

The Catholic Lawyer

Volume 2
Number 1 *Volume 2, January 1956, Number 1*

Article 3

St. Thomas More's Tree

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/tcl>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Catholic Lawyer by an authorized editor of St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact selbyc@stjohns.edu.

In the preparation of this article, much help and encouragement was received from Mr. and Mrs. Richard O'Sullivan and the Sisters of the Adoration Réparatrice.

ST. THOMAS MORE'S TREE

In the city of London, within sight and sound of the ancient Thames, there grows a tree; a mulberry tree. It is old and gnarled; its branches are sustained by props and wires; yet it still bears fruit.

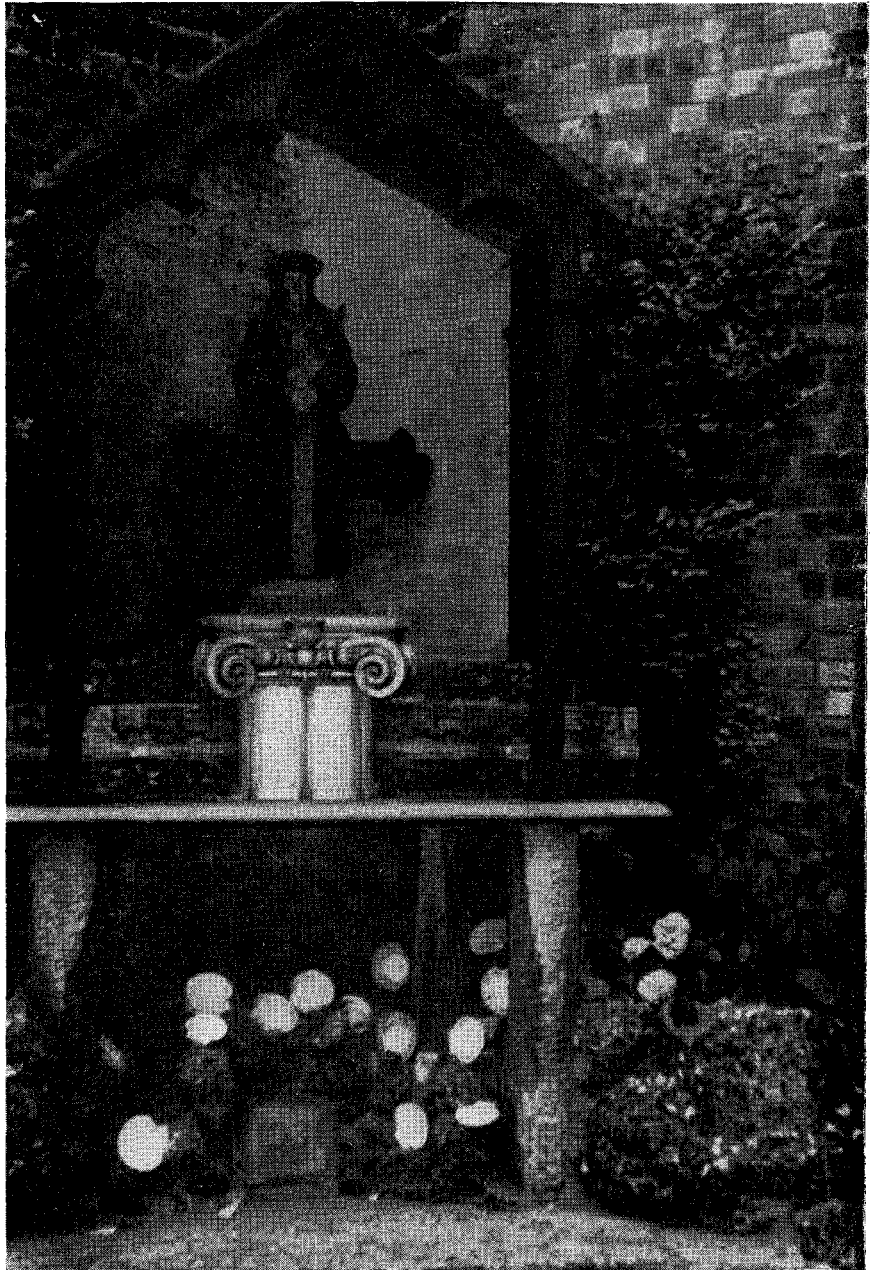


The Mulberry Tree

Over four hundred years ago that fruit was savored by its owner Sir Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of England. It is likely that he offered it to his royal guest, Henry VIII, as they walked arm in arm beneath the branches of the then-young tree.

