

St. Thomas More

Lawyer • Politician • Father

Of St. Thomas More the world will never tire. His name will be vivid upon the minds of men as long as truth and liberty are prized. Many volumes have been written and probably many more will appear, but our limitations in this DEDICATION ISSUE necessarily demand that we follow the life of St. Thomas More according to the incidents so vividly portrayed in the sixteen stained glass windows.

1. Thomas was the second of six children, but of those six only four - his eldest sister, Jane, Thomas himself, his brother John, and his youngest sister Elizabeth survived their infancy. The eventful day of February 6th, 1478 brought Thomas More to the light of the world.
2. From tradition in the More family, it has been told that when Thomas was two years old, he, in the arms of his nurse, crossed a river on horseback. The horse stumbled while crossing, and the nurse, fearing that the child would fall into the river, threw him onto the river bank. Upon reaching the river bank, the nurse found Thomas smiling and without injury.
3. At the age of nine or ten, Thomas was sent to serve and study under the guidance of Cardinal de Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury. One day, while dining with friends, the Archbishop told them, pointing to Thomas who was serving at the table: "This child waiting here at the table, whosoever shall live to see it, will prove to be a marvelous man."
4. Cardinal de Morton sent young Thomas to Oxford University in 1492. In this castle of learning, More studied rhetoric and logic. At the age of sixteen and only two years of study at Oxford, his father, wishing him to follow in his footsteps and wear the long robes of the Law, abruptly took him from the University and brought him to London. Offering no rebellion to the parental will, he immediately absorbed himself in the arts and sciences of the Law. Long before his apprenticeship was concluded he excelled in the many devices of the barrister's trade.



1. As a Child



2. With his Nurse



3. With Cardinal de Morton



4. At Oxford

5. Two of More's closest friends who were to profoundly influence his way of thinking were Giles and Erasmus. Peter Giles lived in Antwerp where More began writing his famous "Utopia," and was a friendly critic. Erasmus and More first met in 1499. It was More who defended Erasmus when his writings were criticized for having taints of heretical doctrine. More was one of the few men of real sanctity that Erasmus had met and this he recognized. This friendship continued to strengthen over the years and Erasmus was not an infrequent visitor to the More home in Chelsea.
6. After realizing that his vocation was that of a layman and not that of a cleric, Thomas decided to marry. His fancy settled upon the oldest daughter of John Colt and he married her in the Spring of 1505. The role of husband fitted him awkwardly at the beginning due to the fact that Jane Colt was ten years his junior. This union gave him three daughters - Margaret, Elizabeth, Cecilia - and a son - John.
7. The jealousy with which the foreign merchants were regarded by the English merchants and apprentices finally led to a very serious outbreak during the night of April 30, 1517. The aldermen and guards fled for their lives; prisons were broken open and houses plundered. More was appointed by the Privy Council to appease the mob. The next morning, standing near St. Martin's Gate in London, More addressed the rioters who listened to him with respect. The Merchants' Riot was calmed for the time being.
8. The best known of all of Thomas More's writings is "Utopia." This book concerns itself with an imaginary Portuguese traveler named Raphael Hythloday, a companion of Amerigo Vespucci. Hythloday describes to More and Giles the customs of the wonderful people he had found on an island called Utopia or "Nowhere." While treating of the various social, political, philosophical and religious ideas, this satire reflects the character, strong will, intelligence and wit of its author. "Utopia" was written in 1516, probably during the leisure hours of More's first embassy in Flanders.



