

**THE MIRROR OF VERTUE
IN WORLDLY GREATNESS
OR THE LIFE OF SIR
THOMAS MORE KNIGHT**

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Thomas More & William Roper

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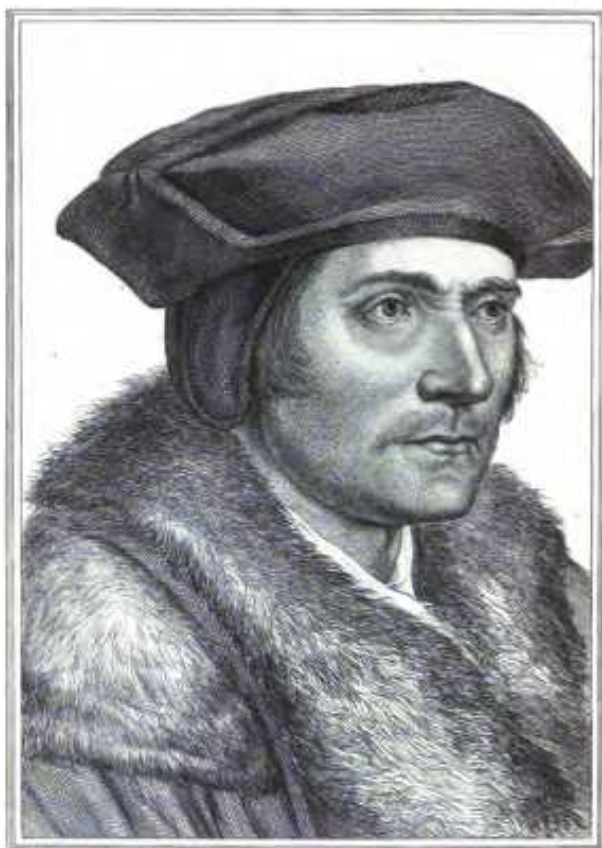
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SIR THOMAS MORE & WILLIAM ROPER

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MORE KNIGHT BY
WILLIAM ROPER

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PREFACE

The First Edition

The Mirroure of Vertue in Worldly Greatnes, or The Life of Sir Thomas More, Knight, sometime Lord Chancellor of England, was first imprinted in the year mdcxxvi, at Paris, according to the title-page, though it has been suggested, without any definite proof, that the book was not really printed abroad.

The author of the *Life*, William Roper, Sir Thomas More's son-in-law, died in 1578; he had possibly not completed his book at the end of Queen Mary's reign. It is noteworthy that in 1557 Sir Thomas More's English works were first collected together and published, at the Queen's command, under the editorship of More's nephew, Justice Rastell, the elder son of the printer, John Rastell. In 1555 and 1556 the Latin works were published

at Louvain. William Roper's precious memoir, described as *A Brief History of the Life, Arraignment, and Death of that Mirrour of all True Honour and Vertue, Syr Thomas More*, must have circulated in MS. for well-nigh seventy years, until at length "T. P." gave it to the press. Unfortunately the text he found was very faulty. "T. P." has not yet been identified, but may be Thomas Plowden. It is an interesting coincidence that a writer with the same initials, Thomas Paynell, the learned translator, added a table of contents to the afore-mentioned edition of More's English works. But this Thomas Paynell died in 1567, and "T. P." was the contemporary of Lady Elizabeth, Countess of Banbury, the second wife of William Knollys, upon whom Charles I conferred the Earldom of Banbury in August, 1626.

Other Biographies

Before the *Life* appeared in print the MS. version had already been utilised by various biographers of Sir Thomas More, notably by Stapleton, whose *Tres Thome* appeared at Antwerp in 1588; by Nicholas Harpsfield, whose work is preserved in Harleian MS. 6253; and by Cresacre

More, his great-grandson, whose *Life and Death of Sir Thomas More*, long erroneously assigned to his brother Thomas, was published without date or place, with a dedication to Queen Henrietta Maria ; it was probably printed in Paris or Louvain in 1631. Besides these there are other sixteenth-century *Lives of More* in MS. One of these, written in 1599, is printed in Wordsworth's *Ecclesiastical Biography*.

Editions of Roper's Life

Thomas Hearne, the famous antiquary, reprinted William Roper's book in the year 1716, but his text is almost as faulty as the editio princeps, though he had better MS. materials at his disposal ; he added various readings and emendations at the end of his volume. In 1729 the Rev. John Lewis, the biographer of Wiclif and Caxton, edited the *Life* from a fairly good MS. lent him by Mr. Thomas Beake, of Stourmouth, in Kent. In 1817 a new edition appeared, based on those of Hearne and Lewis, edited by S. W. Singer, the editor of Shakespeare. A much improved text was issued by him in 1822, amended by the collation of two MS. copies, both of these, according to his statement, in the handwriting of Roper's age, one of them belonging to Sir William

Strickland, Bart., of Boynton, in Yorkshire. It is an interesting fact that an earlier kinsman of the same name married one of the last female descendants of Margaret, Roper's wife.

The Present Edition

For the present issue Singer's modernised text has been utilised ; here and there some slight changes, notably in punctuation, have been made. Probably now, for the first time, More's verses, written with a coal after Master Secretary's visit to him in the Tower, are correctly given. In the four MS. copies of Roper's *Life* in the British Museum, namely, Harleian MSS. 6166, 6254, 6362, 7030, and in the printed copies, the versions of the lines make little sense. In Rastell's edition of *More's English Works* they are more correctly printed under the title of "Lewys, the Lost Lover." Together with the record left us by Sir Thomas More's son-in-law the biographical letters of his friend Erasmus should be read by way of commentary, and also More's own letters, more especially those to his favourite daughter Meg, and those from her to him : these famous letters between father and daughter are fittingly included in this volume.