

SIR THOMAS MORE.

THIS great man was born in London, in the year 1480. His father was Sir John More, one of the Judges of the King's Bench, a gentleman of established reputation. He was early placed in the family of Cardinal Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Lord Chancellor of England. The sons of the gentry were at this time sent into the families of the first nobility and leading statesmen, on an equivocal footing; partly for the finishing of their education, and partly in a menial capacity. The Cardinal said more than once to the nobility who were dining with him, "This boy waiting at table, whosoever lives to see it, will one day prove a marvellous man." His eminent patron was highly delighted with that vivacity and wit which appeared in his childhood, and did not desert him on the scaffold. Plays were performed in the archiepiscopal household at Christmas. On these occasions Young More would play the improvisatore, and introduce an extempore part of his own, more amusing to the spectators than all the rest of the performance. In due time Morton sent him to Oxford, where he heard the lectures of Linacer and Grocyn on the Greek and Latin languages. The epigrams and translations printed in his works evince his skill in both. After a regular course of rhetoric, logic, and philosophy, at Oxford, he removed to London, where he became a law student, first in New Inn, and afterwards in Lincoln's Inn. He gained considerable reputation by reading public lectures on St. Augustine, De Civitate Dei, at Saint Lawrence's church in the Old Jewry. The most learned men in the city of London attended him; among the rest Grocyn, his lecturer in Greek at Oxford, and a writer against the doctrines of Wickliff. The object of More's proflusions was not so much to discuss points in theology, as to explain the precepts of moral philosophy, and clear up difficulties in history. For more than three years after this he was Law-reader at Furnival's Inn. He next removed to the Charter-House, where he lived in devotion and prayer; and it is stated that from the age of twenty he wore a hair-shirt next his skin. He remained there about four years, without taking the vows, although he performed all the spiritual exercises of the society, and had a strong inclination to enter the priesthood. But his spiritual adviser, Dr. Colet, Dean of St. Paul's recommended him to adopt a different course. On a visit to a gentleman of Essex, by name Colt, he was introduced to his three daughters, and became attached to the second, who was the handsomest of the family. But he bethought him that it would be both a grief and a scandal to the eldest to see her younger sister married before her. He therefore reconsidered his passion, and from motives of pity prevailed with himself to be in love with the elder, or at all events to marry her. Erasmus says that she was young and uneducated, for which her husband liked her the better, as being more capable of conforming to his own model of a wife. He had her instructed in literature, and especially in music.

He continued his study of the law at Lincoln's Inn, but resided in Bucklersbury after his marriage. His first wife lived about seven years. By her he had three daughters and one son; and we are informed by his son-in-law, Roper, that he brought them up with the most sedulous attention to their intellectual and moral improvement. It was a quaint exhortation of his, that they should take virtue and learning for their meat, and pleasure for their sauce.

In the latter part of King Henry the Seventh's time, and at a very early age, More distinguished himself in parliament. The King had demanded a subsidy for the marriage of his eldest daughter, who was to be the

Scottish Queen. The demand was not complied with. On being told that his purpose had been frustrated by the opposition of a beardless boy, Henry was greatly incensed, and determined on revenge. He knew that the actual offender, not possessing anything, could not lose anything; he therefore devised a groundless charge against the father, and confined him to the Tower till he had extorted a fine of £100 for his alleged offence. Fox, Bishop of Winchester, a privy Councillor, insidiously undertook to reinstatement young More in the King's favour: but the Bishop's Chaplain warned him not to listen to any such proposals; and gave a pithy reason for the advice, highly illustrative of Fox's real character. "To serve the King's purposes, my lord and master will not hesitate to consent to his own father's death." To avoid evil consequences, More determined to go abroad. With this view, he made himself master of the French language, and cultivated the liberal sciences, as astronomy, geometry, arithmetic, and music; he also made himself thoroughly acquainted with history: but in the mean time the King's death rendered it safe to remain in England, and he abandoned all thoughts of foreign travel.

Notwithstanding his practice at the bar, and his lectures, which were quoted by Lord Coke as undisputed authority, he found leisure for the pursuits of philosophy and polite literature. In 1516 he wrote his *Utopia*, the only one of his works which has commanded much of public attention in after times. In general they were chiefly of a polemic kind, in defence of a cause which even his abilities could not make good. But in this extraordinary work he allowed his powerful mind fair play, and considered both mankind and religion with the freedom of a true philosopher. He represents *Utopia* as one of those countries lately discovered in America, and the account of it is feigned to be given by a Portuguese, who sailed in company with the first discoverer of that part of the world. Under the character of this Portuguese he delivers his own opinions. His *History of Richard III.* was never finished, but it is inserted in Kennet's *Complete History of England*. Among his other eminent acquaintance, he was particularly attached to Erasmus. They had long corresponded before they were personally known to each other. Erasmus came to England for the purpose of seeing his friend; and it was contrived that they should meet at the Lord Mayor's table before they were introduced to each other. At dinner they engaged in argument. Erasmus felt the keenness of his antagonist's wit; and when hard pressed, exclaimed, "You are More, or nobody;" the reply was, "You are Erasmus, or the Devil."