In recalling one of those occasions, John Roper, More's biographer tells us,

And for the pleasure he took in his company would his grace [Henry] suddenly sometimes come home to his [More's] house at Chelsea to be merry with him, whither, on a time, unlooked for, he came to dinner, and after dinner, in a fair garden of his, walked with him by the space of an hour, holding his arm about his neck. As soon as his grace was gone, I rejoicing thereat, said to Sir Thomas More, how happy he was whom the king had so familiarly entertained, as I never had seen him do to any before, except Cardinal Wolsey, whom

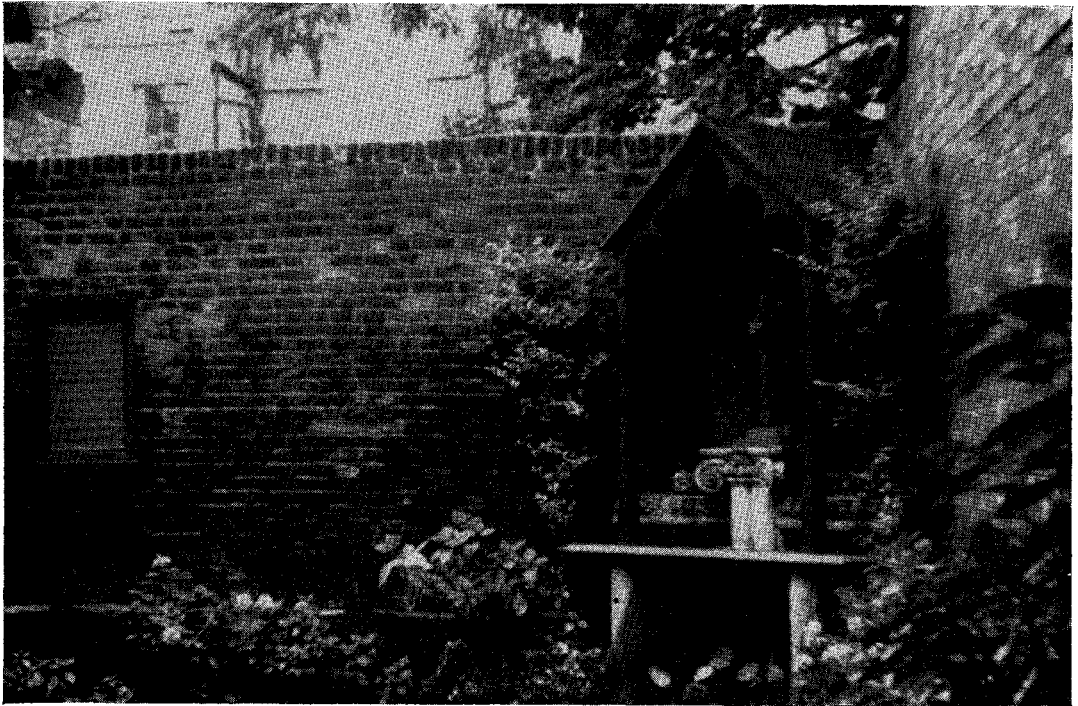


*Shrine in honor of St. Thomas More in the Convent Garden
28 Beaufort St., Chelsea, S. W. 3, London, England*

I saw his grace walk once with arm in arm. "I thank our Lord, son," quoth he, "I find his grace my very good lord indeed, and I believe he doth as singularly favour me, as any subject within this realm: howbeit, 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 (for then there was war between us), it should not fail to go."*

And go, it did. Not for a castle in France but for a greater prize: control of the Church in England. Ten years were to pass before that sorrowful event was consummated; ten years during which Sir Thomas must have spent many anxious hours beneath his beloved tree pondering the course he was to take. Like Gethsemane, it was a garden of prayer. Like his Master, the future saint prayed that the chalice of suffering might pass from him. Though courageous as a saint, his very saintly prudence forbade a rash and premature trial of his fitness for martyrdom.

And so the garden, the mulberry tree and the nearby wall, mute witnesses of sorrow and tragedy as well as laughter and joy, have become a shrine for those who love and revere the memory of their saintly owner.

