

**THE HOUSEHOLD
OF
SIR THOMAS MORE**

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The Household of Sir Thomas More by Anne Manning

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ANNE MANNING

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Libellus a Margarcta More,

QUINDECIM ANNOS NATA, CHELSEIÆ INCEPTVS.

Margaretta More

"Nulla dies sine linea."

NEW YORK:

CHARLES SCRIBNER, 145 NASSAU STREET.

1852.

E. A.

SIR THOMAS MORE.*

IN composing, several years since, a small sketch of the life of this admirable person, which has been published in another biographical collection, I summed up his character as it appeared to me, in terms which it may be pardonable to repeat here ; for a second and more exact review of his conduct has furnished no ground for change of opinion, and to alter the diction of a few simple passages which the same pen could perhaps scarcely otherwise express, would produce but a silly counterfeit of originality. I shall perhaps take a similar liberty in a few subsequent instances, in the progress of the present work, and beg leave, once for all, to offer this apology for the practice, as well as for having said here so much on the subject.

To say that Sir Thomas More's was the brightest character of the age in which he lived, an age which exhibited the ferocity of uncivilised man without his simplicity, and the degeneracy of modern manners without their refinement, were praise beneath his merit ; to

* The following comprehensive sketch of the life of Sir Thomas More, is taken from Mr. Lodge's admirable "Portraits of Illustrious Personages of Great Britain."

challenge the long and splendid series of English biography to produce his equal at any period, might be deemed presumptuous ; but if the wise and honest statesman, the acute and incorrupt magistrate, the loyal but independent subject, constitute an excellent public man ; if the good father, the good husband, and the good master, the firm friend, the moral though witty companion, the upright neighbor, the pious Christian, and the patient martyr, form a perfect private character, *ecce homo*.

He was born in Milk-street, Cheapside, about the year 1480, the only son of Sir John More, a Judge of the King's Bench, by his wife the daughter of a Mr. Handcombe, of Holywell, in Bedfordshire. He acquired the learned languages at the hospital of St. Anthony in the parish of St. Benet Fink, in London, then a school of high reputation, from whence he was removed to St. Mary Hall, or as some have said, to Canterbury College, now Christchurch, in the university of Oxford. The Primate, Cardinal Morton, in whose family he passed some of his earliest years, in the character of a gentleman attendant, according to the fashion of that time, charmed as much by his wit as by his learning, often said to the great persons at his table, " This child here waiting, whosoever shall live to see it, will prove a marvelous great man ;" and the prediction soon began to be verified, for, even at the age of eighteen, the literary fame which he had acquired provoked the envy of some German critics, and the praise of others. Erasmus, at that time, wrote to him in the behalf of

Brixius, one of the former class, who had attacked him in an invective intituled "Antimorus," seriously intreating his mercy to that old and experienced disputant.

Just at this period he left the university, and began to study the law in New Inn, and afterwards in Lincoln's Inn, passing his hours of leisure in a circle, of which he naturally became the centre, composed of those whose wisdom and learning could best inform, and of those the vivacity of whose genius could most delight. At the age of twenty-one, when he had barely been called to the station of an utter barrister, he was elected a member of the House of Commons, and was presently distinguished there for a freedom of conduct which, at that time, could have arisen only from the purest motives. In that spirit he opposed in 1503 the requisition of a subsidy and three fifteenths, for the marriage of the Princess Margaret, daughter of Henry the Seventh, to the King of Scots, with such force and honesty of reasoning that the rejection of the demand is said to have been ascribed almost wholly to his endeavors. A privy councillor ran immediately from the house, and told the King, "that a beardless boy had overthrown all his purpose," and Henry satisfied at once his anger and his avarice by committing, under some frivolous pretences, the young senator's father to the Tower and forcing him to purchase his release by the payment of a fine of one hundred pounds. More, however, became so alarmed at the King's resentment, that he retired for a considerable time from the parliament, and from his

professional avocations, and during that interval, which seems to have been passed in a place of concealment, he studied geometry, astronomy, and music, in which last he much delighted, and exercised his pen in historical composition.

He returned at length to his practice at the bar, which presently became so extensive as to produce, according to his own report to his son-in-law, and biographer, Mr. Roper, an annual income of four hundred pounds, equal at least to five thousand in our days. He remained, however, in disfavor at court till after the accession of Henry the Eighth, who, with all his faults, easily discovered and generally encouraged, true merit. The King sent for him by Wolsey, and, on the first taste of his extraordinary powers, determined to employ him. Foreign negotiation was then held to be the most essential part of the education of a statesman. More was directed therefore in 1516 to accompany Tonsal, Bishop of Durham, one of his intimate friends, to Flanders, for the renewal of a treaty of alliance with the Archduke of Austria, afterwards Charles the Fifth, and on his return was warmly invited by Henry to devote himself to the service of the Crown, which his prudence, and indeed his interests, induced him at that time and for some years after, to decline. The King at length pressed him with such earnestness that he durst no longer refuse, and in 1519 he accepted the office of a Master of the Requests; was soon after knighted, and sworn of the Privy Council; and in the succeeding year appointed Treasurer of the Exchequer. More's hesitation had

been wholly unaffected. On the occasion of his becoming a Privy Councillor, he expressed himself (according to Stapleton, one of his biographers), to his bosom friend Bishop Fisher, in these terms; and the passage is rendered the more valuable by the features which it discloses, on such good authority, of Henry's character at that time:—"I am come to the court extremely against my will, as every body knows, and as the King himself often twitteth me in sport for it; and hereto do I hang so unseemly, as a man not using to ride doth sit unhand-somely in the saddle. But our Prince, whose special and extraordinary favor towards me I know not how I shall ever be able to deserve, is so affable and courteous to all men, that every one who has never so little hope of himself may find somewhat whereby he may imagine that he loveth him; even as the citizen's wives of London do, who imagine that our Lady's picture, near the Tower, doth smile upon them as they pray before it. But I am not so happy that I can perceive such fortunate signs of deserving his love, and of a more abject spirit than that I can persuade myself that I have it already: yet, such is the virtue and learning of the King, and his daily increasing industry in both, that by how much the more I see his Highness increase in both these kingly ornaments, by so much the less troublesome this courtier's life seemeth unto me."

In 1523 he was chosen Speaker of the House of Commons, and in the following year, says Hakewel, of the House of Peers. In the former capacity he again distinguished himself by his firm opposition to a subsidy,