Before More entered definitely into the service of Henry VIII. his learning, wisdom, and experience were held in such high estimation, that he was twice sent on important commercial embassies. His discretion in those employments made the King desirous of securing him for the service of the court; and he commissioned Wolsey, then Lord Chancellor, to engage him. But so little inclined was he to involve himself in political intrigues, that the King's wish was not at the time accomplished. Soon after, More was retained as counsel for the Pope, for the purpose of reclaiming the forfeiture of a ship. His argument was so learned, and his conduct in the cause so judicious and upright, that the ship was restored. The King upon this insisted on having him in his service; and, as the first step to preferment, made him Master of the Requests, a Knight and Privy Councillor.

In 1520 he was made Treasurer of the Exchequer: he then bought a house by the river-side at Chelsea,

where he had settled with his family. He had at that time buried his first wife and was married to a second. He continued in the King's service full twenty years, during which time his royal master conferred with him on various subjects, including astronomy, geometry, and divinity; and frequently consulted him on his private concerns. More's pleasant temper and witty conversation made him such a favourite at the palace, as almost to estrange him from his own family; and under these circumstances his peculiar humour manifested itself; for he so restrained the natural bias of his freedom and mirth, as to render himself a less amusing companion, and at length to be seldom sent for but on occasions of business.

A more important circumstance gave More much consequence with the King. The latter was preparing his answer to Luther, and Sir Thomas assisted him in the controversy. While this was going on, the King one day came to dine with him; and after dinner walked with him in the garden with his arm round his neck. After Henry's departure, Mr. Roper, Sir Thomas's son-in-law, remarked on the King's familiarity, as exceeding even that used towards Cardinal Wolsey, with whom he had only once been seen to walk arm in arm. The answer of Sir Thomas was shrewd and almost prophetic. "I find his Grace my very good lord indeed, and I believe he doth as singularly favour me as any subject within this realm. However, Son Roper, I may tell thee, I have no cause to be proud thereof, for if my head would win him a castle in France it should not fail to go."

In 1523 he was chosen Speaker of the House of Commons, and displayed great intrepidity in the discharge of that office. Wolsey was afraid lest this parliament should refuse a great subsidy about to be demanded, and announced his intention of being present at the debate. He had previously expressed his indignation at the publicity given to the proceedings of the house, which he had compared to the gossip of an ale-house. Sir Thomas More therefore persuaded the members to admit not only the Cardinal, but all his pomp; his maces, poll-axes, crosses, hat, and great seal. The reason he assigned was, that should the like fault be imputed to them hereafter, they might be able to shift the blame on the shoulders of his Grace's attendants. The proposal of the subsidy was met with the negative of profound silence; and the Speaker declared that "except every member could put into his one head all their several wits, he alone in so weighty a matter was unmet to make his Grace answer." After the parliament had broken up, Wolsey expressed his displeasure against the Speaker in his own gallery at Whitehall; but More, with his usual quiet humour, parried the attack by a ready compliment to the taste and splendour of the room in which they were conversing.

On the death of Sir Richard Wingfield, the King promoted Sir Thomas to the Chancellorship of the Duchy of Lancaster. At this time the see of Rome became vacant, and Wolsey aspired to the Papacy; but Charles V. disappointed him, and procured the election of Cardinal Adrian. In revenge, Wolsey contrived to persuade Henry that Catharine was not his lawful wife, and endeavoured to turn his affections towards one of the French King's sisters. The case was referred to More, who was assisted by the most learned of the Privy Council; and he managed, difficult as it must have been to do so, to extricate both himself and his colleagues from the dilemma. His conduct as ambassador at Cambray, where a treaty of peace was negotiated between the Emperor, France, and England, so confirmed the favour of his master towards him, that on the fall of the Cardinal he was made Lord Chancellor. The great seal was delivered to him on the 25th of October 1530. This favour was the more extraordinary, as he was the first layman on

whom it was bestowed: but it may reasonably be suspected that the private motive was to engage him in the approval of the meditated divorce. This he probably suspected, and entered on the office with a full knowledge of the danger to which it exposed him. He performed the duties of his function for nearly three years with exemplary diligence, great ability, and uncorrupted integrity. His resignation took place on the 16th May, 1533. His motive was supposed to be a regard to his own safety, as he was sensible that a confirmation of the divorce would be officially required from him, and he was too conscientious to comply with the mandate of power, against his own moral and legal convictions.