5. With Erasmus
and Giles



6. Weds Jane Colt



7. Calms Merchants'
Riot



8. Writes "Utopia"

9. Since it was More's duty to accompany the king on more solemn occasions, he was among those present at the famous meeting between King Henry VIII and Francis I, King of France, at Calais in June 1520. Due to the ornate preparations, this meeting became known as "The Field of the Cloth of Gold."
10. More was not knighted at the time he accompanied Henry VIII to Calais. This dignity seems to have been conferred upon him a year later, about the time he was made Under-Treasurer.
11. More held a particular devotion to his firstborn, Margaret, and his pet name for her was "Meg." And it was to her that he sent his last letter along with the hair-shirt which he had worn under the robes of his office. His wife, Jane, died suddenly when Margaret was only five-years-old and John not yet a year old. Before a month passed More married again. This was a deliberate action. He had four young but motherless children in his household, and professional as well as civic tasks occupied most of his time. No matter how scrupulously and carefully he acted the part of a father, there still remained the necessity of a mother's love, care and attention. His choice was a widow with one child, Alice. Although Alice Middleton was seven years older than More himself, she became the wife of the next Lord Chancellor of England.
12. Up till this point in his life Thomas More had served as a member of Parliament, as the Under-Sheriff of London, in embassy to Flanders and to Calais, as Privy Councillor, as the Under-Treasurer, in embassy to Bruges, as Speaker of the House of Commons, as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and in embassy to France and to Cambrai. English history records how Cardinal Wolsey by his failure to secure the royal divorce lost the favor of the king who he had served better than his God. Henry VIII knew that at this critical time he would have to choose a man who was not only a renowned scholar and successful ambassador but also a skilled lawyer. Perhaps of equal or greater importance, the new Chancellor should not be over-ambitious or self-seeking. And on October 25, 1529, Thomas More was summoned to Greenwich where Henry VIII gave him the Great Seal and proclaimed him Lord Chancellor of England. Thus the tempest that had struck Wolsey now had swirled Thomas More to the highest office of the realm, making him the first commoner and layman not possessed of high judicial experience to be so honored. There was no objection to the appointment from any quarter, only applause. Even Wolsey, from his position in exile, stated that the best choice had been made. Friendship did not prompt this compliment since the only bond between them was a common service to the king.



9. On The Field of Gold



10. Knighted by Henry VIII



11. With His Family



12. Made Lord Chancellor

13. More prepared his family for the crisis which he felt would soon befall the nation. He warned them that their manner of living, though comfortable yet tempered by a frugality that a few in his position would have observed, must surely change. In the few years that followed, Henry VIII forced the clergy and people to acknowledge him as Supreme Head of the English Church "as far as the law of God permits." But on March 30, 1534, an Act of Succession was made the law of the land. All nobles, clergymen, and all other subjects were liable to imprisonment and execution for high treason if they refused to take an oath "to observe and maintain the whole effect and contents of the Act of Succession." Thomas More, as expected, refused to make this oath.
14. And because of his refusal, the judges ordered him to the Tower of London. His property was confiscated and his wife was forced to sell some of her personal belongings in order to keep the family together. Among his anxieties in prison was the fact that his wife and, more especially his favorite daughter, Meg, failed to understand his actions. Through the plight of imprisonment and the conditions in which his family found themselves, the king's court hoped to sway More's refusal.
15. His ordeal came to a climax in June, 1535, when he was brought to a form of trial in Westminster Hall. More stood there, a wasted figure, leaning for support on a stick. But he was still master of the scene and of himself so that his accusers were driven to frame a lie in order to ensure the prearranged verdict of "GUILTY." His remaining days were to be spent back in the Tower of London where he would be given time to prepare to meet his Maker.
16. The scaffold, on the morning of July 6, 1535, was very unsteady. And Thomas More, putting his feet on the ladder, said merrily to the lieutenant of the guard: "I pray thee see me safe up, and for my coming down let me shift for myself." Then he asked all the people to pray for him and to witness his death for the faith of the Catholic Church. The executioner as usual asked pardon, and More cheerfully replied: "Pluck up thy spirits, man, and be not afraid to do thy office. My neck is very short; take heed, therefore, thou strike not awry for saving of thine honesty." The block used at that period was a mere low log, so that the victim had to lie at full length on the scaffold with his face downwards. More had brought a handkerchief with him, blindfolded himself, and placed his head upon the block to await the fatal but blessed blow.

Throughout a life set in the hubbub of law and public service, among the temptations of courts and princes, surrounded by men straining after new honors and new wealth, Thomas More walked with God; and to all his earthly occupations brought the vision and insight of eternal things. He is timeless because he lived timelessly in his prayer. And because his whole life was centered on God, he could distinguish the things of God from the things of Caesar, and could at last die on the scaffold "THE KING'S GOOD SERVANT, BUT GOD'S FIRST."



13. Refuses the Oath



14. Enters the Tower of London



15. Imprisonment



16. Is Beheaded