequal to giving the thanks due to such a signal favour.

We freely acknowledge with the greatest gratitude that the arrival of the painter [Holbein] gave you so much pleasure because he brought you the portraits of both my parents and all of us. We pray for nothing more ardently than that we may some time be able to speak face to face with and see our teacher, by whose learned labours we have received whatever of good letters we have imbibed, and one who is the old and faithful friend of our father. Farewell.

My mother greets you heartily, and so do my husband who is entirely yours, and my brother. Both my sisters send you hearty greetings.

When Margaret called Erasmus "our teacher" she was not, of course, referring to him as a former tutor; he could not have given the More children any systematic instruction; his only stay of any length at More's house in Bucklersbury was from July 1509[1] when he had just arrived from Italy and was awaiting the coming of his

[1] As Erasmus was godfather to John More, this determines the year of the boy's birth.

books. It was then that he wrote *The Praise of Folly* which he had planned during his long journey. There must have been plenty of laughter in the house at that time! Margaret would be about four years old. Other visits by Erasmus were brief. The last time he could have seen the children was in 1516 when Margaret was eleven years old. The explanation of him as their teacher must have been that his educational books, his *Adages*, and the early *Colloquies* were used by the More children. Later they would enjoy *The Praise of Folly*, dedicated to their father, and would use Erasmus's New Testament in Greek. We have seen that Margaret translated one of his smaller tracts. His many books must have been part of More's library; then, too, there were his letters many of which leave perished but those that we have show that Erasmus took an affectionate interest in the More children and their progress in the classics. The bond between him and Thomas More was so strong that the name of Erasmus must have been very familiar in that household.

The year in which Holbein left England saw an outbreak of the sweating sickness that was a recurrent menace in Tudor times. This was probably the occasion of Margaret's dangerous illness when the doctors gave up hope of her recovery. Her father prayed for her.

> Whereupon going up, after his usual manner, into his aforesaid New Building, there in his chapel, on his knees, with tears most devoutly besought Almighty God that it would like his goodness, unto whom nothing was impossible, if it was his blessed will, at his mediation to vouchsafe graciously to hear his humble petition.

More's interest in medicine has already been noted, and it occurred to him that there was one possible remedy that had not yet been tried—a clyster. The doctors admitted that they had not thought of this; the treatment proved successful and Margaret recovered her health. Her father had declared when hope seemed vain that "if it had pleased God at that time to have taken [her] to his mercy, he would never have meddled with worldly matters

after." In that declaration he revealed the strength of his love for his eldest daughter.

At this period More was already engaged in his labour of combating the heresies of Luther and Tyndale. It was at the request of his friend Cuthbert Tunstall, the Bishop of London, that this work was undertaken. The bishop had written to him in March 1528 licensing him to read heretical books, and begging him to undertake the defence of the Faith, "since you, my dearest brother, are as distinguished in the use of our native language as you are in Latin." The first fruits of this appeal appeared in June 1929. *A Dialogue concerning Heresies* was published by his brother-in-law, John Rastell. This is the liveliest of More's controversial writings. He put it in the form that was most congenial to his genius—the dialogue or disputation, set, as was *Utopia*, in a garden. It is probable that he discussed the progress of the book with Margaret, and her husband's first-hand experience of heresy may have proved useful.

A month after this book was published, he set out with an embassy under Tunstall to Cambrai to negotiate a peace with the Emperor Charles and Francis, King of France. More regarded the success of this mission as a notable event in his service to the king, and he mentioned it in his Epitaph. When he returned to England at the end of August, he went direct to Woodstock to report to the king. "And while he was there with the king, part of his own dwelling house at Chelsea and all his barns there full of corn suddenly fell on fire and were burnt." He at once wrote to his wife. The last paragraph reads,

> I pray you to make some good search what my poor neighbours have lost and bid them take no thought thereof, for, and I should not leave myself a spoon, there shall no poor neighbours of mine bear no loss by chance happened in my house... At my coming hither I perceived none other that I should tarry still with the King's Grace, but now I shall, I think, by cause of this chance get leave this week to come home and see you, and then shall further devise together upon all things what order shall be best to take.

And thus so heartily fare you well with all our children as you can wish, at Woodstock, the 3rd day of September, by the hand of

Yours loving husband

Thomas More, Kg.

A far more harassing problem weighed on his mind at this time than the loss of his barns. For two years he had known that the king desired that his marriage with Catherine of Aragon should be annulled. When Henry had first put the problem to him, More had asked for time to study the issues; he reached the conclusion that the marriage was valid and could not be dissolved. The king was disappointed but showed no resentment and continued to favour him. While Tunstall and More were at Cambrai, the legatine court was sitting at Blackfriars; it was adjourned by Cardinal Campeggio without any conclusion being announced. This led to the downfall of Wolsey. It was while Thomas More was at Woodstock in attendance at court, that the king permitted the first move to be made against the Cardinal. On 19 October he was ordered to surrender the Great Seal, and a week later it was delivered by the king to Sir Thomas More as the new Lord Chancellor. Henry again put before More the case for the annulment of the marriage, but More still felt unable to support the king. In recalling this occasion in later years, More wrote, "he graciously declared unto me that he would in no wise that I should other thing do or say therein, than upon that that I should perceive mine own conscience should serve me, and that I should first look to God and after God to him"—words that were to be echoed on the scaffold.

We can be certain that there was no discussion of these matters at Chelsea in More's presence. He consistently acted on the principle that it was his duty to give the best advice he could to the king personally or in council, but he would not canvass his own opinions, nor did he seek to influence others outside the circle of councillors. Ambassadors complained that they could get no useful hints out of him however carefully they angled; his silence on affairs of state baffled them.

How did these weighty affairs affect his family? We have no indication of what they thought; it is however notable that when the crisis came a few years later, even Margaret, who was so close to her father, did not know all the reasons for the stand he made. Indeed, he did not speak out until after the verdict of death had been pronounced.

His rise to the great office of Lord Chancellor was another matter, for this greatly affected the status of his household. He had to maintain a retinue suited to his position, and there must have been more ceremony in his going and coming and in the reception of important visitors than his family had known in the past. It was noted, however, that it was still necessary for his manservant to keep an eye on him to see that he was suitably dressed, and the young lawyers copied his negligent manner of wearing his gown when they put on their own. There must have been one gain by his promotion; much of his time was spent in his Chancery at Westminster and he no longer had to follow the court from place to place. He also did some business in the hall of his own house. This meant that his family saw far more of him than they had done for some years.

More was Lord Chancellor for two-and-a-half years. He seems to have concentrated as much as possible on his legal duties, but he could not avoid the responsibilities of his position, nor the expectations that others, besides the king, would wish to know his views when matters of high policy were in debate. The king was still intent on freeing himself from Catherine; the influence of Anne Boleyn and her relatives became stronger every month; Parliament was increasingly anti-clerical in opinion. Among its members were More's three sons-in-law, William Roper for Bramber, and Giles Heron and William Daunce for Thetford, as well as his brother-in-law, John Rastell for Dunheved (Launceston), but they, and those who shared their opinions, could not ward off the attack on the Church; indeed, John Rastell was probably inclined to support the popular view. From these and other signs More could see the direction in which policy was moving. It was impossible for him to go on. Fortunately he had a well-found reason for resigning; for some time he had been

suffering from some complaint of the chest, which, he believed, had been brought on by the long hours spent over his desk writing his controversial works. The king accepted his resignation on 16 May 1532. Two days earlier, by their Submission, the clergy had surrendered their authority to the king.

Soon after his resignation, More erected in the chancel of his parish church at Chelsea a tomb or monument with a long inscription; the concluding lines of this have already been quoted. It was, as it were, a declaration that he had now withdrawn from public life; it was also, as he wrote to Erasmus, "to defend the integrity of his name." It must be remembered that in those days officers of state did not resign unless incapacitated; to be dismissed was to be disgraced and might lead to the Tower.[1] So More was anxious to establish the fact that his resignation was due to "a certain sickly disposition of his breast, a sign or token of age creeping upon him."

As a Councillor and Lord Chancellor he had been receiving about £500 a year (Tudor values) from the Treasury; in addition there were the customary legal fees, and the king assigned some manors to him for the upkeep of his position. These lands were really held at the king's pleasure and could not be regarded as permanent possessions. It was true that the king had promised that his former Lord Chancellor "should find his Highness good and gracious lord to him", but More was well aware how ruthless Henry could be when thwarted. The position was summed up in a passage in More's *Apologye*, published in 1533.

> And for as all the lands and fees that I have of the gift of the king's most noble Grace, is not at this day, nor shall while my mother-in-law[2] liveth (whose life and good health I pray God long keep and continue) worth yearly to my living the sum of full fifty pound. And thereof have I some by my wife, and some by my father (whose soul Our Lord assoil) and some have I also purchased myself, and some fees have I of some temporal men.

[1] A survival of this is the curious procedure followed by a Member of Parliament who wants to resign.

[2] To-day we should say 'step-mother'; the widow of Sir John More survived Thomas More; she died about 1546.

His first step in reorganizing his way of living was to find places for the attendants and servants who had been part of his state as Lord Chancellor. Then he called all his family together. William Roper gives us a report of what was said to them—partly banter, partly serious. More's purpose was to make it clear to his sons-in-law that they must now shoulder some responsibility for the upkeep of the household if they all wished, as he so strongly did, to go on living together. There was, however, something more serious in the picture he painted of the economies that might have to be practised; he was warning them that the time might come when his lands would be taken from him at a word from a vindictive king.

It would be wrong to infer that the sons-in-law and their families were supported by More. William Roper had much property in Kent after his father's death in 1524, and in addition had his office of Prothonotary as well as other legal work. Giles Heron had lands in Essex, and William Daunce in Hertfordshire. Giles Alington had property in Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. No doubt from time to time they went off with their families to live in their own mansions. It would seem that when they were at Chelsea, Sir Thomas charged himself with the upkeep of the combined households; it was an expression of that sense of family that was one of his notable characteristics.

As a further precaution he decided to convey his lands to his children with provision for the maintenance of himself and his wife. Unfortunately this limitation was to invalidate the transfer of the lands and the conveyances were set aside at his condemnation. The share allotted to the Ropers was, however, made as an absolute gift, and this could not be confiscated. It was the south-east portion of the Chelsea estate where the New Building probably stood; this small property became known as Butclose.[1]

[1] The name probably means 'the end piece'. It is not certain whether the later Danvers House was an extension of the New Building, or a new structure. John Aubrey wrote that the chimney-piece of "Sir Thomas More's chamber" was in Danvers House; he goes on, "where the gate is now . . . there stood anciently a gate-house, which was flat on the top . . . On this place the Lord Chancellor was wont to recreate himself and contemplate." (*Brief Lives*, ed. Powell, p. 315.) Roper's account should be recalled; the New Building contained a chapel, a library and a gallery—which suggests something bigger than a gate-house.

CHAPTER V

THE TOWER

THE pressure of events increased as the months passed after More's retirement. He would not be surprised when Henry and Anne Boleyn were married in January 1533; the appointment of Thomas Cranmer as Archbishop of Canterbury in the following month, and his annulment two months later of the marriage between Henry and Catherine could not have been unexpected. Few men had had greater opportunities over a period of fifteen years of reading the king's character than Thomas More. He gave only one sign of his opinions; he refused to attend the coronation of Anne Boleyn on 1 June 1533; many, perhaps the new queen herself, must have remarked on the absence of the former Lord Chancellor.

He was a man of rare simplicity of intention and it may have been his singleness of mind and heart that enabled him to see, as even a Cuthbert Tunstall could not see, the inevitable outcome of the king's wilfulness, not only in its larger probabilities, but the practical steps that would be taken. So it was that he said to William Roper at the time of Anne Boleyn's triumph, "God give grace, son, that these matters within a while be not confirmed with oaths."

Sir Thomas More occupied himself with his writings against heretics. The years 1532 to 1534 saw the publication of six volumes, all printed by his nephew William Rastell who seems to have taken up the trade mainly in order to publish his uncle's books. It was an enormous output. *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* alone was nearly half-a-million words in length. To-day only the vigorous *Apologye* is likely to find willing readers. We do not know whether Margaret shared his labours, but it is probable that he discussed the writing with her, and that she acted as one of his amanuenses.

William Rastell also published in 1533 John More's translation of Damianus à Goes's account of the legendary land of Prester John.[1] This little work suffices to dispel the late tradition (it is certainly not contemporary) that John More was deficient in intelligence. He may not have been as brilliant as Margaret, but that does not mean that he was dull-witted. In the following year Simon Grynaeus dedicated his edition of Plato to John More. Dedications cannot be regarded as trustworthy evidence; one sentence will serve our purpose. "Enthusiasm for learning has carried you and your sisters, a prodigy of the age, to such heights that no difficult question is beyond you." He was not writing without personal knowledge for he had come to England in 1531 to study manuscripts at Oxford; he had an introduction to More who, although his guest was a Zwinglian, gave him every help, but saw to it that he did not spread his heresies.

This was not the first work dedicated to John More. Three years earlier Erasmus had dedicated his edition of Aristotle to him. These tributes must have given great pleasure to Thomas More, and that, no doubt was their purpose.

It is not within the range of our subject to narrate in detail either the way in which the break with Rome was carried out, or the course of More's life during the three years before his martyrdom. Our concern here is with matters that affected Margaret Roper. Two general observations may be made at this point. There was an unusually close affinity between father and daughter; each could follow, as if by instinct, the thoughts of the other. While he was in the Tower, it was chiefly to her that he turned for affectionate understanding; it was to her he most frequently wrote, and, though it is probable that other letters have been lost, these reveal how closely they were united. This did not mean, however, that she blindly followed his lead; as we shall see, they differed on the fundamental question of the oath. The second observation is equally important. More did not attempt to impose his views on his family. Having by study and prayer reached his

[1] Damianus à Goes, *The legacye or embassate of prester John unto Emanuell, Kynge of Portyngale*. There is a copy in the library of Emmanuel College, Cambridge (S.T.C. 11966).

decision, he was content with the peace of mind and spirit this brought to him; others, he recognized, had the same duty of examining their consciences, and he accepted their conclusions in good faith. Margaret's difference of opinion in no way affected their relations. As for others, an incident in the Tower will show his complete trust in their integrity. Cuthbert Tunstall sent one of his servants to visit Fisher and More, probably with gifts for them. More asked the servant if his master was likely to join them in the Tower. The servant replied that he did not know the bishop's views. To this More replied, "If he do not, no force [matter], for if he live he may do more good than die with us." He made his own position clear to the Commissioners at Lambeth. "As touching the whole oath, I never withdrew any man from it, nor never advised any to refuse it, nor never put, nor never will, any scruple in any man's head, but leave every man to his own conscience. And me thinketh in good faith, that so it were good reason that every man should leave it to mine." The same principle was applied in his relations with his own family.

He was left undisturbed until February 1534; his name was then included in the Bill of Attainder brought against Elizabeth Barton the Nun of Kent, and those who, it was alleged, had concealed her treasonable sayings. For some years this young woman had had trances in which she received, as she believed, divine warnings of events to come. Her case had been investigated at the instance of Archbishop Warham, and he, and others whose integrity cannot be questioned, accepted her utterances as genuine. The king was well aware of all this, and indeed she had been granted an audience when she spoke plainly about his treatment of Catherine of Aragon, but when she became a centre of political danger as one who voiced popular discontent with the king's proceedings, Henry decided she and her associates must be silenced. It was known that Bishop John Fisher and Sir Thomas More had both seen her, and, in fact, the king had discussed her utterances with More. Both were included in the Bill of Attainder drawn up against the Nun and her chief advisers; the grounds were that they had not at once revealed to the king what she had been saying in public. More wrote a long letter to Thomas Cromwell giving

him an account of his dealings with the Nun. At the same time he wrote a short letter to the king reminding him of that promise, "I should find your Highness good and gracious lord to me." This made no impression on the king, but several of the councillors strongly urged that the case against More was so thin that Parliament would probably refuse to pass the Bill with his name in it. Henry gave way so far as to allow a commission of four councillors to call More before them for interrogation.

William Roper's account of his father-in-law's appearance before this commission is among the liveliest of his pages. Roper urged More to ask the commissioners to get his name removed from the Bill of Attainder. When the interrogation was over, the following conversation took place.

> Then took Sir Thomas More his boat towards his house at Chelsea, wherein by the way he was very merry, and for that was I nothing sorry, hoping that he had got himself discharged out of the Parliament Bill. When he was landed and come home then walked we twain alone into 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."
>
> "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."
>
> 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 these lords I had gone so far as without great shame I could never go back again."

What had happened? According to Roper's report, which he must have had from More himself, the matter of the Nun of Kent was not mentioned; the inquiry was mainly on More's refusal to

support the king's policy. At first the commissioners were affable, but when they found they could not move him, they threatened him with the king's displeasure. To which he replied, "My lords, these terrors be arguments for children, and not for me." "And thus displeasantly departed they."

When More declared "I had given the devil a foul fall" he had two things in mind. He had not drawn back at the first direct attack but had been given the grace to stand firm, and, secondly, the strain of waiting was at last over.

The commissioners, however, in spite of their threats, recognized that there was no case against the former Chancellor, and they begged the king not to go further in the matter, and it was only after much persuasion that Henry gave way. Roper takes up the tale.

> And on the morrow after, 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.*"[1]

In this matter he had taken Margaret and her husband into his confidence, but when the next blow fell, he went on alone. It was not long in coming.

Parliament passed an Act of Succession in March 1534; as More had foreseen, "these matters" were to be "confirmed with oaths." This Act was not just a simple statement making the children of Queen Anne heirs to the throne; its long preamble set out to justify the king's action in having his marriage with "the Lady Catherine", as the Act called his first queen, "deemed and adjudged to be against the laws of Almighty God", thus putting on one side the authority of "the Bishops of Rome." Those who "by writing, print, deed or act" questioned the lawfulness of the marriage with Anne Boleyn were guilty of high treason and those who did so "by any words, without writing" were guilty of misprision of treason, as were all those who refused to take the oath by which they accepted "*the whole effects and contents of this present Act.*" The

[1] What is put off, is not laid aside.

last phrase is crucial; the oath was not simply to the line of succession laid down in the Act; both Fisher and More were prepared to take such an oath as it lay within the competence of Parliament to determine the succession; the oath, however, went further than this; to take it meant accepting also the justice of the king in putting away his lawful wife in defiance of Papal authority. Such an oath they could not take.