While Chancellor, some of his injunctions were disapproved by the common law judges. He therefore invited them to dine with him in the council chamber, and proved to them by professional arguments that their complaints were unfounded. He then proposed that they should themselves mitigate the rigour of the law by their own conscientious discretion; in which case he would grant no more injunctions. This they refused; and the consequence was, that he continued that practice in equity which has come down to the present day.

It was through the intervention of his friend the Duke of Norfolk that he procured his discharge from the laborious, and under the circumstances of the time, the dangerous eminence of the chancellorship, which he quitted in honourable poverty. After the payment of his debts he had not the value of one hundred pounds in gold and silver, nor more than twenty marks a year in land. On this occasion his love of a jest did not desert him. While Chancellor, as soon as the church service was over, one of his train used to go to his lady's pew, and say, "Madam, my Lord is gone!" On the first holiday after his train had been dismissed, he performed that ceremony himself, and by saying at the end of the service, "Madam, my Lord is gone!" gave his wife the first intimation that he had surrendered the great seal.

He had resolved never again to engage in public business; but the divorce, and still more the subsequent marriage with Anne Boleyn, which nothing could induce him to favour, with the King's alienation from the see of Rome, raised a storm over his head from which his voluntary seclusion at Chelsea, in study and devotion could not shelter him. When tempting offers proved ineffectual to win him over to sanction Anne Boleyn's coronation by his high legal authority, threats and terrors were resorted to: his firmness was not to be shaken, but his ruin was determined, and ultimately accomplished. In the next parliament he, and his friend Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, were attainted of treason and misprision of treason for listening to the ravings of Elizabeth Barton, considered by the vulgar as the Holy Maid of Kent, and countenancing her treasonable practices. His innocence was so clearly established, that his name was erased from the bill; and it was supposed to have been introduced into it only for the purpose of shaking his resolution touching the divorce and marriage. But though he had escaped this snare, his firmness occasioned him to be devoted as a victim. Anne Boleyn took pains to exasperate the King against him, and when the Act of Supremacy was passed in 1534, the oath required by it was tendered to him. The refusal to take it, which his principles compelled him to give, was expressed in discreet and qualified terms; he was nevertheless taken into the custody of the Abbot of Westminster, and upon a second refusal four days after, was committed prisoner to the Tower of London.

Our limits will not allow us to detail many particulars of his life while in confinement, marked as it was by firmness, resignation, and cheerfulness, resulting from a conscience, however much mistaken, yet void

of intentional offence. His reputation and credit were very great in the kingdom, and much was supposed to depend on his conduct at this critical juncture. Archbishop Cranmer, therefore, urged every argument that could be devised to persuade him to compliance, and promises were profusely made to him from the King; but neither argument nor promises could prevail. We will give the last of these attempts to shake his determination, in the words of his son-in-law, Mr. Roper:—

“Mr. Rich, pretending friendly talk with him, among other things of a set course, said this unto him: ‘Forasmuch as is well known, Mr. More, that you are a man both wise and well learned, as well in the laws of the realm as otherwise, I pray you therefore, sir, let me be so bold as of good-will to put unto you this case. Admit there were, sir, an act of parliament that the realm should take me for King; would not you, Mr. More, take me for King?’ ‘Yes, sir,’ quoth Sir Thomas More, ‘that would I.’ ‘I put the case further,’ quoth Mr. Rich, ‘that there were an act of parliament that all the realm should take me for Pope; would not you then, Master More, take me for Pope?’ ‘For answer, sir,’ quoth Sir Thomas More, ‘to your first case the parliament may well, Master Rich, meddle with the state of temporal princes; but to make answer to your other case, I will put you this case. Suppose the parliament would make a law that God should not be God; would you then, Master Rich, say that God were not God?’ ‘No, sir,’ quoth he, ‘that would I not; sith no parliament may make any such law.’ ‘No more,’ quoth Sir Thomas More, ‘could the parliament make the King supreme head of the Church’ Upon whose only report, was Sir Thomas indicted of high treason on the statute to deny the King to be supreme head of the church, into which indictment were put these heinous words, *maliciously, traitorously, and diabolically.*”

Sir Thomas More in his defence alleged many arguments to the discredit of Rich's evidence, and in proof of the clearness of his own conscience; but all this was of no avail, and the jury found him guilty. When asked in the usual manner why judgment should not be passed against him, he argued against the indictment as grounded on an Act of Parliament repugnant to the laws of God and the Church, the government of which belonged to the see of Rome, and could not lawfully be assumed by any temporal prince. The Lord Chancellor, however, and the other Commissioners gave judgment against him.