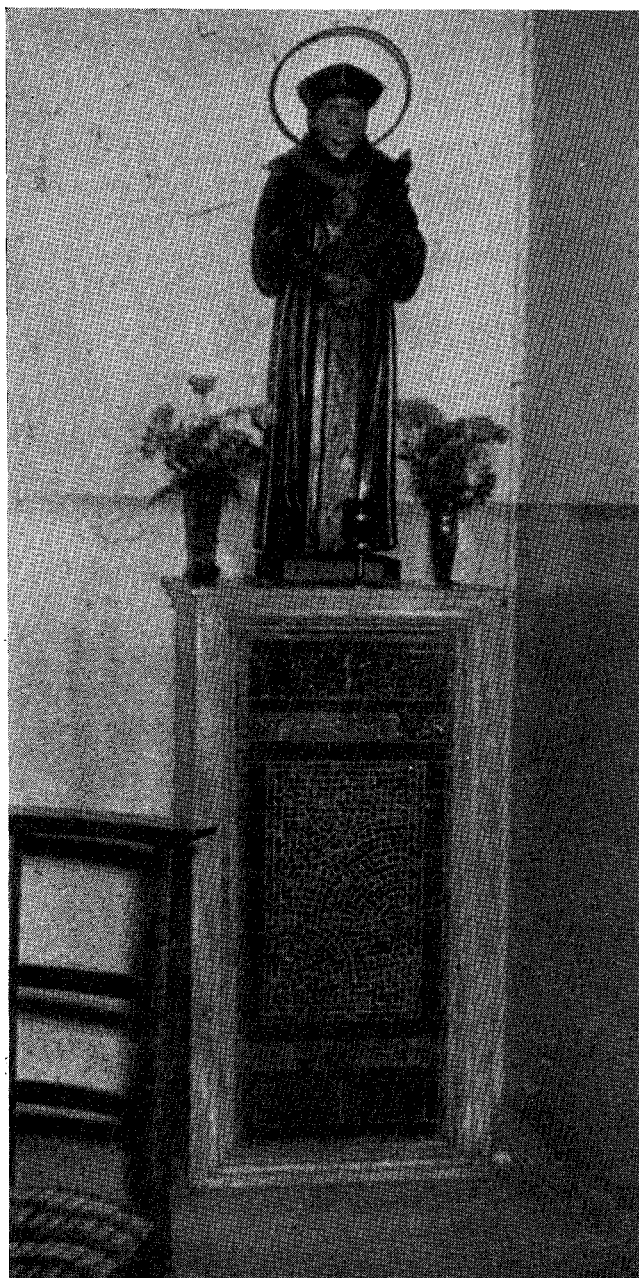


Section of the Original Wall of the More Estate in Chelsea. The tablet on the wall reads as follows:

This hallowed spot was once a part of the domain of the St. Thomas More, Chancellor, beheaded on Tower Hill under Henry VIII, July 6, 1535 and came under our possession on the very day of his beatification, December 9, 1886, by the Providence of God, who sowed therein the seed of the work of Expiation. This brick wall also dates back to his time and formed a part of the old boundary wall of his garden.

*ROPER, LIFE OF SIR THOMAS MORE 22 (De La More Press 1903).

Little else remains of the Great House at Chelsea. Gone are the buildings and barns and fields which St. Thomas loved so well. But the spirit of prayer which imbued the very atmosphere of the More household is now permanently and providentially restored.



Statue of St. Thomas More in the Convent of the Sisters

Visitors to London in search of places associated with St. Thomas More, will certainly find their way to Chelsea and to 28 Beaufort Street. They will be met by a Catholic nun who will escort them to the garden and show them its tree and its wall. She will also grant them the privilege of visiting the chapel in which Jesus Christ is constantly adored in the Blessed Sacrament exposed above the altar. The chapel is dedicated to "The Blessed Sacrament and St. Thomas More" and St. Thomas, who was noted for his devotion to the Mass, would have loved this chapel. He would have rejoiced in the Perpetual Exposition, for, as he himself wrote, "the perfect lover longeth for to be in presence of his love both night and day."

The story of the Convent of *Adoration Réparatrice* is an interesting one. Shortly after the arrest of St. Thomas the Chelsea house and lands were confiscated. For almost four hundred years the spiritual pall that had settled over England with the suppression of the monasteries encompassed the old More residence as well. Then, providentially, on the



Convent Chapel dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament and St. Thomas More

very day of the Saint's beatification on December 9, 1886, the property returned to Catholic hands.

Father Kenelm Vaughan had acquired title to 28 Beaufort Street with the intention of founding a religious order of men. Shortly thereafter, in 1897, his brother Herbert Cardinal Vaughan invited the Sisters of *Adoration Réparatrice*, whose community had been founded in Paris in 1848, to establish a convent in London, and the Chelsea property was made available to them.

The Sisters of *Adoration Réparatrice* were founded for a three-fold purpose:

1. The perfection and sanctification of its members.
2. Constant prayer for the exaltation and welfare of the Church.
3. Public reparation for sin, especially for outrages and sacrileges committed against the Blessed Sacrament, for blasphemy and for the profanation of Sunday.

In turn, the Sisters keep a constant vigil before the Blessed Sacrament. Each sister has three "watches" before the altar: one in the morning, one in the afternoon and one at night; the last is especially devoted to Reparation. The Divine Office is recited daily in choir.

Although there is a kinship with the spirituality of the Carmelite Vocation,

Adoration Réparatrice has its own very distinctive spirituality. The chapels of *Adoration Réparatrice* are open for public use; there are no walls, veils or grilles, to hide the Sisters from the eyes of the world: in the sight of all, and on behalf of all they offer their acts of worship.

The foundress of the Community, Théodelinde Dubouché, was a gifted painter and her spiritual daughters are likewise devoted to the arts relating to divine worship, painting religious pictures and sewing altar linens and liturgical vestments.

Some years ago the curator of the Stalin Museum in Moscow, desirous of collecting information concerning the background of More's *Utopia*, "a 16th Century Communist state," wrote to the Sisters in Chelsea for a biography of the author. The incident inspired the following lines attributed to R. W. Chambers.

When the Reds had shot the bourgeoisie up with gunnery
And stained their hands with capitalist gore,
They yearned for correspondence with a nunnery
On the virtues of the Sainted Thomas More.



Bust of St. Thomas More in possession of the Sisters at the Convent of Adoration Réparatrice.



This card was painted by one of the Sisters of *Adoration Réparatrice*. The reproduction does not do justice to the delicacy of line and color of the original.



The card upon which the Sisters have pasted a wooden cross and a Mulberry leaf contains a printed portrait of St. Thomas More.