Sir Thomas More and William Roper went to hear the sermon at St. Paul's on Low Sunday, 12 April 1534. Afterwards they walked down Cheapside to Bucklersbury to see John Clements and Margaret Giggs, who, after their marriage, had gone to live at The Barge. So it chanced that it was in his old house, so crowded with happy memories, that a summons was served on More to appear at Lambeth Palace the next day to take the oath to the Succession before the king's commissioners. He and Roper returned to Chelsea, and the following morning they left together for Lambeth. This was the only occasion, so Roper noted, when his father-in-law would not allow his wife and children to come down to the riverside to say good-bye. "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."

Bishop John Fisher had also been summoned to Lambeth. When he rode out of Rochester, the people pressed round him, lamenting his departure and begging his blessing.

It is a striking commentary on the times that, although no charge had been made against them, neither John Fisher nor Thomas More expected to return home from Lambeth.

More wrote for Margaret a full account of his appearance before the commissioners. The facts are familiar to all who know his story and need not be repeated here. At the end of the day the commissioners decided to postpone the matter in the hope that More would change his mind. He was put in the charge of Abbot Benson and lodged in the monastery at Westminster. It must have been during this interval[1] of three days that he wrote the first of

[1] In *Rogers*, No. 200, the editor suggests that this letter was written in the Tower but it is concerned solely with what happened on 13 April, and More would know how anxiously his family would await news.

those eight letters to his daughter that are among the most precious and affecting of documents. He came before the commission a second time on 17 April, and after once again refusing to take the oath, he was sent to the Tower. Bishop John Fisher was committed the same day; they were in the Tower for fourteen months, but were not allowed to meet.

Shortly after his arrival in his cell, More wrote a short note to Margaret; he had not yet been allowed pen and ink so he wrote as best he could with a charred stick on a scrap of paper. It was John á Wood, the servant allowed to be there with him, who smuggled this and other letters out of the Tower.

The last paragraph of this letter reads:

> Recommend me to your shrewd Will, and mine other sons, and to John Harris, my friend, and yourself knoweth to whom else, and to my shrewd wife above all, and God preserve you all, and make and keep you his servants still.

John Harris was his secretary; he is included in the painting of the More family, but not in the sketch. He married Dorothy Colley, who was Margaret Roper's maid.

We now come to an incident in the relations between father and daughter of which, unfortunately, the full details are missing, as the key letter from Margaret has not been preserved. When William Rastell published the folio edition of the English Works of his uncle in 1557, he printed More's reply with the following note:

> Within a while after Sir Thomas More was in prison in the Tower his daughter Mistress Margaret Roper wrote and sent unto him a letter, wherein she seemed somewhat to labour to persuade him to take the oath (though she nothing so thought) to win thereby credence with Master Thomas Crumwell, that she might the rather get liberty to have free resort unto her father (which she only had for the most time of his imprisonment) unto which her father wrote an answer, the copy whereof here followeth.

Margaret probably had an interview with Cromwell, and, when he found that she herself was prepared to take the oath (a fact she mentions in a later letter), he gave permission for her

to visit her father. As we shall see, More stated at his last interrogation that she had written "divers letters to exhort him . . . to incline to the king's desire". Rastell's gloss, "though she nothing thought so", does not tally with More's own plain statements.

The answer shows that, for the first and last time, he was deeply hurt. He certainly accepted the sincerity of her views. The opening paragraph reads:

> If I had not been, my dearly beloved daughter, at a firm and fast point (I trust in God's mercy) this good great while before, your lamentable letter had not a little abashed me, surely far above all other things, of which I hear divers times not a few terrible toward me. But surely they all touched me never so near, nor were so grievous unto me, as to see you, my well-beloved child, in such vehement piteous manner labour to persuade unto me, that thing wherein I have of pure necessity for respect unto mine own soul, so often given you so precise answer before. Wherein as touching the points of your letter, I can make no answer, for I doubt not but you well remember, that the matters which move my conscience (without declaration whereof I can nothing touch the points) I have sundry times showed you that I will disclose them to no man. And therefore, daughter Margaret, I can in this thing no further, but like as you labour me again to follow your mind, to desire and pray you both again to leave such labour, and with my former answers to hold yourself content.

He then turned to a thought that was to find expression time and again in his letters.

> A deadly grief unto me, and much more deadly than to hear of my own death . . . is that I perceive my good son your husband, and you my good daughter, and my good wife, and mine other good children and innocent friends, in great displeasure and danger of great harm thereby. The let [hindering] thereof, while it lieth not in my hand, I can no further but commit all unto God.

We may wonder why More's family did not follow his example; why, indeed, the people of the country, with so few

exceptions, accepted the new order of things. To reach even a partial understanding of their attitude, we must try to forget all that followed the Acts of Succession and Supremacy, and see the situation as it would appear to ordinary folk in 1534. Almost the only way of reaching them was through their parish priests whose guidance the people, unless exceptionally well-informed, and intelligent, would accept. So it was that when the bishops (except John Fisher) and the great majority of the parish clergy and the regular clergy accepted Henry as Supreme Head of the Church in England, the people, as a whole, followed them; the new title would convey little meaning to ordinary folk. When John Fisher said, "the fort is betrayed even of them that should have defended it," he was declaring what was a lamentable truth. For most people, such matters as the relations between the king and the Pope, or even the validity of Henry's marriage, were outside their range of interest; these were problems for priest and noble. As to the Act of Succession, how many knew what it contained? They had to swear to "the whole effect and present contents of this Act." It seems unlikely that the Act was read to each person, nor would many of the literate ask, as More did when he was tendered the oath, to see a copy of the Act.

The More family could not be described as ordinary folk but they too must have been sorely puzzled at the course of events; for them, too, the acquiescence of the bishops, especially of their father's close friend Cuthbert Tunstall, must have carried great weight. No doubt, had More expounded the problems of the succession and Supremacy to them, he could have persuaded them to accept his opinion, but he would not force their consciences, and, as we have seen, even when Margaret put their case to him, he still refused to debate the fundamental issue of the Supremacy. He was true to his decision to "leave every man to his own conscience."

Margaret's next letter did not take up the argument.

Mine own good Father.

It is to me no little comfort, since I cannot talk with you by such means as I would, at the least way to delight myself among in this bitter time of your absence, by such means as I may, by

as often writing to you as shall be expedient and by reading again and again your most fruitful and delectable letter, the faithful messenger of your very virtuous and ghostly [spiritual] mind, rid from all corrupt love of worldly things, and fast knit only in the love of God, and desire of heaven, as becometh a very true worshipper and a faithful servant of God, which I doubt not, good father, holdeth his holy hand over you and shall (as he hath) preserve you both body and soul (*ut sit mens sana in corpore sano*) and namely, now when you have abjected [cast off] all earthly consolations and resigned yourself willingly, gladly and fully for his love to his holy protection.

Father, what think you hath been our comfort since your departing from us? Surely the experience we have had of your life past and godly conversation, and wholesome counsel, and virtuous example, and a surety not only of the continuance of the same, but also a great increase by the goodness of our Lord to the great rest and gladness of your heart devoid of all earthly dregs, and garnished with the noble vesture of heavenly virtues, a pleasant palace for the Holy Spirit of God to rest in, who defend you (as I doubt not, good father, but of his goodness he will) from all trouble of mind and body, and give me your most loving obedient daughter and handmaid, and all us your children and friends, to follow that that we praise in you, and to our only comfort remember and coming together of you, that we may in conclusion meet with you, mine own dear father, in the bliss of heaven to which our most merciful Lord hath bought us with his precious blood.

Your own most loving and obedient daughter and beadswoman, Margaret Roper, which desireth above all worldly things to be in John Wood's[1] stead to do you some service. But we live in hope that we shall shortly receive you again, I pray God heartily we may, if it be his holy will.

At last Margaret got permission to visit her father. The evidence shows that Cromwell was anxious for Thomas More to make his peace with the king, not merely for politic reasons, but through friendliness. They had been on good terms in the past.

[1] More's servant in the Tower.

More, who was no time-server, mentioned in one of his letters from the Tower that Cromwell "hath tenderly favoured me." Nor is that a unique tribute. It seems that Cromwell hoped that Margaret would be able to persuade her father to yield. It is not difficult to picture the joy of the first reunion of father and daughter. Roper gives the following account.

> 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 to her, "I believe, Meg, that they that have put me here, ween [think] 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 [narrow] 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 here than in my own house. For methinketh God maketh me a wanton, and setteth me on his lap and dandleth me".

Roper goes on to give an account of another meeting of father and daughter; this cannot be dated.

> 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 piteth me to remember into what misery, poor soul, she shall shortly come."

From the first meeting she brought away the following note to be shown to his friends.

> To all my loving friends.

For as much as being in prison, I cannot tell what need I may have, or what necessity I may hap [chance] to stand in, I heartily beseech you all, that if my well-beloved daughter Margaret Roper (which only of my friends hath by the king's gracious favour license to resort to me) do anything desire of any of you, of such thing as I shall hap to need, that it may like you no less to regard and tender it, than if I moved it unto you and required it of you personally present myself. And I beseech you all to pray for me, and I shall pray for you.

Your faithful lover and poor beadsman,
Thomas More, Knight, prisoner.

At another meeting he said to her:

I may tell thee, Meg, they that have committed me hither, for refusing of this oath not agreeable with the statute, are not by their own law able to justify my imprisonment. And surely, daughter, it is great pity that any Christian prince should by a flexible council ready to follow his affections, and by a weak clergy lacking grace constantly to stand to their learning, with flattery be so shamefully abused.

He was here commenting on the fact that the oath put to him was not one laid down by the first Act of Succession as the terms of the oath were not included; this defect, a curious one, was remedied by the passing of the second Act at the end of 1534, but it is not known if the oath then given was the same as that to which Fisher and More were asked to subscribe; it may have been the same, but that could not remedy the fact that they had been tendered an oath that had not been authorized by Parliament.

In the middle of August 1534, Lady Alice Alington, More's step-daughter, had an opportunity of speaking to Lord Chancellor Audley, More's successor. If she hoped to move him to show any sympathy for Sir Thomas More and his family, she was quickly undeceived; he amused himself by telling her two of Æsop's fables to illustrate the guiding principle of his own life—that a wise man swims with the tide and not against it. It is necessary to give the whole letter as it is referred to in detail in Margaret Roper's reply.

Sister Roper, with all my heart I recommend me unto you, thanking you for all your kindness.

The cause of my writing at this time is to shew you that at my coming home[1] within two hours after, my Lord Chancellor did come to take a course at a buck in our park, the which was to my husband a great comfort that it would please him so to do. Then when he had taken his pleasure and killed his deer, he went unto Sir Thomas Barmeston[2] to bed, where I was the next day with him at his desire, the which I could not say nay to, for methought he did bid me heartily, and most specially because I would speak to him for my father.

And when I saw my time, I did desire him as humbly as I could that he would, as I have heard say that he hath been, be still good lord unto my father. And he said it did appear very well when the matter of the Nun was laid to his charge. And as for this other matter, he marvelled that my father is so obstinate in his own conceit, as that everybody went forth with all save only the blind Bishop [Fisher] and he. And in good faith, said my lord, I am very glad that I have no learning but in a few of Æsop's fables of which I shall tell you one. There was a country in the which there were almost none but fools, saving a few which were wise. And they by their wisdom knew that there should fall a great rain, the which should make them all fools, that should so be fouled or wet therewith. They seeing that, made them caves under the ground till all the rain was passed. Then they came forth thinking to make the fools to do what they list, and to rule them as they would. But the fools would none of that, but would have the rule themselves for all their craft. And when the wise men saw they could not obtain their purpose, they wished that they had been in the rain, and had befouled their clothes with them.

When this tale was told, my lord did laugh very merrily. Then I said to him that for all his merry fable I did put no doubts but that he would be good lord unto my father when

[1] Halesworth, Suffolk; this was one of the Alington manors. They had another at Horseheath, just over the Cambridgeshire border.

[2] Head of a Suffolk family that became strongly puritan.

he saw his time. He said, "I would not have your father so scrupulous of his conscience." And then he told me another fable of a lion, an ass, and a wolf and of their confession. First the lion confessed him that he had devoured all the beasts that he could come by. His confessor assoiled [absolved] him because he was a king and also it was his nature so to do. Then came the poor ass and said that he took but one straw out of his master's shoe for hunger, by the means thereof he thought that his master did take cold. His confessor could not assoil this great trespass, but by and by sent him to the bishop. Then came the wolf and made his confession, and he was straightly commanded that he should not pass sixpence at a meal. But when this said wolf had used this diet a little, he waxed very hungry, insomuch that on a day when he saw a cow with her calf come by him he said to himself, "I am very hungry and fain would I eat, but that I am bounden by my ghostly [spiritual] father. Notwithstanding that, my conscience shall judge me. And then if it be so, then shall my conscience be thus, that the cow doth not seem to me now but worth a groat [fourpence], and then, if the cow be not worth a groat, then is the calf but worth twopence." So did the wolf eat both the cow and the calf.

Now good sister hath not my lord told me two pretty fables? In good faith they please me nothing, nor I wist not what to say for I was abashed of this answer. And I see no better suit than to Almighty God, for he is the comforter of all sorrows, and will not fail to send his comfort to his servants when they have most need. Thus fare you well mine own good sister.

Written the Monday after Saint Lawrence in haste by
Yours sister Dame
Alice Alington.

Margaret Roper's long reply was prefaced by the following note by her cousin William Rastell when he printed More's English Works in 1557:

When Mistress Roper had received a letter from her sister Lady Alice Alington, she at her next repair to her father,

shewed him the letter. And what communication was thereupon between her father and her, you shall perceive by an answer here following (as written to the Lady Alington). But whether this answer were written by Sir Thomas More in his daughter's Roper's name, or by himself it is not certainly known.

It is evident from this that Rastell was using a copy and not the original for the handwriting would have told him by whom the letter was actually written down. Perhaps the solution to the puzzle is that father and daughter discussed Alice Alington's letters at some length and, when Margaret got back to Chelsea, she wrote down an account of their talk while it was fresh in her mind. The reader will note some passages that point to Margaret as the writer. Whatever the explanation, the letter is an outstanding example of contemporary prose, and it takes the dialogue form that was so congenial to More; for our purpose its interest lies in the light it throws on the two speakers; it shows their complete confidence in one another even though they differed in opinion.

When I came next unto my father after, methought it both convenient and necessary to show him your letter. Convenient, that he might thereby see your loving labour taken for him. Necessary, that since he might perceive thereby, that if he should stand still to this scruple of conscience (as it is at the leastwise called by many that are his friends and wise) all his friends that seem most able to do him good either shall finally forsake him, or peradventure not be able indeed to do him any good at all. And for these causes, at my next being with him after your letter received, when I had awhile talked with him, first of his diseases, both in his breast of old, and his reins now by reason of gravel and stone, and of cramp also that divers nights grippeth him in his legs, and that I found by his words that they were not much increased, but continued after their manner that they did before, sometime very sore and sometime little grief, and that at that time I found him out of pain, and (as one in his case might) meetly [fittingly] well minded, after our seven Psalms and the Litany said, to sit and talk and be merry, beginning first with other things of the

good comfort of my mother, and the good order of my brother, and all my sisters, disposing themselves every day more and more to set little by the world, and draw more and more to God, and that his household, his neighbours, and other good friends abroad, diligently remembered him in their prayers, I added unto this, "I pray God, good father, that their prayers and ours, and your own therewith, may purchase of God the grace, that you may in this great matter (for which you stand in this trouble and for your trouble all we also that love you) take such a way by time, as standing with the pleasure of God, may content and please the king whom you have always found so singularly gracious unto you, that you should stiffly refuse to do the thing that were his pleasure, which, God not displeased, you might do (as many great wise and well learned men say that in this thing you may) it would both be a great blot in your worship in every man's wise opinion and as myself have heard some say (such as yourself have always taken for well learned and good) a peril unto your soul also. But as for that point, father, will I not be bold to dispute upon, since I trust in God and your good mind that you will look surely thereto. And your learning I know for such, that I wot well you can. But one thing is there which I and other your friends find and perceive abroad, which, but if it be showed you, you may peradventure to your great peril, mistake and hope for less harm (for as for good I wot well in this world of this matter you look for none) than I sore fear me, shall be likely to fail to you. For I assure you, father, I have received a letter of late from my sister Alington, by which I see well that if you change not your mind, you are likely to lose all those friends that are able to do you any good. Or if you lose not their good wills, you shall at the leastwise lose the effect thereof, for any good that they shall be able to do you."

It is important to note in this paragraph the stress put by Margaret Roper on the opinions of "many great wise and learned men"; she had been trained to respect their authority; now she found herself forced to choose between her father and John

Fisher on one side, and Cuthbert Tunstall and the other bishops and scholars on the other. The letter continues:

With this my father smiled upon me and said, "What, Mistress Eve (as I called you when you first came), hath my daughter Alington played the serpent with you, and with a letter set you a-work to come tempt your father again, and for the favour that you bear him labour to make him swear against his conscience, and so send him to the devil?" And after that, he looked sadly again and earnestly said unto me, "Daughter Margaret, we two have talked of this thing ofter than twice or thrice, and that same tale in effect that you now tell me therein, and the same fear too, have you twice told me before, and I have twice answered you too, that in this matter if it were possible for me to do the thing that might content the King's Grace, and God therewith not offended, there hath no man taken this oath already more gladly than I would do, as he that reckoneth himself more deeply bounden unto the King's Highness for his most singular bounty, many ways showed and declared, than any of them all beside. But since standing my conscience, I can in no wise do it, and that for the instruction of my conscience, in this matter, I have not slightly looked, but by many years studied and advisedly considered, and never could yet see nor hear that thing, nor I think never shall, that could induce mine own mind to think otherwise than I do, I have no manner remedy, but God hath given me to the straight, that either I must deadly displease him, or abide any earthly harm that he shall for mine other sins, under name of this thing, suffer to fall upon me. Whereof (as I before this have told you) I have ere I came here, not left unbethought nor unconsidered, the very worst and the uttermost that can by possibility fall. And albeit that I know mine own frailty full well and the natural faintness of mine own heart, yet if I had not trusted that God should give me strength rather to endure all things, than offend him by swearing ungodly against mine own conscience, you may be very sure I would not have come here. And since I look in this matter but only unto

God, it maketh me little matter, though men call as it pleaseth them and say it is no conscience but a foolish scruple."