He remained in the Tower a week after his sentence, and during that time he was uniformly firm and composed, and even his peculiar vein of cheerfulness remained unimpaired. It accompanied him even to the scaffold, on going up to which, he said to the Lieutenant of the Tower, “I pray you, Master Lieutenant, see me safe up, and for my coming down let me shift for myself.” After his prayers were ended, he turned to the executioner and said, with a cheerful countenance, “Pluck up thy spirits, man, and be not afraid to do thine office. My neck is very short, take heed, therefore, thou strike not awry for thine own credit's sake.” Then laying his head upon the block, he bid the executioner stay till he had removed his beard, saying, “My beard has never committed any treason;” and immediately the fatal blow was given. These witticisms have so repeatedly run the gauntlet through all the jest-books, that it would hardly have been worth while to repeat them here, were it not for the purpose of introducing the comment of Mr. Addison on Sir Thomas's behaviour on this solemn occasion. “What was only philosophy in this extraordinary man, would be frenzy in one who does not resemble him as well in the cheerfulness of his temper as in the sanctity of his manners.”

He was executed on St. Thomas's eve in the year 1555. The barbarous part of the sentence, so dis-

graceful to the Statute-book, was remitted. Lest serious minded persons should suppose that his conduct on the scaffold was mere levity, it should be added that he addressed the people, desiring them to pray for him, and to bear witness that he was going to suffer death in and for the faith of the holy Catholic Church. The Emperor Charles V. said, on hearing of his execution, “Had we been master of such a servant, we would rather have lost the best city of our dominions than such a worthy councillor.”

No one was more capable of appreciating the character of Sir Thomas More than Erasmus, who represents him as more pure and white than the whitest snow, with such wit as England never had before, and was never likely to have again. He also says, that in theological discussions the most eminent divines were not unfrequently worsted by him; but he adds a wish that he had never meddled with the subject. Sir Thomas More was peculiarly happy in extempore speaking, the result of a well-stored and ready memory, suggesting without delay whatever the occasion required. Thuanus also mentions him with much respect, as a man of strict integrity and profound learning.

His life has been written by his son-in-law, Roper, and is the principal source whence this narrative is taken. Erasmus has also been consulted, through whose epistolary works there is much information about his friend. There is also a life of him by Ferdinando Warner L. L. D., with a translation of his *Utopia*, in an octavo volume, published in 1758.

THE COUNTESS POTOZKA.

MR. TWEDDELL visited a remote corner of Europe—Tulczyn, in the Ukraine, where he passed some time at the seat of the Countess Potozka, and in the company of her numerous guests, and her neighbours the distinguished family of the Duke de Polignac. He thus describes the princely hospitality of the Countess Potozka:—

“The Countess has indeed a princely establishment, about 150 persons daily in family. The Marshal Suwarrow, and a great number of his officers occupy a wing of the palace, which is a very large and magnificent building. I have an apartment of three rooms, to myself. The family never unites before dinner-time. Each person orders breakfast in his own apartment, and has all the morning to himself; this is very convenient; a perfect liberty of conduct upon all occasions. The Countess sends a servant to me every morning to ask if I want anything, and at what hour I choose to ride out. I have a carriage and four horses, and one of her servants to attend me whenever I please. We are just restored to tranquillity after a mighty bustle. There has been a great wedding in the family. We have had a great crowd of Russian Princes; and all the feet of the Ukraine have been summoned to dance.

“Marshal Suwarrow, the hero of Ismael, is a very extraordinary character. He dines every morning about nine o'clock. He sleeps almost naked. He affects a perfect indifference to heat and cold; and quits his chamber, which approaches to suffocation, in order to review his troops, in a thin linen jacket, while the thermometer of Reaumur is at ten degrees below freezing. His manners correspond with his humours: he finds that it suits his troops, and the people he has to deal with. I asked him, if after the massacre at Ismael, he was perfectly satisfied with the conduct of the day? He said he went home and wept in his tent!

“I have seldom passed my time so pleasantly as in the Ukraine. But the greatest treasure to me was the society of the Polignacs, with whom I dined three or four times a week, and spent the whole day. It is truly a rare thing to see women who have always lived in the great world, and on its very pinnacle, and who, while they appeared made only for that, so highly possessed of every charm that gives a relish to private life.”