At this word I took good occasion, and said unto him thus: "In good faith, father, for my own part, I neither do, nor it cannot become me, either to mistrust your good mind or your learning. But because you speak of that that some call it a scruple, I assure you you shall see my sister's letter, that one of the greatest estates [officials] in this realm and a man learned too, and (as I dare say yourself shall think when you know him, and as you have already right effectually proved him) your tender friend and very special good lord, accounteth your conscience in this matter, for a right simple scruple, and you may be sure he saith it of good mind and layeth no little cause. For he saith that where you say your conscience moveth you to this, all the nobles of this realm and almost all other men too, go boldly forth with the contrary, and stick not thereat, save only yourself and one other man [Fisher], whom, though he be right good and very well learned too, yet would I ween [think], few that love you, give you counsel against all other men to lean to his mind alone."

And with this word I took him your letter that he might see my words were not feigned, but spoken of his mought [might], whom he much loveth and esteemeth highly. Thereupon he read over your letter. And when he came to the end, he began it afresh and read it over again. And in the reading he made no manner haste, but advised [considered] it leisurely and pointed every word.

And after that he paused, and then thus he said: "Forsooth, daughter Margaret, I find my daughter Alington such as I have ever found her, and trust I ever shall, as naturally minding me as you that are mine own. Howbeit, her take I verily for mine own too, since I have married her mother, and brought up her of a child as I have brought up you, in other things and learning both, wherein I thank God she findeth now some fruit, and bringeth her own up very virtuously and well. Whereof God, I thank him, hath sent her good store, our Lord preserve them and send her much joy of them and my good son her good

husband too, and have mercy on the soul of mine other good son her first;[1] I am daily beadsman (and so write her) for them all.

"In this matter she hath used herself like herself, wisely and like a very daughter towards me, and in the end of her letter, giveth as good counsel as any man that wit hath would wish; God give me grace to follow it and God reward her for it. Now daughter Margaret, as for my lord, I not only think, but have also found it, that he is undoubtedly my singular good lord. And in mine other business concerning the seely[2] nun, as my cause was good and clear, so was he my good lord therein, and Master Secretary my good master too. For which I shall never cease to be faithful beadsman for them both and daily do I by my troth, pray for them as I do for myself. And whensoever it should happen (which I trust God shall never happen) that I be found other than a true man to my prince, let them never favour me neither of them both, nor of truth no more it could become them to do.

"But in this matter, Meg, to tell the truth between thee and me, my lord's Æsop's fables do not greatly move me. But as his wisdom for his pastime told them merrily to mine own daughter, so shall I for my pastime, answer them to thee Meg, that art mine other daughter. The first fable of the rain that washed away all their wits that stood abroad when it fell, I have heard oft of this. It was a tale so often told among the king's councillors by my Lord Cardinal when his Grace was chancellor, that I cannot lightly forget it. For of truth in times past, when variance began to fall between the Emperor and the French king, in such wise that they were likely and did indeed fall together at war, and that there were in the Council here somewhat sundry opinions, in which some were of the mind that they thought it wisdom that we should sit still and let them alone, but everymore against that way my lord used this fable of those wise men that because they would not be washed with

[1] Alice Middleton married first Thomas Elryngton in 1516, and after his death (Sir) Giles Alington. They had four sons and five daughters.

[2] 'Seely' can mean either 'holy' or 'foolish'.

the rain that should make all the people fools, went themselves to caves and hid them under ground. But when the rain had once made all the remnant fools and they that came out of their caves and would utter their wisdom, the fools agreed together against them, and there all to beat them. And so said his Grace that if we would be so wise that we would sit in peace while the fools fought, they would not fail after to make peace and agree, and fall at length all upon us. I will not dispute upon his Grace's counsel and I trust we never made war but as reason would. But yet this fable for his part, did in his days help the king and the realm to spend many a fair penny. But that gear is passed and his Grace is gone, our Lord assoil [absolve] his soul.

"And therefore shall I now come to this Æsop's fable, as my lord full merrily laid it forth for me. If those wise men, Meg, when the rain was gone at their coming abroad, where they found all men fools, wished themselves fools too, because they could not rule them, then seemeth it, that the foolish rain was so sore a shower, that even through the ground it sank into their caves, and poured down upon their heads, and wet them to the skin, and made them more noddies [simpletons] than them that stood abroad. For if they had had any wit, they might well see that, though they had been fools too, that thing would not have sufficed to make them the rulers over the other fools, no more than the other fools over them, and of so many fools all might not be rulers. Now when they longed so sore to bear a rule among the fools, and that so they so might, they would be glad to lose their wit and be fools too, the foolish rain had washed them meetly [fittingly] well. Howbeit, to say the truth before the rain came if they thought that all the remnant should turn into fools, and then they either were so foolish that they would, or so made to think that they should, so few rule so many fools, and not so much wit as to consider that there are none so unruly as they that lack wits and are fools, then were these wise men stark fools before the rain came. Howbeit, daughter Roper, whom my lord taketh here for the wise men and whom he meaneth to be fools, I cannot very

well guess, I cannot well read such riddles. For as Davus[1] says in Terence *Non sum Œdipus*, I may say, you wot well, *Non sum Œdipus, sed Morus*, which name of mine what it signifieth in Greek, I need not tell you.[2] But I trust my lord reckoneth me among the fools, and so reckon I myself, as my name is in Greek. And I find, thank God, causes not a few wherefore I so should in very deed.

"But surely among those that long to be rulers, God and mine own conscience clearly knoweth, that no man may number and reckon me. And I ween [think] each other man's conscience can tell himself the same, since it is so well known that, of the king's great goodness, I was one of the greatest rulers in this noble realm and that at mine own great labour by his great goodness discharged.[3] But whomsoever my lord meaneth for the wise men, and whomsoever his lordship take for the fools, and whomsoever long for the rule, and whosoever long for none, I beseech our Lord make us all so wise as that we may every man here so wisely rule ourselves in this time of tears, this vale of misery, this simple wretched world (in which as Boethius says, one man to be proud that he beareth rule over other men, is much like as one mouse would be proud to bear a rule over other mice in a barn[4]) God, I say, give us the grace so wisely to rule ourselves here that when we shall hence in haste to meet the great Spouse, we be not taken sleepers and for lack of light in our lamps, shut out of heaven among the five foolish virgins.

"The second fable, Margot, seemeth not be to Æsop's. For by that the matter goeth all upon confession, it seemeth to be feigned since Christendom began. For in Greece before Christ's days they used not confession, no more the men then than the beasts now. And Æsop was a Greek, and died long

[1] A cunning slave in Terence's *Andria*.

[2] This was the pun used by Erasmus in the title of his book *Moriae encomium* (*Praise of Folly*).

[3] More several times stressed the fact that he resigned the Chancellorship and was not dismissed.

[4] "For if among mice thou shouldst see one claim jurisdiction and power to himself over the rest, to what a laughter it would move thee!" *Boethius*, Loeb ed. p. 207.

ere Christ was born. But what? Who made it, maketh little matter. Nor I envy not that Æsop hath the name. But surely it is somewhat too subtle for me. For whom his lordship understandeth by the lion and the wolf, which both twain confessed themselves, of raving and devouring of all that came to their hands, and the one enlarged his conscience at his pleasure in the construction of his penance, nor whom by the good discreet confessor that enjoined the one little penance, and the other none at all, and sent the poor ass to the bishop, of all these things can I nothing tell. But by the foolish scrupulous ass that had so sore a conscience for the taking of a straw for hunger out of his master's shoe, my lord's other words of my scruple declare that his lordship merrily meant that by me, signifying (as it seemeth by that similitude) that of oversight and folly, my scrupulous conscience taketh for a great perilous thing towards my soul, if I should swear this oath, which thing as his lordship thinketh, were indeed but a trifle. And I suppose well, Margaret, as you told me right now, that so thinketh many more beside, as well spiritual as temporal and that even of those that for their learning and their virtue myself not a little esteem. And yet albeit that I suppose this to be true, yet believe I not even very surely, that every man so thinketh that so sayeth. But though they did, daughter, that would not make much to me, not though I should see my Lord of Rochester say the same, and swear the oath before me too.

"For whereas you told me right now that such as love me would not advise me that against all other men, I should lean unto his mind alone, verily, daughter, no more I do. For albeit, that of very truth, I have him [Fisher] in that reverent estimation that I reckon in this realm no one man, in wisdom, learning and long approved virtue together, meet [fit] to be matched and compared with him, yet that in this matter I was not led by him, very well and plainly appeareth, both in that I refused the oath before it was offered him, and in that also his lordship was content to have sworn of that oath (as I perceived since by you when you moved me to the same) either somewhat more, or in some other manner than ever I minded

to do. Verily, daughter, I never intend (God being my lord) to pin my soul at another man's back, not even the best man that I know this day living; for I know not whither he may hap [chance] to carry it."

This last paragraph is of interest not only for the tribute paid by Sir Thomas More to Bishop John Fisher, but for the light it throws on their relations one to another. They had not discussed the question of the oath and they had had no opportunity of learning each other's views during the four months they had been in the Tower. Margaret had apparently heard that Fisher had been prepared to take the oath on certain conditions; as far as records go, these conditions were exactly the same as those which More put to the commissioners; Fisher was willing to take a simple oath to the Succession but not one, as then put to him, that implied a repudiation of the Pope's authority. The letter continues with More's words to Margaret.

"There is no man living, of whom while he liveth, I may make myself sure. Some may do for favour, and some may do for fear, and so might they carry my soul a wrong way. And some might hap to frame [adjust] himself a conscience and think that while he did it for fear, God would forgive it. And some may peradventure think that they will repent, and be shriven thereof, and that so God shall remit it them. And some may be peradventure of that mind that if they say one thing and think the while contrary, God more regardeth their heart than their tongue, and that therefore their oath goeth upon what they think, and not upon what they say, as a woman reasoned once, I trow [as I believe], daughter, you were by. But in good faith, Margaret, I can use no such ways in so great a matter, but like as if my own conscience served me, I would not let to do it, though other men refused, so though other refuse it or not, I dare not do it, mine own conscience standing against it. If I had (as I told you) looked but lightly for the matter I should have cause to fear. But now have I so looked for it and so long, that I purpose at the leastwise to have no

less regard unto my soul, than had once a poor honest man of the country that was called Company."

And with this, he told me a tale, I ween [think] I can scant [barely] tell it you again because it hangeth upon some terms and ceremonies of the law. But as far as I can call it to mind my father's tale was this, that there is a court belonging of course unto every fair, to do justice in such things as happen within the same. This court hath a pretty fond name, but I cannot happen upon it, but it beginneth with a "pie", and the remnant goeth much like the name of a knight that I have known, I—wis [assuredly] (and I trow [think] you too, for he hath been at my father's oft or this, at such time as you were there) a meetly tall black man his name was Sir William Pounder. But, tut, let the name of the court go for this once, or call it if you will a court of pie Sir William Pounder.[1] But this was the matter, lo, that upon a time at such a court holden at Bartholomew Fair there was an escheator[2] of London that had arrested a man that was outlawed, and had seized his goods that he had brought into the fair, tolling [luring] him out of the fair by a train [trick]. The man that was arrested and his goods seized was a northern man, which by his friends made the escheator within the fair to be arrested upon an action, I wot not what, and so was he brought before the judge of the court of pie Sir William Pounder, and at the last the matter came to a certain ceremony to be tried by a quest [inquest] of twelve men, a jury as I remember they call it, or else a perjury.

Now had the clothman by friendship of the officers found the means to have all the quest almost made of northern men such as had their booths there standing in the fair. Now was it come to the last day in the afternoon, and the twelve men had heard both the parties, and their counsel tell their tales at the bar, and were from the bar had into a place, to talk and commune, and agree upon a sentence. Nay let me speak better in

[1] Court of Piepowders—a summary court set up at fairs. This paragraph strengthens the impression that Margaret herself was responsible for the composition of this letter.

[2] Officer appointed to look after property lapsing to the crown. "Cheater" in Shakespeare.

my terms yet; I trow [suppose] the judge giveth sentence and the quest's tale is called a verdict. They were scant [hardly] come together but the northern men were agreed, and in effect all the other too, to cast [convict] our London escheator. They thought they needed no more to prove that he did wrong than even the name of his bare office alone. But then was there then as the devil would, this honest man of another quarter that was called Company. And because the fellow seemed but a fool and sat still and said nothing, they made no reckoning of him, but said, "Come let us go give our verdict."

Then when the poor fellow saw that they made such haste and his mind nothing gave him that way that theirs did (if their minds gave them that way that they said), he prayed them to tarry and talk upon the matter and tell him such reason therein that he might think as they did: and when he so should do, he would be glad to say with them, or else he said they must pardon him. For since he had a soul of his own to keep as they had, he must say as he thought for his, as they must for theirs. When they heard this, they were half angry with him. "What good fellow," quoth one of the northern men, "where wonnes thou?[1] Be not we eleven here and you but one all alone, and all we agreed? Whereto shouldst thou stick? What is thy name good fellow?" "Masters," quoth he, "my name is called Company." "Company," quoth they, "now by thy troth, good fellow, play then the good companion; come thereon forth with us and pass even for good company." "Would God, good masters," quoth the man again, "that there lay no more weight thereby. But now when we shall hence and come before God, and that he shall send you to heaven for doing according to your conscience, and me to the devil for doing against mine, in passing at your request here for good company now, by God, Master Dickenson" (that was one of the northern men's names) "if I shall then say to all you again, masters, I went once for good company with you, which is the cause that I go now to hell, play you the good fellows now again with me, as I went then for good company

[1] What worries you?

with you, so some of you go now for good company with me. Would you go, Master Dickenson? Nay, nay, by Our Lady, nor never one of you all. And therefore must you pardon me from passing as you pass, but if I thought in the matter as you do, I dare not in such a matter pass for good company. For the passage of my poor soul passeth all good company."[1]

And when my father had told me this tale, then said he further thus: "I pray thee now, good Marget, tell me this. Wouldst you wish thy poor father being at the leastwise somewhat learned, less to regard the peril of his soul, than did there the honest unlearned man? I meddle not (you wot [know] well) with the conscience of any man, that hath sworn, nor I take not upon me to be their judge. But now if they do well, and that their conscience grudge them not, if I with my conscience to the contrary, should for good company pass on with them and swear as they do, when all our souls hereafter shall pass out of this world, and stand in judgment at the bar before the high Judge, if he judge them to heaven and me to the devil, because I did as they did, not thinking as they thought, if I should then say (as the good man Company said) mine old good lords and friends, naming such a lord and such, yea and some bishops peradventure of such as I love best, I swear because you sware, and went that way that you went, do likewise for me now, let me not go alone, if there be any good fellowship with you, some of you come with me: by my troth, Marget, I may say to thee, in secret counsel, here between us twain (but let it go no further, I beseech thee heartily), I find the friendship of this wretched world so fickle, that for anything that I could treat or pray, that would for good fellowship go to the devil with me, among them all I ween I should not find one. And then, by God, Marget, if you think so too, best it is I suppose that for any respect of them all were they twice as many more as they be, I have myself a respect to mine own soul."

"Surely, father," quoth I, "without any scruple at all, you may be bold I dare say for to swear that. But, father, they that

[1] There is a play upon words here; one meaning being 'to pass sentence on'.

think you should not refuse to swear the thing, that you see so many so good men and so well learned swear before you, mean not that you should swear to bear them fellowship, nor to pass with them for good company, but that the credence that you may with reason give to their persons for their aforesaid qualities, should well move you to think the oath such of itself, as every man may well swear without peril of their soul, if their own private conscience to the contrary be not the let [hindrance], and if you well ought and have good cause to change your own conscience, in confirming your own conscience to the conscience of so many other, namely being such as you know they be. And since it is also by a law made by the Parliament commanded, they think that you upon the peril of your soul, bound to change and reform your conscience, and confirm your own as I said to other men's."

"Marry, Marget," quoth my father again," for the part that you play, you play it not much amiss. But Margaret first, as for the law of the land, though every man being born and inhabiting therein, is bound to the keeping in every case upon such temporal pain, and in many cases upon pain of God's displeasure too, yet is there no man bound to swear that every law is well made, nor bound upon the pain of God's displeasure, to perform any such point of the law as were indeed unleaful [unlawful]. Of which manner kind, that there may such hap to be made in any part of Christendom, I suppose no man doubteth, the General Council of the whole body of Christendom evermore to that point excepted; which, though it may make some things better than other, and some things may grow to that point, that by another law they may need to be reformed, yet to institute anything in such wise, to God's displeasure, as at the making might not lawfully be performed, the spirit of God that governeth his church never hath it suffered nor never hereafter shall, his whole catholic church lawfully gathered together in a General Council, as Christ hath made plain promises in Scripture.

"Now if it so hap, that in any particular part of Christendom, there be any law made, that be such as for some part thereof

some men think that the law of God cannot bear it, and some other think yes, the thing being in such manner in question that through diverse quarters of Christendom, some that are good men and cunning [learned], both of our own days and before our days, think some one way, and some other of like learning and goodness think the contrary, in this case he that thinketh against the law, neither may swear that law lawfully was made, standing his own conscience to the contrary, nor is bounden upon pain of God's displeasure to change his own conscience therein, for any particular law made anywhere, other than by General Council or by a general faith grown by the working of God universally through all Christian nations, not other authority than one of these twain, except special revelation and express commandment of God, since the contrary opinions of good men and well learned, as I put you the case, made the understanding of the Scriptures doubtful, I can see none that lawfully may command and compel any man to change his own opinion, and to translate his own conscience from the one side to the other.

"For an example of some such manner things, I have I trow before this time told you, that whether our Blessed Lady were conceived in original sin or not, was sometimes in great question among the great learned men of Christendom.[1] And whether it be yet decided and determined by any General Council, I remember not. But this I remember well, that notwithstanding that the feast of her conception was then celebrated in the Church (at the leastwise in divers provinces) yet was holy St. Bernard, which as his manifold books made in the laud and praise of our Lady do declare, was of as devout affection towards all things sounding toward her commendation, that he thought might well be verified or suffered, as any man was living, yet, I say, was that holy devout man against that part of her praise, as appeareth well by an epistle of his, wherein he right sore and with great reason argueth there against, and

[1] The dogma was defined in the bull of Pius IX in 1854. A feast of the Conception of the Virgin Mary was kept in Ireland and England in the tenth century. More was in error in his reference to St. Anselm.

approacheth not the institution of that feast neither. Nor he was of this mind alone, but many other well learned men with him, and right holy men too. Now was there on the other side the blessed holy bishop St. Anselm, and he not alone neither, but many well learned and very virtuous also with him. And they both twain holy saints in heaven, and many more that were on either side. Nor neither part was there bounden to change their opinion for the other, nor for any provincial Council either.

"But like as after the determination of a well assembled General Council, every man had been bounden to give credence that way, and confirm their own conscience to the determination of the Council General, and then all they that held the contrary before, were for that holding out of blame, so if before such decision a man had against his own conscience, sworn to maintain and defend the other side, he had not failed to offend God very sore. But, marry, if on the other side a man would in a matter take away by himself from his own mind alone, or with some few, or with never so many, against evident truth appearing by the common faith of Christendom, this conscience is very damnable, yea, or if it be not even fully so plain and evident, yet if he see but himself with far the fewer part, think the one way, against far the more part of as well learned and as good, as those are that affirm the thing that he thinketh, thinking and confirming the contrary, and that of such folk as he hath no reasonable cause wherefore he should not in that matter suppose, that those which say they think against his mind, affirm the thing that they say, for none other cause but for that they so think indeed, this is of very truth a very good occasion to move him, and yet not to compel him, to confirm his mind and conscience unto theirs.

"But, Margaret, for what causes I refuse the oath, the thing, as I have often told you, I will never show you, neither you nor nobody else except the King's Highness should like to command me. Which if his Grace did, I have ere told you therein how obediently I have said. But surely, daughter, I have refused it and do for more causes than one. And for what causes

soever I refuse it, this am I sure that it is well known that of them that have sworn it, some of the best learned before the oath given them, said and plain affirmed the contrary, of some such things as they have now sworn in the oath, and that upon their troth, and their learning then, and that not in haste nor suddenly, but often and after great diligence done to seek and find out the truth."

"That might be, father," quoth I. "And yet since they might see more, I will not," quoth he, "dispute, daughter Margaret, against that, nor misjudge any other man's conscience which lieth in their own heart far out of my sight. But this will I say, that I never heard myself the cause of their change, by any new further thing found of authority, than as far as I perceive they had looked on, and as I suppose, very well weighed before. Now of the selfsame things that they saw before, seem some otherwise unto them now, than they did before, I am for their sakes gladder a great deal. But anything that ever I saw before, yet at this day to me they seem but as they did. And therefore, though they may do otherwise than they might, yet, daughter, I may not. As for such things as some men would happily say, that I might with reason the less regard their change, for any sample of them to be taken to the change of my conscience, because that the keeping of the prince's pleasure, and the avoiding of his indignation, the fear of the losing of their worldly substance, with regard unto the discomfort of their kindred and their friends, might hap make some men either swear otherwise than they think, or frame their conscience afresh to think otherwise than they thought, and such opinion as this is, will I not conceive of them, I have better hope of their goodness than to think of them so. For if such things should have turned them, the same things had been likely to make me do the same, for in good faith I knew few so faint hearted as myself. Therefore will I, Margaret, by my will, think no worse of other folk in the thing that I know not, than I find in myself. But as I know well mine only conscience causeth me to refuse the oath, so will I trust in God, that according to their conscience, they have received it and sworn.

"But whereas you think, Margaret, that they be so many more than there are on the other side that think in this thing as I think, surely for your own comfort that you shall not take thought, thinking that your father casteth himself away like a fool, that he would jeopard the loss of his substance, and peradventure his body, without any cause why he so should for the peril of his soul, but rather his soul in peril thereby too, to this shall I say to thee, Marget, that in some of my causes I nothing doubt at all, but that though not in this realm, yet in Christendom about, of those well learned men and virtuous that are yet alive, they be not the fewer part that are of my mind. Besides that, that it were you wot well possible that some men in this realm too think not so clear the contrary, as by the oath received they have sworn to say.

"Now this far forth I say for them that are yet alive. But go we now to them that are dead before, and that are I trust in heaven, I am sure that it is not the fewer part of them that all the time while they lived, thought in some of the things the way that I think now. I am also, Margaret, of this thing sure enough, that of those holy doctors and saints, which to be with God in heaven long ago no Christian man doubteth, whose books yet in this day remain here in men's hands, there thought in some such things, as I think now. I say not that they thought all so, but surely such and so many as will well appear by their writing, that I pray God give me grace that my soul may follow theirs. And yet I show you not all, Margaret, that have for myself in the sure discharge of my conscience. But for the conclusion, daughter Margaret, of all this matter, as I have often told you, I take not upon me neither to define nor dispute in these matters, nor I rebuke not nor impugn other man's deed, nor I never wrote, nor so much as spake in any company, any word of reproach in anything that the Parliament had passed, nor I meddled not with the conscience of any other man, that either thinketh or sayeth he thinketh contrary unto mine. But as concerning mine own self, for thy comfort shall I say, daughter, to thee, that mine own conscience in this matter (I damn none other man's) is such, as may well stand

with mine own salvation, thereof am I, Meg, so sure, as that is, God is in heaven. And therefore as for all the remnant, goods, lands, and life both (if the chance should so fortune) since this conscience is sure for me, I verily trust God he shall rather strengthen me to bear the loss, than against this conscience to swear and put my soul in peril, since all the causes that I perceive move other men to the contrary, seem not such unto me, as in my conscience make any change."

This long and somewhat involved passage will repay careful study. It seems probable that Margaret had been approached by some of her father's friends, who had taken the oath, in the hope that she could persuade him to follow their example. This anxiety to get More to take the oath is also shown by the number of times he was seen by some of the councillors. We need not think that Henry was recalling former days of intimacy; that would not have been in character. He and Cromwell had their eyes on the European situation where More's reputation was so high that action against him might lead to difficulties with Charles V and Francis of France, who were just then on good terms. That the king was worried about this was shown later by the propaganda carried out abroad to justify the executions of Fisher and More. Cromwell showed his worst side in this deliberate defamation of two such men. In England there was, alas, nothing much to worry about when it was found that priests and laity had small hesitation in taking the oath.

It should be remembered that at the time of the conversation recorded in this letter, the Act of Supremacy had not yet been passed. More's opinion was based entirely on the first Act of Succession. He saw that this Act was the first step, not the last, in a policy that would carry people much further than they expected. As he told the bishops when they wanted him to attend Anne Boleyn's coronation, "When they have deflowered you, then will they not fail soon to devour you." He refused to tell Margaret what was the decisive factor, but there is a suggestion of his line of thought in the passage referring to "the whole body of Christendom"; he was to use a similar phrase after the verdict at his

trial. There was only one thing in the Act of Succession to which that criterion could be applied—the implicit repudiation of papal authority. Within a few months, what was implicit became explicit in the Act of Supremacy.

More's anxiety to make it clear that he judged no man—a theme he laboured overmuch, perhaps—was partly that he did not wish even to appear to suggest what decision each member of his family should make.

We return to the letter.

> When he saw me sit with this very sad, as I promise you, sister, my heart was full heavy for the peril of his person, for in faith I fear not his soul; he smiled upon me and said, "How now, daughter Marget? What now, mother Eve? Where is your mind now? Sit not musing with some serpent in your breast, upon some new persuasion, to offer father Adam the apple yet once again!" "In good faith, father," quoth I, "I cannot no further go, but am (as I trow Creseyde said in Chaucer) come to Dulcarnon,[1] even at my wit's end. For since the example of so many wise men cannot in this matter move you, I see not what to say more, but if I should look to persuade you with the reason that Master Harry Patenson[2] made. For he met one day one of our men, and when he had asked where you were and heard that you were in the Tower still, he waxed even angry with you and said, 'Why? What aileth him that he will not swear? Wherefore should he stick to swear? I have sworn the oath myself.' And so I can in good faith go now no further neither, after so many wise men whom you take for no example, but if I should say like Master Harry, 'Why should you refuse to swear, father, for I have sworn myself?' "
>
> At this he laughed and said, "That word was like Eve too, for she offered Adam no worse fruit than she had eaten herself."

How are we to interpret this? Did More clearly understand that in fact his daughter had taken the oath, or was he under the impression that she was speaking in keeping with her story of Harry

[1] A dilemma; see *Troilus*, iii, 931.

[2] He had been More's fool up to 1529; he appears in Holbein's sketch of the family.

Patenson when she used the words, "but *if* I should say . . ."? He replied jokingly without showing any sign of surprise, still less of shock.

When William Rastell printed this letter he added a note, "She took the oath with this exception, as far as would stand with the law of God." This must have been a mental reservation for it is inconceivable that anyone, at that time, would have been allowed to modify the wording of the oath. She came within the category of those described by her father earlier in their conversation: "and some may be peradventure of that mind, that if they say one thing and think the while the contrary, God more regardeth their heart than their tongue."

Margaret took up the conversation.

> "But yet, father," quoth I, "by my troth, I fear me very sore that this matter will bring you in marvellous heavy trouble. You know well that, as I showed you, Master Secretary sent you word as your very friend, to remember, that Parliament lasteth yet." "Margaret," quoth my father, "I thank him right heartily. But as I showed you then again, I left not this gear unthought on. And albeit I know well that if they would make a law[1] to do me any harm that law could never be lawful, but that God shall I trust keep me in that grace, that concerning my duty to my prince, no man shall do me hurt but if he do me wrong (and then as I told you, this is like a riddle, a case in which a man may lose his head and have no harm) and notwithstanding also that I have good hope that God shall never suffer so good and wise a prince, in such wise to requite the long service of his true, faithful servant, yet since there is nothing impossible to fall I forgot not in this matter the counsel of Christ in the Gospel, that ere I should begin to build this castle for the safeguard of mine own soul, I should sit and reckon what charge would be. I counted, Marget, full surely many a restless night while my wife slept and went [thought] that I slept too, what peril was possible for to fall to me, so far forth that I am sure there can come none above [unexpected]. And in

[1] Such as an Act of Attainder.

devising, daughter, thereupon, I had a full heavy heart. But yet, I thank our Lord, for all that, I never thought to change, though the uttermost should hap me that my fear ran upon."

"No, father," quoth I, "it is not like to think upon a thing that may be, and to see a thing that shall be, as you should, our Lord save you, if the chance should so fortune. And then should you peradventure think that you think not now and yet then peradventure it would be too late." "Too late, daughter," quoth my father, "Margaret? I beseech our Lord that if ever I make such a change it may be too late indeed. For well I wot the change cannot be good for my soul, that change I say that should grow but by fear. And therefore I pray God that in this world I never have good of such a change. For so much as I take harm here, I shall have at leastwise the less therefore when I am hence. And if so were that I wist well now, that I should faint and fall, and for fear swear hereafter, yet would I wish to take harm by the refusing first, for so should I have the better hope for grace to rise again.

"And albeit, Marget, that I wot well my lewdness hath been such, that I know myself well worthy that God should let me slip, yet can I not but trust in his merciful goodness, that as his grace hath strengthened me hitherto, and made me content in my heart to lose goods, land and life too, rather than to swear against my conscience, and hath also put in the king toward me that good and gracious mind that as yet he hath taken from me nothing but my liberty (wherewith, as help me God, his Grace hath done me so great good by the spiritual profit that I trust I take thereby, that among all his great benefits heaped upon me so thick, I reckon upon my faith my imprisonment even the very chief) I cannot, I say, therefore mistrust the grace of God, but that either he shall conserve and keep the king in that gracious mind still to do me none hurt, or else if his pleasure be that for mine other sins I shall suffer in such case in sight as I shall not deserve, his grace shall give me the strength to take it patiently, and peradventure somewhat gladly too, whereby his high goodness shall, by the merits of his bitter passion joined thereunto, and far surmounting in merit for me, all that I can

suffer myself, make it serve for the release of my pain in Purgatory and over that for increase of some reward in heaven.

"Mistrust him, Meg, will I not, though I feel me faint, yea, and though I should feel my fear even at the point to overthrow me too, yet shall I remember how St. Peter, with a blast of wind, began to sink for his faint faith, and shall do as he did, call upon Christ and pray him to help. And then I trust he shall set his holy hand unto me, and in the stormy seas hold me up from drowning. Yea, and if he suffer me to play St. Peter further, and to fall full to the ground and swear and forswear too, which our Lord for his tender passion keep me from, and let me leese [be destroyed] if it so fall and never win thereby, yet after shall I trust that his goodness will cast upon me his tender piteous eye as he did upon St. Peter, and make me stand up again and confess the truth of my conscience afresh, and abide the shame and the harm here of mine own frailty. And finally, Marget, this wot I well, that without my fault he will not let me be lost. I shall therefore with good hope commit myself wholely to him. And if he suffer me for my faults to perish, yet shall I then serve for a praise of his justice. But in good faith, Meg, I trust that his tender pity shall keep my poor soul safe and make me command his mercy. And therefore mine own good daughter, never trouble thy mind for anything that ever shall hap to me in this world. Nothing can come but that that God will. And I make me very sure that whatsoever that be, seem it never so bad in sight, it shall indeed be the best. And with this, my good child, I pray you heartily, be you and all your sisters and my sons too comfortable and serviceable to your good mother my wife. And of your good husbands' minds I have no manner doubt. Commend me to them all, and to my daughter Alington and to all my good friends, sisters, nieces, nephews and allies [relatives], and unto all our servants, man, woman and child, and all my good neighbours and our acquaintance abroad. And I right heartily pray both you and them, to serve God and be merry and rejoice in him. And if anything hap to me that you would be loath, pray to God for me, and trouble not yourself, as I shall full heartily pray

for us all, that we may meet together once in heaven, where we shall be merry for ever and never have trouble after."

While the order in which the letters between father and daughter can be established with some certainty, the actual dates are difficult to determine. The next letter from Margaret was written, according to William Rastell's note, when her father was "shut up in close prison". This period of stricter confinement probably began towards the end of 1534. The Act of Supremacy was passed that November as well as a new Treason Act which declared that anyone who "do *maliciously* wish, will, or desire by words or writing . . . to deprive them [the king and queen] or any of them the dignity, title, or name of their royal estates" was guilty of High Treason. The Commons, of which More's sons-in-law were still members, insisted on the word "maliciously" being inserted. It was an innovation in law to make spoken words capable of bearing a charge of High Treason; previously only proved overt acts had provided the necessary grounds for such a charge. By those two Acts, a spoken denial of the king's title of Supreme Head of the Church in England came within the meaning of treason. The word "maliciously", as Fisher and More were to find, was not in fact operative; the judges regarded any such denial as, *ipso facto*, spoken maliciously. It was probably after these Acts were passed that both Fisher and More were deprived of some of their privileges they had been allowed. More appears to have been treated with greater consideration than Fisher.

Lady Alice More made an appeal to the king at the end of 1534. She gratefully acknowledged that up to the time of her writing she had been allowed "to retain and keep still his moveable goods and the revenues of his lands", but she feared that under the new Act of Supremacy she was threatened with poverty as the lands would be confiscated. She begged that her husband, since "his offence is grown not of any malice", should be pardoned. It may have been William Roper who advised her in writing this letter; we see how that word "maliciously" was thought to be significant; Roper would think so because he was a member of the Commons who put the word into the Act; Bishop Fisher was certain

that because of that one word the Act could not touch him, but Sir Thomas More warned him that it would be ignored by the judges. Lady More's letter had its reply in January 1535 when the first grant of More's lands was made to Henry Norris[1]; other grants followed within a few months.

Soon after More's imprisonment became harsher, Margaret wrote to him the following letter, in answer to one from him that has not survived.

Mine own most entirely beloved father.

I think myself never able to give you sufficient thanks for the inestimable comfort my poor heart received in the reading of your most loving and godly letter, representing to me the clear shining brightness of your soul, the pure temple of the Holy Spirit of God, which I doubt not shall perpetually rest in you and you in him. Father, if all the world had been given to me, as I be saved it had been a small pleasure, in comparison of the pleasure I conceived of the treasure of your letter, which though it were written with a coal, is worthy of mine opinion to be written in letters of gold.

Father, what moved them to shut you up again, we can nothing hear. But surely I conjecture that when they considered that you were of so temperate mind, that you were contented to abide there all your life with such liberty, they thought it were never possible to incline you to their will, except it were by restraining you from the Church, and the company of my good mother your dear wife and us your children and beadsfolk. But, father, this chance was not strange to you. For I shall not forget how you told us when we were with you in the garden that these things were like enough to chance shortly after. Father, I have many times rehearsed to mine own comfort and divers others, your fashion and words you had to us when we were last with you, for which I trust by the grace of God to be better while I live, and when I am departed out of this frail life, which, I pray God, I may pass and end in his true obedient service, after the wholesome counsel and fruitful

[1] Executed in 1536 for his alleged relations with Anne Boleyn.

example of living I have had, good father, of you, whom I pray God give me grace to follow, which I shall the better through the assistance of your devout prayers, the special stay of my frailty. Father, I am sorry I have no longer leisure at this time to talk with you, the chief comfort of my life, I trust to have occasion to write again shortly. I trust I have your daily prayer and blessing.

Your most loving obedient daughter and beadswoman, Margaret Roper, which daily and hourly is bounden to pray for you, for whom she prayeth in this wise that our Lord of his infinite mercy give you of his heavenly comfort, and so to assist you with his special grace that you never in anything decline from his blessed will, and live and die his true obedient servant. Amen.

We learn from this letter that More had been deprived of pen and ink; this may not have been for long as some later letters of his would seem to have been too lengthy to have been written in charcoal. It is also clear that, for a time, More had been allowed visits, not only from Margaret, but from his wife and other children, and that they had been allowed to walk with him in the Tower gardens. To him the most serious deprivation must have been the withdrawal of permission to attend Mass in one of the Tower churches, St. Peter ad Vincula or St. John's. Bishop Fisher too was deprived in the same way.

In his reply to Margaret's letter, her father showed his increased anxiety for his family now that he could not see them. He wrote:

So doth my mind always give me that some folk yet may ween [think] that I was not so poor as it appeared in the search, and that it may therefore happen that yet eftsoons ofter than once, some new sudden searches may hap to be made in every house of ours as narrowly as is possible. Which thing if ever it so should hap, can make but game to us that know the truth of my poverty, but if they find my wife's gay girdle and her golden beads. Howbeit I verily believe in good faith, that the King's Grace of his benign pity will take nothing from her.

And later in the same letter he wrote:

> Nor never longed I since I came hither to set my foot in mine own house for any desire or pleasure of my house, but gladly would I sometime somewhat talk with my friends, and specially my wife and you that pertain to my charge.

The playful reference to his wife's gold beads and his desire to have conversation with her show that she was often in his mind. Roper's account of one of her visits to her husband in the Tower is well known, but does it give a true impression of the relations between husband and wife? It may be that Roper and Lady Alice did not get on well with each other and he allowed some prejudice to colour his references to her. More's affectionate concern for her is shown in his letters; "gladly would I sometime talk with my friends, and specially my wife", "your good mother my wife", "my good bedfellow", these and other expressions should be kept in mind when we think of Lady Alice More.

Several letters from Margaret to her father have not survived; we know of them from his replies. In one she seems to have expressed her fear of her own frailty. He wrote:

> That you fear your own frailty Marget, nothing misliketh me. God give us both twain the grace to despair of our own self, and whole to depend and hang upon the hope and strength of God ... Surely Meg a fainter heart than thy frail father hath, canst you not have.

On 16 April 1535 three Carthusian priors were imprisoned in the Tower; one was John Houghton of the London Charterhouse; with them were Richard Reynolds, a learned Brigittine monk of Syon Abbey and a close friend of Thomas More, and John Haile, vicar of Isleworth. They were brought to trial on 28 April and condemned because they refused to take the oath of Supremacy.

A few days later Thomas More wrote to Margaret to say that he feared that the news of the fate of the five priests might have alarmed her especially as she may have heard that he himself had been interrogated on 30 April. So he gave her an account of

what had happened, and ended by saying that he was back in his cell "neither better nor worse."

The execution of the Carthusians with Richard Reynolds and John Haile was fixed for 4 May. Margaret was allowed to visit her father on that day, apparently the first time for several months. Why was this visit allowed? It seems probable that the king or Cromwell hoped that the emotion she might be expected to show would lead her to make another appeal to her father, whose own resolution might be shaken at what he saw. What happened was recorded by Roper. Thomas More and Margaret were standing at the window of his cell and could see the priests being tied down on the hurdles on which they were to be dragged to Tyburn.

> He, as one longing in that journey to have accompanied them said unto my wife, then standing there besides him, "Lo, dost thou not see, Meg, that these blessed fathers be now as cheerfully going to their deaths as bridegrooms to their marriage? Wherefore thereby mayest thou see, mine own good daughter, what a great difference 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, consumed all their time in pleasure and ease licentiously. For God, considering their long continued life in most sore and grievous penance, will not suffer them to remain here in this vale of misery and iniquity, but speedily taketh them to the fruition of his everlasting deity, whereas thy silly father, Meg, that like a most wicked caitiff hath passed forth the whole course of his miserable life most sinfully, God, thinking him not worthy so soon to come to that eternal felicity, leaveth him here yet still in the world, further to be plagued and turmoiled with misery."

More was again interrogated on 3 June, and he wrote an account of this to Margaret. This was the last of his long letters to be preserved. "Verily, to be short," he wrote, "I perceive little difference between this time and last, for as far as I can see, the whole purpose is either to drive me to say precisely the one way, or else precisely the other."

The final interrogation was on 14 June. He was questioned about some harmless notes that had passed between him and Bishop Fisher; the councillors had also learned that he had been writing to Margaret; their questions seem to have been on the letters giving accounts of the interrogations. The official record reads:

> Also he saith, that he, considering how it should come to his daughter's ear, Mr. Roper's wife, that the Council had been with him, and should hear things abroad of him thereupon, that might put her to a sudden flight [? fright], and fearing lest she, being (as he thought) with child, should take some harm by that sudden flight [? fright] and therefore minding to prepare her before, to take well aworth, whatsoever thing should betide him, better or worse, did send unto her, both after the first examination and also after the last, letters by which he did signify unto her how that the Council had been to examine him and had asked him certain questions touching the king's statutes, and that he had answered them that he would not meddle with no thing but would serve God, and what the end thereof should be, he could not tell, but whatsoever it were, better or worse, he desired to take it patiently and take no thought therefore, but only pray for him. And saith that she had written to him before divers letters, to exhort him and advertise him to accommodate himself to the king's pleasure, and, specially, in the last letter, she used great vehemence and obsecration to persuade this examinat to incline to the king's desire.[1]

No letters from Margaret in such strong terms are extant; it is probable that More destroyed them after reading them, not because he did not want his daughter's views to be known but that she might get into trouble for writing more frequently than Cromwell permitted. He was unable to report this interrogation to her. An even closer watch was kept to prevent further communications.

A fortnight later, Sir Thomas More was brought to trial.

[1] *State Papers*, I, pp. 434–5. The summary in *L.P.* VIII, 341, does not bring out the force of the references to Margaret's letters.

Chapter VI

THE SCAFFOLD

SIR THOMAS MORE was brought to trial on 1 July 1535. He was taken to Westminster Hall by the river. We must not picture such a scene as the trial of Charles I or of Warren Hastings. The prisoner was a commoner and he was tried in the King's Bench Court where his father had sat as judge. The visitor to-day who enters the bare, empty hall by the north door will have some difficulty in reconstructing in his mind its appearance in the sixteenth century. There were two courts partitioned off at the far end where the broad steps are now seen. That on the left was the King's Bench Court, and that on the right was the Chancery where More himself had presided. Neither court could have been more than twenty-five feet square; this made it impossible for anyone to be present other than the judges, the lawyers, the jury, witnesses and officials. The public may have been allowed in the body of the Hall, but no one there could have heard anything of the trial.

Roper stated that he himself was not at the trial, though as Prothonotary of the King's Bench he could have been had he not felt it would be unseemly to play an official part in the trial—a scruple that would not have deterred some Tudor lawyers. He relied on reports given him by lawyers who were present, particularly on his partner, Richard Heywood, who was one of the More circle; his brother, John Heywood, "the mad merry wit", had married Sir Thomas More's niece, Joan Rastell.

This absence of the family may seem strange to us, but they may not have been allowed to be present as it was not a public trial in our sense of the term, or had they been allowed, More himself may have asked them not to come.

We are not concerned here with the course of the trial. The verdict was a foregone conclusion. The return journey was made down the river to the Tower.

The last meeting between Margaret and her father must be told in her husband's words.

> 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 should pass by before he could enter into the Tower, there tarrying for his coming. As soon as she saw him, after his blessing on her knees reverently received, she, hasting towards him, and, without consideration or care of herself, pressing in among the middest of the throng and company of the guard that with halberds and bills went round about him, hastily ran to him, and there openly in the sight of them 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 godly 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.

The Paris News Letter,[1] issued within a fortnight of More's execution, contained his last words to Margaret.

> Have patience, Margaret. Don't torment yourself. It is the will of God. You have long known the secret of my heart.

Roper did not mention other members of the family who were present, but Stapleton recorded that John More and Margaret Clement were there.

[1] Printed at the end of *Harpsfield*. For a discussion of this, see my *Saint Thomas More*.

> Another one, too, at the same time embraced and kissed him. This was Margaret Giggs, his daughter, not by birth but by adoption, and afterwards the wife of Doctor Clement. John, too, his son, after receiving his father's blessing, kissed him and received his kiss in return.

At the beginning of his account of that last journey Stapleton noted that,

> John More, his only son, threw himself at his father's feet as he passed on his way, and on his knees begged, with many tears, his father's blessing.

This is confusing. It is difficult to see how John More could have been near Westminster Hall, as Stapleton implies, and later at the Tower Wharf two miles away, unless, as seems improbable, he took a fast wherry and passed his father downstream. By the time Stapleton wrote his book (1588), Dorothy Colley's memory of what had happened half a century earlier was not always precise. It is more likely that John More accompanied the two Margarets and waited with them on the Wharf. Perhaps the state of the tide made it impossible for More to be taken in by Traitor's Gate, so the party had to land on the Wharf; had he gone by the Gate, his children could not have embraced him.

During the four days between his condemnation and his execution More does not appear to have seen any of his family, but Margaret sent her maid, Dorothy Colley, each day to the Tower, and she was allowed to see him on the fourth day. "Nor did the gaoler, a friend to More, at this time refuse access", as Stapleton noted. It was then that he wrote his last letter to Margaret, and with it he sent his hair shirt and the scourge he used as a discipline. That precious and most moving letter has often been quoted, but it cannot be omitted from these pages.

> Our Lord bless you good daughter and your good husband and your little boy and all yours and all my children and all my godchildren and all our friends. Recommend me when you may to my good daughter Cecily, whom I beseech our Lord to comfort, and I send her my blessing and to all her children and

pray her to pray for me. I send her an handkerchief and God comfort my good son her husband. My good daughter Daunce hath the picture in parchment that you delivered me from my Lady Conyers, her name is on the back side. Show her that I heartily pray her that you may send it in my name to her again for a token from me to pray for me.

I like specially well Dorothy Coley; I pray you be good unto her. I would wit [know] whether this be she that you wrote me of. If not, I pray you be good to the other, as you may in her affliction, and to my good daughter Joan Aleyne to give her I pray you some kind answer, for she sued to me this day to pray you be good to her.

I cumber you good Margaret much, but I would be sorry, if it should be any longer than tomorrow for it is St. Thomas's eve,[1] and the utas [octave] of Saint Peter and therefore tomorrow long I to go to God; it were a day very meet and convenient for me. I never liked your manner toward me better than when you kissed me last for I love when daughterly love and dear charity hath no laisor [leisure] to look to worldly courtesy.

Farewell, my dear child and pray for me, and I shall for you and all your friends that we may merrily meet in heaven.

I thank you for your great coaste [cost].

I send now unto my good daughter Clement her algorism stone [slate] and I send her and my good son and all hers, God's blessing and mine.

I pray you at time convenient recommend me to my good son John More. I liked well his natural fashion. Our Lord bless him and his good wife my loving daughter, to whom I pray him be good, as he hath great cause, and that if the land of mine come to his hand, he break not with my will concerning his sister Daunce. And our Lord bless Thomas and Austen and all that they shall have.

This letter gives the impression that it was written hastily.

[1] Not the feast of St. Thomas Becket which is on 29 December, but of the translation of his body to the shrine at Canterbury on 7 July 1220. The shrine was despoiled in September 1538. The Feast of SS. Peter and Paul is on 29 June.

Perhaps the friendly gaoler dared not let Dorothy Colley remain for more than a short time. More tried to remember each member of his family, and sent such mementos as he could. There is no mention of his wife, but he may have sent her a special message, or she may have been allowed to see him. Nothing is known of Lady Conyers or the picture, nor do we know what domestic upset lay behind the few words that More wrote on behalf of Joan Alleyn, who was, presumably, another of Margaret Roper's maids, though the word 'daughter' suggests a member of the 'school'. It is of more interest to note that even at such a time More could remember to put in a good word for someone who had appealed to him. The last paragraph is devoted to his son and his son's sons who would carry on the name of More. "I liked well his natural fashion" would refer to that last meeting outside the Tower.

On the morning of 6 July, Thomas Pope, a Tower official, informed More that the execution had been fixed for nine o'clock that day. He accepted the news with thankfulness—the long strain was at last coming to an end—and then he had a request to make.

> "I beseech you, good Master Pope, to be a mean unto his Highness that my daughter Margaret may be at my burial."
>
> "The king is content already," quoth Master Pope, "that your wife, children and other 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."

The last words may seem extraordinary to us, but we shall never understand the men of that period until we appreciate their attitude to the king; a man's duty was to serve and obey his prince; the very strength of this belief is the measure of More's agony of mind and spirit at finding himself bound by conscience to disobey his king. He had, indeed, cause to be grateful that his family were allowed to see his burial, though it is to be hoped that he did not know the treatment the body of John Fisher had received a fortnight earlier. His headless and naked body had been left lying on

the scaffold all day until two soldiers "without any reverence . . . buried it very contemptuously" in a hastily dug grave outside Barking (All Hallows) Church by the Tower.

Margaret Clement was in the crowd that saw Thomas More pass to the scaffold. Margaret Roper must have been nearby; perhaps she was in Barking Church on her knees. She and Dorothy Colley were waiting to carry out their last service to Sir Thomas. Stapleton recorded Dorothy's memories of that day.

> His body was buried by Margaret Roper and Margaret Clement in the little Chapel of St. Peter ad Vincula in the Tower. In regard to this burial an incident occurred which may well be regarded as miraculous. Margaret Roper from earliest morning had been going from church to church and distributing such generous alms to the poor that her purse was now empty. After her father's execution she hastened to the Tower to bury his body. In her hurry she forgot to replenish her purse and found that she had no winding-sheet for the body. She was in the greatest distress and knew not what to do. Her maid Dorothy, afterwards the wife of Master Harris, suggested that she should get some linen from a neighbouring shop. "How can I do that," she asked, "when I have no money left?" "They will give you credit," replied the maid. "I am far away from home," said Margaret, "and no one knows me here, but yet go and try." The maid went into a neighbouring shop and asked for as much linen as was needed; she agreed on the price. Then she put her hand into her purse as if to look for the money intending to say that unexpectedly she found herself without money, but that if the shopkeeper would trust her she would obtain the price of the linen as quickly as possible from her mistress and bring it back. But although the maid was quite certain that she had absolutely no money, yet in her purse she found exactly the price of the linen, not one farthing more nor less than the amount she had agreed to pay. Dorothy Harris, who is still living here in Douai, has told me these details again and again.

With this winding-sheet, so strangely obtained, the two

Margarets and Dorothy most reverently buried the body. The shirt in which he died, stained with his blood, Margaret Clement showed me whole and entire, and gave me a large portion of it.[1] I am not sure whether she was allowed by the other Margaret from the beginning to keep it, or whether it only came to her after her death, for Margaret Roper died many years before Margaret Clement.

Since too many were visiting his grave and showing their regard for his memory the body of John Fisher was removed from where it had been hastily buried near Barking Church, and reburied by the grave of his fellow martyr. The family tradition was that both graves were under the tower of the church; if this was so, they were not disturbed when the main building was reconstructed last century.

We also owe it to Stapleton that the following facts were put on record while an eyewitness was still alive to give him information.

> [The head] by order of the king, was placed upon a stake on London Bridge, where it remained for nearly a month, until it had to be taken down to make room for other heads . . . The head would have been thrown into the river had not Margaret Roper, who had been watching carefully and waiting for the opportunity, bribed the executioner, whose office it was to remove the heads, and obtained possession of the sacred relic. There was no possibility of mistake, for she, with the help of others, had kept careful watch, and, moreover, there were signs so certain that anyone who had known him in life would have been able now to identify the head.

After the death of Margaret Roper, the head was in the keeping of her eldest daughter, Elizabeth, Lady Bray, and it was probably at her death in 1558 that it was placed in the Roper vault under the Chapel of St. Nicholas in St. Dunstan's, Canterbury.

It was seen there in 1835[2] when, by accident, the roof of the

[1] The fate of this precious relic is not known.

[2] *The Gentleman's Magazine* for May 1837 contains an account by an anonymous eyewitness. Another reference is given in a footnote to W. J. Loftie's *History of London*, II, p. 264.

vault was broken; the head was enclosed in a leaden case with one side open; this stood in a niche protected by an iron grille. The vault was later sealed, but a tablet in the floor above bears the inscription:

> Beneath this floor is the vault of the Roper family in which is interred the head of Sir Thomas More of illustrious memory, sometime Lord Chancellor of England, beheaded on Tower Hill 6th July 1535. *Ecclesia Anglicana libera sit.*[1]

[1] This was quoted from Magna Charta by Sir Thomas More during his trial when he argued that the Church in England, as part of the Church Universal, was free from the control of the king.

Chapter VII

BUTCLOSE

HANS HOLBEIN returned to England in 1532; his remarkable talent as a portrait painter soon gained him the patronage of merchants and nobles, and of the king himself. But Holbein did not forget those who had given him his earlier commissions. It was probably about 1536 that he painted the companion miniatures of Margaret and William Roper—lovely examples of that delicate art. Less than ten years had passed since Holbein had painted the twenty-two-year-old Margaret. The miniature shows the features of one who had suffered much and had aged beyond her years.

It might have been thought that with the execution of Sir Thomas More and the confiscation of his property the king and Council would have been satisfied. The martyr's family soon found that they were being watched. A month after the execution Thomas Cromwell jotted down among things-to-be-done, "To send for William Roper", and "To send to Lady More." It is not necessary to see any sinister meaning in these colourless notes.

Stapleton recorded that

> Margaret Roper was brought before the King's Council and charged with keeping her father's head as a sacred relic, and retaining possession of his books and writings. She answered that she had saved her father's head from being devoured by the fishes with the intention of burying it, and that she had hardly any books and papers but what had already been published, except a very few personal letters, which she humbly begged to be allowed to keep for her consolation. By the good offices of friends she was released.

Unfortunately there are no records of the proceedings of the King's (Privy) Council for the period between 1461 and 1540,

so it is not possible to give further details of her interrogation.

On 16 March 1537 Lady Alice More was granted an annuity of £20 to date from the previous Michaelmas, and in 1542 she was allowed the lease of a house in Chelsea at a rent of twenty-one shillings a year; she was also permitted some of her husband's lands in Battersea which had been leased to him in 1529 by the Abbot of Westminster. This fact is revealed in a lawsuit in 1561 brought against William Roper over these lands; he had obtained the lease of these lands in 1541 and Lady Alice had been very annoyed at his doing so. A servant of hers testified that she had heard "Lady Alice many times talk thereof and was very angry whensoever she chanced to speak of the same until such time as she and . . . Mr. Roper were agreed again." She went to law, and Sir Giles Alington acted as arbitrator; an agreement was reached by which William Roper paid her compensation. The Barge, which was leased in the names of Sir Thomas and Lady Alice More and was occupied by the Clements, was confiscated in 1542 but the Clements remained tenants.

Meanwhile the other Lady Alice More, the widow of Sir John, seems to have been able to remain at Gobions as it was her jointure. The property would have come to Sir Thomas after her death, which occurred before 1546[1]; it then fell to the Crown and was leased to William Honynge for twenty-one years; in 1551 the reversion of Gobions was granted to the Princess Elizabeth for life.

William and Margaret Roper settled down at Butclose; they no doubt had to adapt the New Building as a residence, but, although it was a small property, they preferred Chelsea to the Roper house at Eltham; this was due, it is reasonable to assume, to the precious associations it had for Margaret. The great house and grounds had passed into the hands of William Paulet, afterwards Marquis of Winchester; Butclose was at least a corner of the Chelsea home.

John More lost the lands his father had intended for him. He had been reminded in his father's last letter that "he hath great

[1] She was buried at Northaw (Herts.).

cause" to be grateful to his wife Anne Cresacre; she had inherited her father's property at Barnbrough in the West Riding of Yorkshire, where she and her husband, as his grandson Cresacre wrote, "enjoyed a competent living to keep him out of a needy life". They seemed to have remained at Chelsea for several years; it is not known where they lived; perhaps they joined the Ropers. There were eight children—seven sons and one daughter. Thomas and Augustine, the first two of the sons, were born before their grandfather's death, and are mentioned at the end of his last letter. He and Margaret Roper were godparents to Thomas.

The king and Cromwell had believed that the executions of John Fisher and Thomas More would frighten others from opposing the king's will; certainly no other leaders in the Church or the state followed their example. The Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536 was not primarily a protest against the Supremacy but that was one of an accumulation of grievances, not all of which were religious; stress was put on the dissolution of the smaller monasteries and the threat to the greater. In putting down the Rising, the Duke of Norfolk took the opportunity to hang John Rochester and James Walworth, two of the London Carthusians who had been sent to the Charterhouse at Hull; there is no evidence that they had any part whatever in the Rising. They suffered on 11 May 1537. As if to complete the destruction of the London Carthusians, a few days later four of the monks with six laybrothers were sent to Newgate prison. They were never tried, but were starved to death. They were kept so fast chained that they could not feed themselves nor attend to their own needs. Margaret Clement heard of their distress and, by bribing the gaoler, went to their help in the guise of a milkmaid. The pail on her head contained not milk but food; she fed the prisoners with her own hands and she tended them as best she could. As the Carthusians did not die off as quickly as was expected, inquiries were made and her charitable work was ended. She made one more attempt, this time trying to get at them from the roof, but it proved hopeless. Seven of the prisoners died one by one during June, another in August, and the ninth in September; some kind of nourishment must have been given the tenth, the laybrother William

Horne, for he survived until 1540 when he was hanged at Tyburn. He was the only one of the ten to be brought to trial.

It was to be expected that after this practical expression of her sympathies, the authorities kept an eye on Margaret Clement, and, inevitably, on Margaret Roper as well for the two were known to be as sisters. Evidence of this suspicion is provided in the Council's interrogation of Sir Geoffrey Pole in October 1538. He was the youngest son of Margaret, Countess of Salisbury, and the younger brother of Reginald Pole. The eldest son, Henry, Lord Montague, and Sir Geoffrey were sent to the Tower in August 1538. The real cause of this was the king's anger at the appointment of his bitter critic, Reginald Pole, as Cardinal Legate to England; there was also the consideration that the Poles represented the Yorkist claim to the throne; Prince Edward had been born in 1537. Sir Geoffrey yielded under the seven interrogations to which he was submitted, and he provided sufficient "evidence" to bring his eldest brother, and ultimately his mother, to the block. His unhappy story is relevant here on account of the questions that were put to him.

A long list was prepared, but it is not certain that they were asked, nor, if they were, how he answered. Five of the questions referred to the two Margarets.

> Item, how often within these 12 months or 2 years you have been in company with Mistress Roper or Mistress Clement, and at what places you have met with them?
>
> Of what matters you have most often communed when they have wished for this change?

The "change" presumably means changing the dynasty.

> What communication you have had with either of them touching the death of Sir Thomas More and others, and the causes of the same?
>
> Who hath been present at any of your conferences?
>
> Have you heard of any letters, writings, or books sent to them or their friends touching this matter?

The answer to another question has been recorded. "And further he sayeth that within a twelvemonths he hath heard Mistress Roper and Mistress Clement say that they liked not this plucking down of abbeys, images and pilgrimages, and prayed God to send a change."

There is no record of any action having been taken against the two Margarets as a result of Sir Geoffrey Pole's statements, nor is there any other evidence that they knew him.

The education of her children would be an important concern for Margaret Roper; she would have recollections of her own childhood as a guide. There were two boys and three girls. It has already been noted that the eldest surviving son was born in 1534; his younger brother was named Anthony. It has already been suggested that the three daughters were older than the sons. Harpsfield gives us one glimpse of her with her children.

> To her children she was a double mother as one not content to bring them forth only into the world, but instructing them also herself in virtue and learning. At what time her husband was upon a certain displeasure taken against him in King Henry's days sent to the Tower, certain sent from the king to search her house, upon a sudden running upon her, found her, not puling and lamenting but full busily teaching her children, whom they, finding nothing astonished at their message, and finding also beside this her constancy, such gravity and wisdom in her talk as they little looked for, were themselves much astonished, and were in great admiration, neither could afterwards speak too much good of her, as partly myself have heard at the mouth of one of them.

At a later date, Margaret Roper tried to persuade Roger Ascham to become a tutor to her children. We learn this from a letter dated 15 January 1554 from him to Mistress Clarke, who was Mary Roper; her first husband was Stephen Clarke of whom nothing else is known. Ascham wrote:

> Yes, I am he whom, some years ago, your mother, Margaret Roper, a woman most worthy of such a father, tried to lure

from Cambridge to the house of Lady Alington. She asked me to teach Greek and Latin to you and the other children. At that time I could not bear to be separated under any conditions from the University. It is a real pleasure to me to recall your mother's desire.

It is impossible to date this invitation. The reference to Lady Alington adds interest to the letter. The Alingtons at this time may have been at their manor at Horseheath, Cambridge, and not at Halesworth in Suffolk, and the letter implies that Margaret Roper had gone to stay there for a while with her children.

This incident serves as another warning against too great a simplification of the problems people had to face at that time. We tend to see a straightforward conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism. Those who lived through the religious turmoil of that period must have been often more bewildered than enlightened. Roger Ascham was a supporter of the reformers nor did he conceal his sympathies; indeed, his strong opposition to papal claims nearly lost him his fellowship at St. John's to which he was admitted in 1534. Yet, Margaret Roper could consider him as tutor to her children. The confusion (as we should regard it) in men's minds is further illustrated by the fact that Ascham got his fellowship owing to the "goodness and fatherly discretion" of Dr. Nicholas Metcalfe, the Master of St. John's, who had been Archdeacon to Bishop John Fisher at Rochester and one of his closest disciples; he resigned the mastership in 1537 rather than take the oath to the Supremacy. Yet he supported Ascham's claims to a fellowship.

Margaret Roper "full busily teaching her children" would make an agreeable scene with which to close the drama of her life, but her last few years were to bring acute distress as first one and then another of her family came under the menace of the law. The full story of those matters cannot be told; the biographer like the historian is dependent on the fortuitous survival of documents; these are more likely to record the end of a story than to tell us the course of events. All that we can do is to tell as much as is known; the rest is a matter of speculation.

The first member of the More family to suffer was Giles Heron, the husband of Cecily, Margaret Roper's youngest sister. The exact nature of his offence is not known; there is a vague reference to plotting with Sir Thomas More in 1534, but as he was the last man to encourage any form of intrigue, there could not have been any substance in such a charge. It was added that Heron had turned a man named Lyons out of his farm; but this was not evidence of treason. It was not until five years later that proceedings were taken against Giles Heron whose fate seems to have been of particular interest to Thomas Cromwell. His "Remembrances" contain several references in 1539 and 1540, such as, "Touching Giles Heron and what is to be done with him for as much as there is but one witness", and, "Giles Heron's offence." He was committed to the Tower on 6 July 1539 for treason. The man Lyons nourished his grudge against Giles Heron and he appears again in 1539 and 1540 as an active adversary, and managed to get Giles's four brothers put into prison; they were later released, but the records give no hint of anything that could be described as treason. Heron was not brought to trial but attainted of high treason in Parliament on 12 April 1540. This seems a curious procedure to adopt against a man who was not a holder of any office in the state, nor indeed one of any prominence or influence. Perhaps it had not been possible to find the second witness necessary for a trial in court. The details of the attainder do not throw any light on the offence; such official phrases as "sundry detestable and abominable treasons" tell us nothing. A further unusual feature of the case was that Giles Heron was kept in the Tower for four months after his attainder before execution. The fall of Thomas Cromwell during this period did not bring a reprieve.

Giles Heron was hanged, drawn and quartered at Tyburn on 4 August 1540. Six others suffered at the same time, among them William Horne, the last of the Carthusians who had been succoured by Margaret Clement in 1537. Two of the others were a priest, Edmund Brindholme, and a layman, Clement Philpot, both of Calais, who were alleged to have plotted to betray the town on behalf of Cardinal Pole; their two names are among

those of 116 martyrs whose cause is still in progress. William Horne has been beatified. There has never been any suggestion that Giles Heron's claims to martyrdom should be considered; the evidence brought against him no longer exists, so we remain in ignorance of the grounds of his condemnation and execution. Nor do we know anything further of Cecily Heron. The lands at Wanstead and Walthamstow that had been confiscated on her husband's attainder were restored to their eldest son Thomas in 1554; he had a brother Edmund and a sister Joan.

No other members of the More family appear to have been implicated with Giles Heron, but within a few years the net was closing round them. This was in connection with what is usually called the Plot of the Prebendaries of Canterbury Cathedral against Cranmer, but its ramifications spread far wider than the name suggests. The first rumblings of the affair were heard in 1541. It was partly, as far as the Prebendaries were concerned, a protest against Cranmer's attitude towards them; when the Cathedral Chapter was reconstituted he would have preferred the money needed to support the Prebendaries (he thought them a lot of idle fellows) to be used more effectively in promoting true religion. He tried to even things up by getting a few appointed who were of his mind. The larger charge was that Cranmer was encouraging the spread of heresy in Kent and in this the Prebendaries had the support of some of the County Magistrates. If the reader were to study the ninety pages devoted to this affair in *Letters and Papers* (Henry VIII. 18. i.) he would not fail to sense the state of incertitude into which so many had fallen; instructions and admonitions issued by Cromwell or Cranmer were often half-understood or misunderstood, and as they filtered down to the commonalty, so they became cruder or even incomprehensible. The reader would also realize the strong undercurrent of opposition to what one preacher called "newfangells". When the complaints reached the Council it was thought sufficiently serious a matter for the king's consideration; he, with grim partiality, told Cranmer himself to carry out an investigation with the aid of any colleagues he liked to name.

Among the lists of questions to be put to the witnesses was one

asking, "what communication by word or writing you had with . . .", then followed a list of names including those of William Roper, John Heywood, John More, German Gardiner and John Bekynsaw. A later list added the name of John Clement. Unfortunately none of the evidence recorded includes the replies to this question, so we do not know why these persons were particularized.

A passage from Harpsfield was quoted earlier in this chapter in which reference was made to William Roper's imprisonment in the Tower. The record reads:

> 29 February 1543 brought into the King by Sir Richard Southwell, one of the General Surveyors, for the fine of William Roper, being in the Tower, £100.

In a later passage Harpsfield gave the reason for the imprisonment; "for relieving by his alms a notable learned man, Master Beckenshawe". John Beckenshawe (Bekynsaw, Bekinsale) was an Oxford scholar who had gone to Paris about 1531 to teach Greek at the Sorbonne; he returned to England in 1538 and it must have been about that time that Roper aided him. He was accused of plotting with Cardinal Pole in 1537 in Paris. Beckenshawe submitted and was pardoned and in 1546 wrote a book vehemently defending the king's Supremacy; for this he received a pension of £25. It is said that he returned to the Church before his death.

The scraps of information available do not give any hint of the nature of the connection between members of the More circle and the opponents of Cranmer. William Roper's territorial and official links with Kent, especially with St. Dunstan's, Canterbury, would explain any association he may have had with this "Plot", but his name comes only in the question quoted above; after that it drops out, as does that of John Clement.

For want of more information, all we can do here is to set out in order the official records.

The first is the finding of the jury at a trial at Westminster on 15 February 1544.

> The jury say upon their oath that John Heywood, late of London, gentleman, John Ireland, late of Eltham in the county

of Kent, clerk, John Larke, late of Chelsea in the county of Middlesex, clerk, and German Gardiner, late of Southwark in the county of Surrey, gentleman, ...

Then follows the usual charge of having "maliciously and traitorously" attempted to deprive the king of his title of "Supreme Head of the English and Irish Church." The addition of "Irish" was in consequence of Henry's assumption of the title of King of Ireland in 1540. A verdict of guilty was given and the prisoners were condemned to the death of a traitor. Something further will be said of them presently. We can now turn to the case of William Daunce, Margaret Roper's brother-in-law. All we know is the following record:

William Daunce of Cashiobury, Herts, *alias* late of Canons, Middlesex, *alias* of London. Pardon of all treasonable words against the king's Supremacy, concealments of treason, and treasonable conversations with John More or others concerning the king, the kingdom, and certain prophecies; with restoration of goods. Greenwich, 24 April, 36 Hen. VIII. [1544].

The only clue we have to the significance of "certain prophecies" is that John Heron, brother of Giles, had been under suspicion in 1540 for "his practice of astronomy and necromancie"; he was brought before the Council and after his acknowledging "his folly in using of fantastical practices in astronomy, was set at liberty and was bound in a recognisance of one hundred marks."

John More of Chelsea, Middlesex, *alias* of Barnbrough, Yorks, *alias* of London. Pardon of all treasonable words with the detestable traitors, John Eldrington, German Gardiner, John Bekynsale, John Heywood, William Daunce, John Larke, clerk, John Ireland, clerk, Roger Ireland, clerk, and any others, in wishing ill to the king and arguing against the king's supremacy, and all concealments of treasons of which he has been accused; with restoration of goods. Greenwich, 24 April, 36 Hen. VIII. [1544].[1]

[1] L.P. i. No. 444 (5).

It has already been noted that Bekynsaw submitted; this was in May 1544. John Heywood, the husband of Joan Rastell, Margaret Roper's niece, did not submit until the very day set for the execution, 7 March; it is said that it was not until he was actually on the hurdle that he gave way; he received his pardon on 26 June, and on 6 July, at St. Paul's Cross, clad in a white gown, he made his public recantation.

German Gardiner was a relative of Bishop Stephen Gardiner and served him in some secretarial position. The Bishop had in fact encouraged the movement against Cranmer. German Gardiner must have been known in the More circle for a tract of his, an attack on the heresies of John Frith, was published in 1534 by William Rastell.[1] In his last speech at Tyburn he declared that he had been fortified by the examples of the Carthusians and of Bishop John Fisher and Sir Thomas More.

John Larke, who also suffered, had been parish priest at Chelsea from 1530. He declared that he was following in the steps of his former parishioner. It is not difficult to imagine the distress that Margaret Roper must have undergone at the execution of a priest so closely associated with her father and herself.

John Ireland, the third of these martyrs, had been a chaplain about 1535 to a chantry at St. Dunstan's, Canterbury, founded by William Roper's great-grandfather for Masses to be said at the altar of St. Nicholas for the souls of the Roper family. As Ireland was officially described as "of Eltham", he may have later become a chaplain at Well Hall.[2]

Margaret Roper could not have passed unscathed through the long drawn-out months of these tragic events. Her husband does not seem to have been in any serious danger, but her brother escaped Tyburn only by submitting himself to authority; her niece's husband came within sight of the gallows before he too submitted; a brother-in-law, her parish priest and a family chaplain were hanged, drawn and quartered.

[1] Germen Gardynare, *A Letter of a yonge gentylman* (S.T.C. 11594).

[2] John Ireland has wrongly been described as chaplain to Sir Thomas More; this was probably a confused version of the fact that he was a chaplain to the Ropers at Eltham. See Rev. L. E. Whatmore, "Blessed John Ireland", *Southwark Record*, Aug. 1945.

Her last years were full of sorrow in contrast to those earlier years in Bucklersbury and Chelsea when her father's favourite word "merry" so truly described that warm family life.

Margaret Roper died at Christmas 1544. She was in her fortieth year. She was buried in the vault at Chelsea Old Church where, twelve years earlier, her mother's body had been reinterred when her father set up the monument with his epitaph.

What kind of portrait of Margaret Roper emerges from these pages? The materials are lacking for a finished painting, but some characteristics are clearly defined.

Her portraits do not suggest the "lively beauty" of which Richard Hyrde spoke; the coif and the gable head-dress of the period concealed the hair and gave a baldish effect that must have ruined a face that was really attractive. Of one thing there can be no doubt; the broad, high forehead is that of a woman of marked intelligence. There is one serious defect in nearly all Holbein's portraits; you can turn the pages of an album of his paintings without finding one person with a cheerful expression. It is true the times were grim, but not as grim as that! Even the rightly praised portrait of Sir Thomas More fails to hint at a sense of humour—the expression is sombre. We cannot therefore deduce too much from the grave face in Holbein's portraits of Margaret Roper.

In an anonymous account of More's execution, she is described in these words: "a woman of exceptional grace of figure combined with great dignity of bearing, resembling her father in discernment, manners and learning." The writer was evidently giving an impression of someone he knew personally. As Margaret certainly did not resemble her father in features, it may be assumed that she took after her mother.

There are very few references to her personal characteristics. "You could never," wrote her father, "endure to be decked out in another's finery." This suggests a certain delicacy and independence of feeling. Harpsfield, as we have noted, spoke of her calmness of demeanour when the house was searched during her husband's imprisonment; that was the report of one of those present at the time. To this can be added the determination and

perseverance she showed in persuading Thomas Cromwell to allow her to visit her father in the Tower.

Much has been said in these pages of her learning, but a note on her command of English may be added. The main evidence for this is the long letter to Alice Alington giving an account of the discussion with her father in the Tower. While it is true that the substance of this was largely supplied by her father, the actual composition under the circumstances must have been Margaret's own work. It should not be measured with later developments in English prose, but with contemporary writing. A re-reading of the last few pages of that letter illustrates her ability, not unlike her father's, to tell a story and to write convincing dialogue.

The abiding impression, however, of this record is of the strong affection that united father and daughter. Of this their letters are convincing evidence. The conclusion of one may be recalled; ". . . my children and family, among whom none is more dear to me than yourself, my beloved daughter." And it will be remembered that when she was desperately ill, her father declared, "if it had pleased God at that time to have taken [her] to his mercy, he would never have meddled with worldly matters after."

Stronger even than the human affection was the bond of a deep religious faith. William Roper recalled that each of her meetings with her father in the Tower began with the recitation of the Penitential Psalms and the Litanies, and, here again, their letters are witnesses of the primacy each gave to the faith.

Yet, in spite of this perfect concord of mind and spirit, Margaret retained her independence of judgment. It was not in her father's nature to dominate or dictate, but it would not have been surprising had his daughter followed him with complete submissiveness. The most notable example of this liberty of decision is shown in her disagreement on the question of the oath. "She used great vehemence and obsecration" was the statement made by More in his last interrogation. Only in his second letter did he show any distress at Margaret's attempt to get him to reconsider his position. After that, he carefully avoided the main issue, and banteringly called her "Mother Eve." The difference of

opinion was real, but it meant no loss of affection; indeed the love each bore the other may even have been strengthened in the argument for there was complete faith between them.

So we come to that last letter.

"I cumber you good Margaret much . . . I never liked your manner toward me better than when you kissed me last."

Chapter VIII

WILLIAM ROPER

William Roper was nearly fifty years of age when Margaret died. He did not marry again, though that would have been according to the custom of the period, especially as his eldest son, Thomas, was only eleven years old. The fact that he did not remarry was sufficiently unusual for it to be recorded in his epitaph. There is no information about him during the two remaining years of the king's life, but after Henry's death at the end of January 1547, and with the accession of his ten-year-old son Edward, Roper seems to have reorganized his affairs. In April, he and William Rastell leased the tenancy of Crosby Place from Sir Thomas More's old friend Antonio Bonvisi. Two months later, Bonvisi conveyed the property in trust to Richard Heywood and John Webb, both of whom had been present at More's trial; it was to them that Roper owed his knowledge of it. Richard Heywood, brother of John Heywood, was Roper's partner in the office of Prothonotary; it may be presumed that John Webb was also a lawyer.

Crosby Place was not just the hall (now re-erected on Sir Thomas More's estate) but included dwelling houses and other buildings. William Roper seems to have made it his town house or office as there is no later reference connecting him with Chelsea. Well Hall, Eltham, which was only five miles from London Bridge, was the family home, and the children would probably live there. We know little of their education after their mother's death; Thomas matriculated at Louvain on 20 July 1547, but nothing further is known of his studies there; he entered Lincoln's Inn about 1552. Mary, to whom Ascham wrote the letter of 1554 quoted in the last chapter, had further instruction in Greek from John Morwen of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. During Edward's reign she made a translation of the *Ecclesiastical*

History of Eusebius, the first book into Latin and the first five into English.[1] She also translated into English her grandfather's *Treatise on the Passion* which he had written (partly in Latin) in the Tower but had been unable to finish. This was included in the 1557 edition of More's English Works. Mary Roper had evidently inherited her mother's devotion to learning.

William Rastell had given up printing after his uncle's execution and had entered Lincoln's Inn; he was called to the Bar in 1539 and soon made his mark as a lawyer. In 1544 he married Winifred Clement, the eldest daughter of John and Margaret Clement; in the same year, John Clement became President of the College of Physicians.

William Roper probably severed his connection with Chelsea when in September 1547 he granted the reversion of Butclose to Sir William Paulet, now Lord St. John and Lord Chancellor, who already held the main part of the More estate. The record reads: "reversion of a messuage and pightal or close of land called Butclose in Chelsea, with the houses, barn and garden which William Roper esquire now holds for life, rent free, by the gift of Thomas More attainted." Both Paulet and Roper were long-lived. Paulet (as Marquis of Winchester) was nearly ninety when he died[2]; his Chelsea property went to his daughter Anne who married Gregory Fiennes, Lord Dacre of the South. He died before her and there were no children. On her death in 1595 she left the former More estate to Lord Burghley.

John More died in 1547; the last official reference to him describes him as "of Chelsea"; it is not known whether he ever went to Barnbrough. Nor do we know the date of Lady Alice More's death; in 1550 she would have been about eighty years of age.[3]

Henry VIII's wishes for the government during his son's

[1] The copy she presented to Queen Mary is in the British Museum.

[2] He held office under Henry, Edward, Mary and Elizabeth. When he was asked in his old age how he had managed to survive all the changes in religion, he answered, "I was born of the willow, not the oak."

[3] It is not improbable that they were both buried in the More vault at Chelsea. The epitaph on the monument implies that More expected that his second wife would be buried there.

minority were set aside, and state affairs came under the control of the boy's uncle, Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford (Duke of Somerset) who was Protestant in his outlook; Church affairs were directed by Thomas Cranmer. The issue of new Injunctions in July 1547 clearly indicated the direction in which religious policy was to move; among the provisions, it was ordered that regular sermons against "the Bishop of Rome's usurped power" must be preached, and that images and other signs of "superstition" were to be removed.

Catholics were not as yet directly penalized, but as worship according to age-long custom became more and more difficult, they could not but be apprehensive of the future. The removal and burning of the rood from many a church was a symbol of what was to come. A new "Order of Communion" was issued in March 1548 and in January of the following year an Act of Uniformity imposed the use of the new Book of Common Prayer.

The members of the More circle must have discussed these happenings time and time again. It was becoming increasingly difficult to practise their religion, and it was to become impossible to do so openly. A question was already being posed that became more difficult to answer as the years passed: how were their children to be brought up in the Catholic faith? This may explain why Roper sent his eldest son to Louvain. The solution for some was to leave England and begin life anew in a Catholic country. This was a desperate measure; it meant not only parting from relatives and friends and breaking home associations, but it was a penal offence to leave the country without licence. In spite of these grave hardships, several of the More circle decided to go to the Spanish Netherlands. They made what arrangements they could to safeguard their possessions by conveyances to trustees, as Bonvisi had done with Crosby Place, and by other means devised by the skilled lawyers in the group, but these provisions were to prove unavailing.

John Clement was the first to leave; this was in July 1549; he was followed two months later by Bonvisi. Margaret Clement with the children joined her husband in October. William Rastell

and his wife crossed in December. They settled at Louvain where they were joined by other refugees including Nicholas Harpsfield, the future biographer of Sir Thomas More. As soon as the news of this flight was known, the city sheriffs confiscated Crosby Place and The Barge as forfeited to the king.

William Roper did not leave the country; he seems to have avoided drawing attention to himself; this was not difficult during the six years of Edward's reign as the rivalries within the Council made a thorough-going application of any policy impracticable. It was a more lawless period than England, especially London, had known for two generations. We may ask why Roper did not follow the example of the Clements and Rastells, but this question cannot be answered because the scraps of knowledge we have of him at this period do not provide the material on which to base any judgment. The flight of the Clements and Rastells was exceptional during the reign of Edward VI; there was a greater expatriation during the reign of Elizabeth.

With the accession of Mary Tudor in July 1553, it was possible for the exiles to return, but is was a sad homecoming for William Rastell. His wife Winifred died at Louvain on 17 July 1553 and was buried in St. Peter's. Her epitaph described her as "not learned in the Latin tongue, sufficiently versed in Greek, but not inferior to anyone in character and holiness of life." She was only twenty-six years of age, and there were no children. William Rastell made gifts in her memory to the chapel of Lincoln's Inn, and arranged for Masses to be said in perpetuity for the "souls of Winifred Rastell and of all her parents, kinsfolk and friends."[1]

The returned exiles eventually got back their property. John Clement was anxious about the fate of his valuable library[2] as well as other possessions such as "a table [painted panel] of Sir Thomas More's face" valued at forty shillings. He took up again his work as a doctor and served in various capacities in the College of Physicians. The Patent Rolls record under the date 8 May 1554

[1] Abolished 16 August 1581, as a "stupid abomination and superstition".

[2] For an account of his library, see A. W. Reed's article, "John Clement and his books", *The Library*, March, 1926.

a "grant during pleasure to Thomas Clement M.A., son of John Clement, M.D., of an annuity of £20."[1]

William Rastell became a sergeant-at-law in 1555, and a judge of the Queen's Bench in 1558. He and William Roper were made freemen of Canterbury in 1555, and represented it in the Parliaments of 1555 and 1558. Roper had been appointed sheriff of Kent in 1553, and had represented Rochester in the Parliament of 1554.

After the death of Stephen Clarke, her first husband, Mary Roper married James Basset, youngest son of Sir John Basset of Umberleigh, Devon. He had for twelve years been in the service of Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester. He went into exile during the reign of Edward VI; we do not know whether he joined the group at Louvain, but he may have done so, for this would have brought him on his return to the knowledge of William Roper and his daughter Mary. Basset became a gentleman of the chamber to Queen Mary and his wife one of her ladies in waiting. He died a few months before the queen.

The new reign meant that it was again safe to speak openly of Sir Thomas More. William Rastell had long planned to publish his uncle's works, and with this in mind he had gathered together all the manuscripts and letters that could be found; he must have got many of them from his cousin Margaret Roper. It is probable that when he went into exile he took these precious papers with him. On his return he arranged for Richard Tottel to print More's *Dialogue of Comfort in Tribulation* and this was published in November 1553; it was Tottel's first book. The preparation of the English Works took several years as Rastell had his legal duties to carry out. He himself had been a skilled printer during his uncle's lifetime, and he had a high standard of workmanship; he could therefore supervise production with an expert's eye. The result is a fine folio of nearly fifteen hundred pages. The title page states that the book was "printed at London at the costs and charges of John Cawood, John Waly and Richard Tottell." Waly was a lead-

[1] There is no record of Thomas Clement having been at Oxford and Cambridge; nor do we know the reason for the annuity; he may have had some position at Court.

ing bookseller; John Cawood was the Queen's printer but he was responsible for only a small part of the book, most of which was printed by Richard Tottel. In spite of the statement of the title page, the printers did not bear the whole of the considerable cost. It is known that Mary Basset contributed, and probably her father did so.

The dedication was to Queen Mary and in it Rastell explained his purpose. Not all of Sir Thomas More's works had been printed and those that had appeared during his lifetime were in several volumes which would in time "perish and utterly vanish", so

> I did diligently collect and gather together as many of those his works, books, letters, and other writings, printed and unprinted in the English tongue as I could come by, and the same (certain years in the evil world past, keeping in my hands, very surely and safely) now lately caused to be imprinted in this one volume, to the intent, not only that every man that will now in our days, may have and take commodity by them, but also that they may be preserved for the profit likewise of our posterity.

The words within the brackets are significant. The work, he noted, was finished on the last day of April 1557.

The little band of exiles must have discussed the plans for publishing the works of Sir Thomas More. They could not know when this would be possible; should the boy-king of England live the normal span, it might be many years before such hopes could be fulfilled; perhaps the book might have to be printed at Louvain as was the folio edition of the Latin Works published in Elizabeth's reign. No doubt they would also discuss the need for an account of Sir Thomas More's life and the reasons for his martyrdom. William Rastell may have begun writing his own book which covered the lives of both Bishop John Fisher and Sir Thomas More; it is a great loss that only some pages of the part referring to the Bishop have been preserved. It would be important to get the testimony of William Roper who had lived for so many years in More's company; it was he who later selected Nicholas Harpsfield for writing the book on More, and it was

perhaps at Harpsfield's suggestion that William Roper "set forth such matters touching his life as I could at this present call to remembrance." He apologized because "very many notable things (not meet to have been forgotten) through negligence and long continuance of time are slipped out of my mind." He did not write a biography in our present sense of the term, but he recorded a series of recollections and vivid memories, so vivid that some of the scenes are as sharp as a dramatic performance before our eyes. Harpsfield in his turn wove these memories into his biography—the first of its kind in our language. Roper's book is unique; had he been a practised writer he might have produced a longer book, but instead he has given us in his own artless fashion an imperishable portrait of one of the greatest of Englishmen. He has done something else that may be overlooked. There is another portrait in his book—that of his wife. There is no set account of her; she comes to his memory time and time again as he recalls what she told him. Slight as are the personal references, he conveys a sense of his deep love for her. His account, for instance, of her last meeting with her father is animated by something more than pathos of the occasion; it reveals a sensitiveness to the emotions that agitated father and daughter that could only have come from shared affection. It is difficult to believe that he himself was not present, as indeed he may well have been; the scene made such an impression on him that twenty years later every detail remained clear in his memory.[1] It is instructive to compare Roper's account of this last meeting with that by Harpsfield, who, while following Roper's wording to a great degree, could change the key by such an introduction as, "This good, loving and tender daughter, the jewel of the English matrons of our time..."

Roper makes several references to "a great book" of More's works; this suggests that when he was writing, Rastell's book was nearly finished.[2] Queen Mary died the year after that folio was published, but neither Roper's book nor Harpsfield's was in print

[1] It may be noted that Roper never intrudes himself; he brings himself into the picture only when he has a definite place.

[2] Roper's own copy is in the library of St John's College, Oxford.

before her death. It is probable that Harpsfield's manuscript was not then finished and, as will be noted later, there are indications that he finished it, or revised it, during the twelve years he spent with his brother in the Fleet prison during Elizabeth's reign. Both books were circulated in manuscript form; Roper's was first printed, in a poor text, in 1626, but Harpsfield's had to wait until 1932 before it was published in full.

Queen Mary and Cardinal Pole died on 17 November 1558. Catholics could not but regard the accession of Elizabeth with foreboding. At first there was no active attack on Catholicism. William Cecil's attitude seems to have been that, with the dying out of the priests and the enforcement of uniformity of worship in the parish churches, Catholicism itself would die out. Two Acts passed early in 1559 defined the position; the first was the Act of Supremacy which gave the queen the title of "supreme governor . . . as well in all spiritual or ecclesiastical things or causes, as temporal," and imposed an oath "upon the evangelist" on all who held office in the realm. By this "all foreign jurisdictions, powers, superiorities, and authorities" were renounced—a clause obviously aimed at Papal authority. William Roper, as Prothonotary, must have taken this oath. The Act of Uniformity imposed the use of the Book of Common Prayer; "any manner of parson, vicar, or other whatsoever minister" who used prayers or administered sacraments contrary to those laid down was liable to imprisonment; there were provisions against those who spoke against the new order; finally, all had to attend their parish churches or be fined twelve pence for each absence. Catholics were in a difficult position; there was no one to give them authoritative advice; most of the priests had accepted the changes; all their bishops, save one, were in prison or under constraint; the normal organization of the Church had vanished overnight. Some Catholics took the oath; many attended their parish churches; some priests, having conducted the Prayer Book service in the parish church, then said Mass privately for the faithful Catholics. For a decade the situation was chaotic.

We get a glimpse of William Roper at the beginning of the reign in connection with Abbot Feckenham (John Homan) of

Westminster. The monastery was restored in 1556 to a brief life of three years. We learn that Thomas Brampston, a novice, left the monastery at its second dissolution for the house of "Mr. Roper at Eltham." Later this young man was given a place at St. John's College, Oxford,[1] by its founder Sir Thomas White who numbered among his close friends both Abbot Feckenham and William Roper. From another source it is known that, during Edward VI's reign, Roper contributed twenty shillings to a loan fund established by Feckenham at Solihull, Warwickshire, where he had been vicar. Sir Thomas White, a staunch Catholic, had been Lord Mayor of London in 1553–4 and had been largely responsible for holding the city steady during Wyatt's rebellion. He poured out his wealth in many charitable trusts, in scholarships at schools and in founding his College. White appointed Sir William Cordell, Master of the Rolls, and William Roper visitors for life of St. John's College. Roper would no doubt be present at the burial of his friend in the chapel of St. John's in January 1567. The eulogy was delivered by Edmund Campion; two other members of the College were probably present—the chaplain, Cuthbert Mayne, and Gregory Martin; two future martyrs and the translator of the Rheims *New Testament.* The puritanical Bishop of Winchester tried to get both visitors removed during Elizabeth's reign, but without success.

Mention was made at the beginning of the last chapter of a lawsuit in 1561 brought against Roper concerning lands in Battersea that had belonged to Sir Thomas More. The dispute was with Henry Royden who claimed that a lease of the property had been granted to him during the reign of Edward VI. Roper replied by presenting a later lease made to him in the reign of Queen Mary, and it was on the strength of this that he had driven out Royden's cattle. As "my farm in Battersea" is mentioned in Roper's will, it seems that he retained possession. The long list in that will of estates in many parts of the country indicates the wealth he accumulated in addition to his inherited property. His earlier dispute

[1] Thomas Brampston became a Fellow of St John's; he went to Douay in 1584, and returned to England as a priest in 1586. *See* J. McCann and C. Cary-Elwes, *Ampleforth and its Origins* (1952), pp. 279 and 284.

with Lady Alice More over the same property in Battersea suggests that he was a stubborn defender of his rights even when it meant, as we should think, a misbecoming wrangle with the widow of his father-in-law. It was a litigious time, and it is not surprising that some lawyers became very wealthy; they reaped the rich harvest of the sale and resale of Church lands, in which few Catholics scrupled to share, but there were also incessant appeals to the law occasioned by attainders, confiscations and restorations; the Tudor period was an Elysium for lawyers, and William Roper seems to have enjoyed the opportunities the times put in his way.

In 1563[1] the penalties for refusing the oath laid down in the Act of Supremacy were made more severe, involving loss of property, and for a second offence, condemnation as a traitor. At the same time the net was spread wider and the oath was extended to members of Parliament, lawyers, university students taking a degree, and schoolmasters. William Rastell and the Clements left the country for the second time at the beginning of 1563[2]; they may have had warning of the legislation planned for the new Parliament, but without that they would have found the increasing obstructions to Catholic worship to be unbearable. The very word "Mass" was banned and altars had become tables. John Heywood and his wife, William Rastell's sister, followed a year later. They settled at first at Louvain. In 1565 John Harris and his wife (Dorothy Colley, Margaret Roper's former maid) and their children also went into exile. Harris was able to maintain his family as a teacher of Latin and Greek, and after the English College was founded at Douay, he settled there and served the College, going with it to Rheims. His arrival in the Netherlands was important; he brought with him many of Sir Thomas More's letters. When Thomas Stapleton, another exile, more than twenty years later came to write his life of More, he acknowledgedt hat"nothing has

[1] Lady Alice Alington died in 1563; she was buried in Horseheath Church, Cambridgeshire on 20 September. Sir Giles Alington died in 1586 in his eighty-sixth year. There is a monument to them in the church.

[2] William Rastell, John Clement and his son Thomas matriculated at Louvain in 1563. The reason for this is not known; it may have been to give a status in the University. See Vocht, *Acta Thomae Mori*, p. 109.

helped me more that Harris's manuscript collections, including many of More's letters written in the martyr's own hand, all of which Mr. Harris's widow had handed to me."[1]

It is tempting to say more of these English exiles, but the subject would take us too far afield to be dealt with here; a few notes must suffice. William Rastell died on 11 November 1579 and was buried at St. Peter's, Louvain, where his wife had been buried twenty-six years earlier. Margaret Clement died at Mechlin on 6 July 1570, and her husband two years later; they were buried in St. Rumbold's Church. Their daughter Margaret was to be prioress of St. Ursula's, Louvain, for nearly forty years. Thomas Clement seems to have settled at Louvain; a son, Caesar, became Dean of St. Gudula's, Brussels. John Harris died at Namur on 11 November 1579; his widow returned to Douay, and was alive in 1588. Their daughter, Ann, married John Fowler, a former Fellow of New College, Oxford, the notable printer of Antwerp and Louvain. John Heywood died at Louvain in 1580 when he was well over eighty years of age. His sons, Ellis and Jasper, were distinguished Jesuits.

The extension of the application of the oath of 1563 did not affect William Roper; it has already been pointed out that he must have taken the oath under the 1559 Act, and if he attended his parish church for the sake of outward conformity, he was doing what the majority of Catholics were doing; they still lacked authoritative guidance on how to act. Those like Roper, who were fortunate enough to have more than one place of residence, particularly if this included one in London, could avoid churchgoing more easily than those who lived under the eyes of their churchwardens.

William Roper remained an active member of Lincoln's Inn, and occupied various positions of responsibility in its conduct. Both his sons, Thomas and Anthony, became lawyers, and the records of Lincoln's Inn show that on 1 July 1565, William Roper

> obtained admission to his own Chamber for his sons, Thomas and Anthony, Fellows of this House, and afterwards for

[1] It is not known what happened to these manuscripts. One would have expected them to find a home at Douay.

William Dawtrey, his daughter's [Margaret's] son, who was thus junior, and not able to claim benefit thereof against the other two.[1]

Crosby Place and five tenements there were sold to Alderman William Bond in 1566; this ended the tenancy of William Roper and Richard Heywood; they returned to the Inn; on 19 August 1567 they were "admitted to the two east chambers beneath in the middle rooms of the new building." Richard Heywood died in 1570, and William Roper retained his chamber until 1574 when he was over seventy-five years of age.

It was not until 1568, as far as the records reveal, that he began to get into serious trouble for being a Catholic. He was called before the Privy Council on 8 July of that year.

> Submission of William Roper before the Lords of the Privy Council for having relieved with money certain persons who have departed out of the realm, and who, with others, have printed books against the Queen's supremacy and government.

There is much behind that statement. The reference to books written abroad by Catholics concerns what may be called the first phase of the Catholic response to Elizabethan religious policy. A group of learned exiles, most of them Oxford scholars, took up their pens and vindicated Catholic claims. Among them were William Allen, of Oriel College, and three who had passed from Winchester College to New College—John Rastell, S.J.,[2] Thomas Harding and Thomas Stapleton. Part of their attack was directed against Bishop Jewel's *Apologia Ecclesiae Anglicanae*, a very influential book which was translated into English by Francis Bacon's mother. William Allen wrote his *Defence and Declaration of the Catholic Church's Doctrine* (1564) and Stapleton's books included his translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (1565), which he

[1] An entry in the Black Books of Lincoln's Inn dated 11 Nov. 1575 states that Anthony Roper and William Dawtrey were warned that they "are spared from the expulsion of the Fellowship of this House until the end of Hilary term next, so that they in the mean time receive the Communion in Lincoln's Inn." As Elizabeth Dawtrey is not mentioned in her father's will (only Margaret's name is given) it may be presumed that she died before her father.

[2] Of Gloucester. No relation of William Rastell.

dedicated to Queen Elizabeth to remind her "in what faith your noble Realm was Christened." To get such books printed and then to arrange for smuggling them into England and distributed was an expensive business. It was for this purpose that financial help was sought from well-to-do Catholics. The government was soon alive to the threat of such publications for these books were not the work of hack pamphleteers but of men who were the equals or the superiors in learning of official apologists. Somehow it was discovered that William Roper had contributed to this publications fund, and it was for this reason that he was brought before the Council.

The year 1568 has another significance, for it was then that the second phase of the Catholic response opened. William Allen founded the English College and Seminary at Douay (Douai) in that year. It is highly probable that William Roper contributed to the support of the College. This could explain why it was that a month after his death a Solemn Requiem was sung at Douay for the repose of his soul; the brief entry in the College Diary stated that he would be "missed most greatly by all Catholics living here and in England," which surely implies that he was regarded by William Allen as one of their benefactors.

Harpsfield praised William Roper as "the singular helper and patron of all Catholics, to relieve and aid them in distress, especially such as either were imprisoned or otherwise troubled for the Catholic faith . . . But his great alms reacheth to all kinds of poor and needy persons."[1] Ro. Ba., the unidentified author of a later life of More (written about 1600), elaborated Harpsfield's tribute. "His ordinary alms, as yet to be seen in his book of accounts, amounted yearly to £1000; his extraordinaries were as much, and sometimes more, sometimes two, three, four thousand pound a year." These are fantastic figures; some manuscripts reduce the 'thousands' to 'hundreds' which would be reasonable, but would still represent a considerable sum in Tudor values.

[1] This statement and the acknowledgment in the dedication of the "great benefits and charges employed and heaped upon me" by William Roper, suggests that Harpsfield revised his manuscript during the twelve years he and his brother were in the Fleet prison. He may have supported them during these years. There was no earlier period when Harpsfield would have needed such 'charges'.

'His book of accounts' no longer exists, and it is not possible to do more than mention benefactions that have come to light. Anthony à Wood, writing in the seventeenth century, remarked on Roper's generous almsgiving. One example of his concern for prisoners was his gift of property to the Company of Parish Clerks on condition that they provided yearly grants to four City prisons for bread or coals for the prisoners.

In November 1569 the magistrates for the Eltham area reported to the Council that William Roper had entered into a bond "to be of good behaviour" relative to the Act of Uniformity. This meant that he had been reported for failing to attend his parish church. A London diocesan return of recusants for 1577 included a list of those members of Lincoln's Inn "who upon suspicion had of their religion were appointed to receive the Communion . . . but have not yet done the same." The list includes the name of William Roper, who, it was thought, had "a yearly revenue of £1000", and also "Thomas Roper, his eldest son one of the two Prothonotaries of the Queen's Bench; Anthony Roper, his brother, clerk of the papers in the same court," and "Philip Basset son and heir of Mrs. Basset,[1] late of the Privy Chamber."

The recusancy of the Ropers awaits investigation. One indication concerns the church of St. John's, Eltham. The advowson belonged to the Roper family, but in 1635 Sir William Roper (William Roper's grandson) was inhibited as a convicted recusant from presenting to the vacant living; his son, Anthony, was later also inhibited for the same reason. On both occasions the presentations were made by the Convocation of Oxford University.

Another instance of Roper's concern for Catholic prisoners occurred in the last year of his life. Thomas Sherwood, a Londoner, was arrested on suspicion of being a Catholic, and, as he refused to take the oath, he was sent to the Tower and there

[1] Mary (Roper) Basset died on 20 March 1572; her father was an executor of her will. She left "a ring that was my grandfather More's" to her eldest son Philip (For him, see Ro. Ba., pp. 301–2). Her younger son, Charles, was one of the young men who helped Persons and Campion on their English mission. He was in the Marshalsea for a time. He left England in 1581 and entered the English College, Rome, on 8 Oct. In 1584 he went to Rheims for reasons of health, and seems to have died there in 1585. Fr. Persons had a very high opinion of him. (See Index, C.R.S., vol. 39).

tortured, and put into one of the fouler dungeons. A contemporary account records that "when a Catholic gentleman, pitying his extreme sufferings, had, by means of another prisoner, conveyed to Mr. Sherwood's keeper some money for the use of the prisoner, the money was by the keeper returned the next day because the Lieutenant of the Tower would not suffer the prisoner to have the benefit of any such alms." Father Robert Persons identified "a Catholic gentleman" as "Mr. Roper, son-in-law to Sir Thomas More." Thomas Sherwood suffered at Tyburn on 7 February 1578.

William Roper made his will on 10 January 1577; his chief executors were Sir Christopher Wray, Lord Chief Justice, and Edmund Plowden—a prudent combination of a conformist and a steadfast Catholic. The will mentions estates in Kent, Middlesex, Oxfordshire, Staffordshire, London and Canterbury, but there is no reference to any property at Chelsea. He made generous provision for his clerks and servants, and he left £40 for the benefit of prisoners of the Queen's Bench. He left £5 to the parish church at Chelsea "if I be buried there." An earlier sentence reads, "And my body to be buried at Chelsea in the County of Middlesex in the vault with the body of my dearly beloved wife (whose soul our Lord pardon), where my father-in-law, Sir Thomas More (whose soul Jesus bless), did mind to be buried."[1] It is not known why his wishes were not respected.

William Roper died on 4 January 1578 and was buried in the family vault at St. Dunstan's, Canterbury.

[1] This sentence disposes of two conjectures which have been made from time to time, even recently: (*a*) that Margaret Roper was buried at St. Dunstan's, and (*b*) that Sir Thomas More's body was brought from the Tower and reburied at Chelsea. So William Roper 'had a mind to be buried' at Chelsea but was not.

APPENDIX I

NOTES ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

I. *The More Family Group.*

This sketch for the large painting was probably given to Erasmus by Holbein in 1528. It is now in the Kunstsammlung, Basle. Reading from left to right, the Latin notes give the following information.

"Elizabeth Daunce, daughter of Thomas More, in her 21st year."
"Margaret Giggs, wife of Clement, fellow pupil and relation of the daughters of Thomas More, in her 22nd year."
"John More, father, in his 76th year."
"Anne Cresacre, wife of John More, in her 15th year."
"Thomas More in his 50th year."
"John More, son of Thomas, in his 19th year." ....
"Henry Patenson, fool of Thomas More, in his 40th year."
"Cecily Heron, daughter of Thomas More, in her 20th year."
"Margaret Roper, daughter of Thomas More, in her 22nd year."
"Alice, wife of Thomas More, in her 57th year."

For a detailed study of this sketch, with reproductions of the preliminary studies and of two of the painted versions, see my *Saint Thomas More.*

II. *Margaret Roper.*

Not by Holbein; a copy of a lost original, or based on the large painted group; a wooden panel, 25½ in. × 19½ in.

III. *Title page of "Treatise on the Paternoster."*

The woodcut was one that had been used by Wynkyn de Worde.

IV. *Holograph letter from Margaret Roper to Erasmus.*

As noted in the text, this is the only known example of Margaret Roper's hand.

The portion shown reads, with abbreviations expanded, "Margareta Ropera Eruditiss. Theologo D. Erasmo Ro. S.P.D. Quam illud boni plerunque accidere soleat gratissimum quo subito quis atque insperato fruatur, id ego nuper, vir omnium eruditissime, verissimum experta sum; quum litteras tuas non minus eligantes quam amantes, certosque studiosi animi tui erga patrem omnemque eius familiam testes, Quirinus tuus mihi traderet. Quae quanto magis venerunt insperatae, tanto merito maiorem menti meae voluptatem

intulere. Neque enim aut sperare aut expectare poteram ut tam multis necessariis studiis assidue accupatissimus, morbis tum acribus misere perpetuo agitatus seniique molestia confectus, mihi unquam . . . ."

V & VI. *Margaret and William Roper.*

Miniatures by Holbein, mounted as pendants; watercolour on card. The reproductions are the same size as the originals. The problems raised by the ages given are referred to in the text. If Margaret Roper's age is correctly given, then the miniatures (presumably painted at the same time as a pair) were painted in the year of Sir Thomas More's martyrdom or very shortly afterwards. According to the ages given, William Roper was twelve years older than Margaret; this would make him 85 at the time of his death.

APPENDIX II

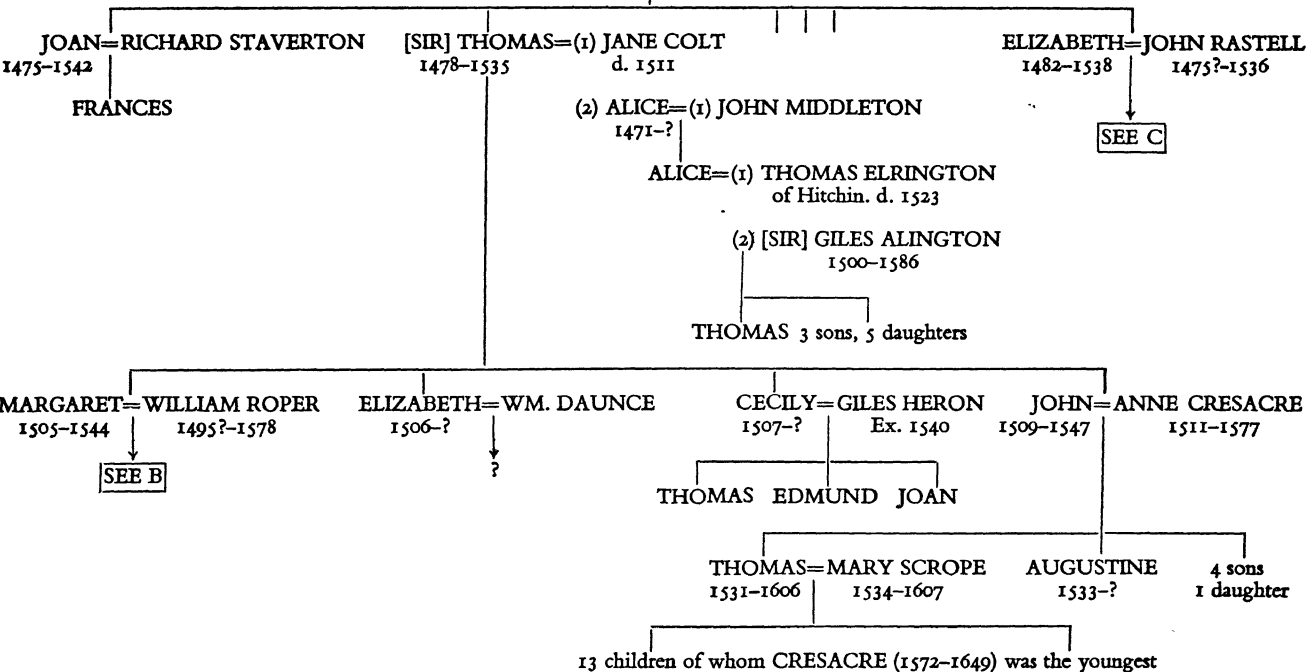
GENEALOGIES

A. More

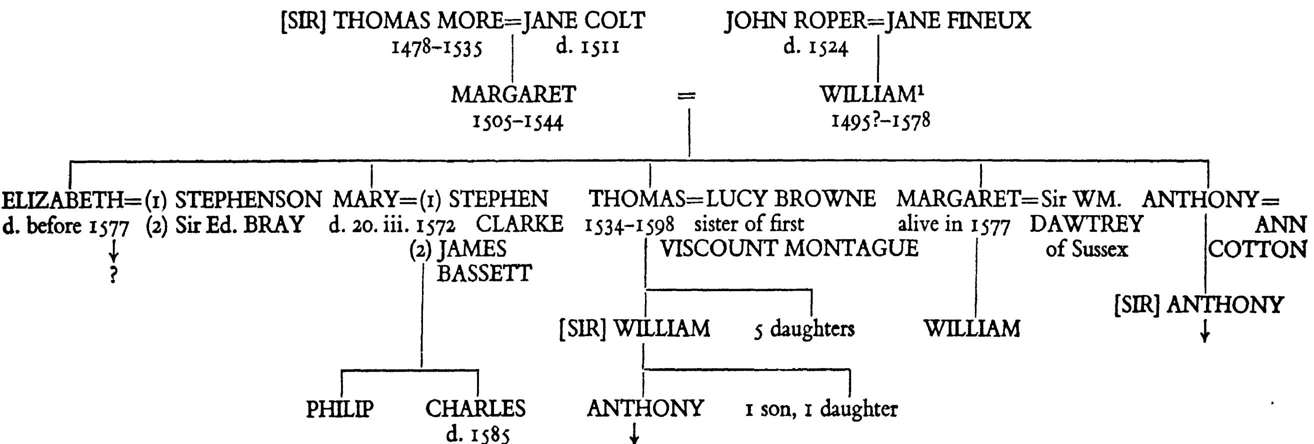
B. Roper

C. Rastell, Clement, Heywood

Note: These are not complete genealogies; a number of names have been omitted; most of those given are of persons mentioned in this book.


A
MORE
[SIR] JOHN MORE=AGNES GRANGER
d. 1530
JOAN=RICHARD STAVERTON
1475–1542
FRANCES
[SIR] THOMAS=(1) JANE COLT
1478–1535
d. 1511
(2) ALICE=(1) JOHN MIDDLETON
1471–?
ALICE=(1) THOMAS ELRINGTON
of Hitchin. d. 1523
(2) [SIR] GILES ALINGTON
1500–1586
THOMAS
3 sons, 5 daughters
ELIZABETH=JOHN RASTELL
1482–1538
1475?–1536
SEE C
MARGARET=WILLIAM ROPER
1505–1544
1495?–1578
SEE B
ELIZABETH=WM. DAUNCE
1506–?
?
CECILY=GILES HERON
1507–?
Ex. 1540
THOMAS
EDMUND
JOAN
JOHN=ANNE CRESACRE
1509–1547
1511–1577
THOMAS=MARY SCROPE
1531–1606
1534–1607
AUGUSTINE
1533–?
4 sons
1 daughter
13 children of whom CRESACRE (1572–1649) was the youngest

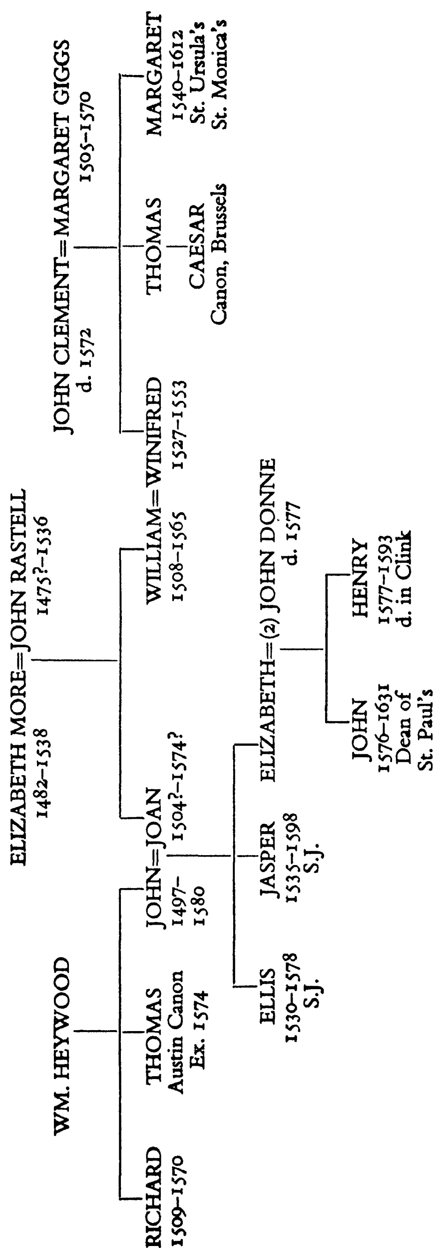
B
ROPER



[1] From his brother Christopher are descended the Lords Teynham (Roper–Curzon) and the Trevor–Ropers.

The order given here follows the pedigree roll, in the Guildhall Library, London, drawn up by John Philipott, Somerset Herald, in 1636; no dates are given in the roll. The order may be incorrect. Margaret's son, William Dawtrey, entered Lincoln's Inn in 1565. Assuming he was then 18, and that his mother was married when she was 18, her birth would come about 1530.

C
RASTELL
CLEMENT
HEYWOOD



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