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YOUNG THOMAS MORE, the eldest son of John and Agnes More, was born on Milk Street, Cheapside, within hail of the Church of St. Mary-le-Bow and the sound of Bow Bells. He was therefore a true cockney, like Thomas à Becket before him, who was also born in Cheapside, at the eastern end, near the site of the hall and chapel of the Mercers' Company. John More, the father of young Thomas, was a member of the Bar of Lincoln's Inn, and in 1503 was bidden to take upon himself the estate and degree of serjeant-at-law, which meant that he left Lincoln's Inn and became a member of Serjeants' Inn from which the judges were selected. In due time John More became a judge of the Court of Common Pleas and afterwards of the Court of King's Bench. In his epitaph, Thomas More refers to his father as *homo civilis, suavis, innocens, mitis, misericors, aequus, integer.* During the lifetime of his father, who died in 1530, Thomas More was always called "Young More."

As a child of some five or six years, young Thomas was sent to St. Anthony's School, in Threadneedle Street, less than half a mile from his home. The head master, Nicholas Holt, a scholar of repute, is said to have had under him William Latimer, the humanist, and also John Colet, afterwards dean of St. Paul's. On his way to school young Thomas would pass by the Church of St. Mary-le-Bow, with its five lanterns in the tower to guide wayfarers. London was in those days a town of some 50,000 inhabitants, guarded by seven gates, with wide stretches of open fields and ground on which the children played, old churches with grey stone towers and roofs of red tiles, and gabled houses of steel-yard merchants leading down to the water's edge.

Having learned at St. Anthony's to write, read and speak Latin, as well as the sciences of logic and rhetoric, young More, outdistancing boys of equal age, was, by his father's procurement, admitted into the

household of Cardinal Morton. The old Archbishop, of whom an affectionate description is to be found in the *Utopia,* used to say to his guests: "This child here waiting at the table, whosoever shall live to see it, will prove a marvellous man."[1] In the household at Lambeth, the boy More attracted attention as an actor or mimic, and at Christmastide would

> suddenly sometimes step in among the players, and never studying for the matter make a part of his own there presently among them, which made the lookers on more sport than all the players beside.[2]

In an Interlude to his play *Fulgens and Lucrece,* Henry Medwall, the Chaplain at Lambeth, introduces two boys who attach themselves to the principal characters and mimic them in a comic underplot. Professor A. W. Reed says:

> It is not an exaggeration to associate the origins of the renaissance of English drama that culminated in Shakespeare with Henry Medwall and the household of Cardinal Morton in the last decade of the fifteenth century.[3]

In the course of time Cardinal Morton persuaded John More "for his better furtherance in learning"[4] – in divinity one may suppose – to place his son Thomas in Oxford, where after two years he fell in love with a young girl called Elizabeth to whom many years later he dedicated a charming poem:

> For one, who knew with what chaste warmth you burn'd,
> Had blabb'd the secret of my love return'd,
> Then the duenna and the guarded door
> Baffled the stars, and bade us meet no more.[5]

Thomas was recalled by his father from Oxford to London and put to legal studies at New Inn – one of the Inns of Chancery attached to the Middle Temple. In 1496, he was entered by his father at Lincoln's Inn; and after what we may assume was a brilliant course, he was called to the Bar in 1501, and immediately appointed Reader in Law at one of the lesser Inns of Chancery, namely Furnivall's Inn, which occupied the site now owned by the Prudential Assurance Company in Holborn.

Thomas More was now of age. His mature life exhibits a rhythm which is worthy of remark. After he came of age, he spent three or four years living without vow with the monks of the Charterhouse, testing his vocation. From the cell in the Charterhouse his life moves outward to a family home at Bucklersbury and afterwards at Chelsea. In the course of years, without any ambition on his part, his life moves outward once more to the King's Court where, after filling a series of high offices, he was appointed in 1529 to the dignity of Lord High Chancellor. In 1532, on the day after the English bishops had given way before the King, Sir Thomas More (who had meantime been knighted) resigned his office as Lord Chancellor, and the rhythm of his life, now in reverse, takes him from the King's Court back to the family home at Chelsea; and once more, in 1534, on his refusal to take the oath which he was summoned to take at Lambeth, he moves from his home to a cell in the Tower of London, where he was to end his days as a contemplative, in preparation for martyrdom.

Having modestly decided in the Charter-

[1] ROPER, LIFE OF SIR THOMAS MORE 5 (Singer-Gollancz ed. 1903).

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Reed, *Young More,* UNDER GOD AND THE LAW 5 (Oxford 1949).

[4] ROPER, *op. cit. supra* note 1, at 5.

[5] REYNOLDS, SAINT THOMAS MORE 35 (1953).

house that he would prefer to be "a chaste husband rather than a Priest impure"[6] he abandoned his life with the Carthusians (taking with him, however, the English style he had learned in reading and in copying the works of the English mystic, Walter Hilton), and within a little time he married a young girl, Jane Colt, of Netherhall, near Roydon, in the County of Essex. With his wife Jane, he made his home at The Barge, Bucklersbury, in the heart of London (at no distance from the Mansion House), on a street which, as we know from Shakespeare in *The Merry Wives,*[7] was a centre for herbalists and apothecaries. Here in the parish of St. Stephen, Walbrook, during little more than six years of married life, were born four children; Margaret, Elizabeth, Cecily and John.

In 1504, shortly before his marriage, as a burgess in Parliament, young More, "a beardless boy," had opposed a grant of monies to Henry VII and had "disappointed all his purpose."[8] The indignant monarch at once devised a causeless quarrel with John More, keeping him in the Tower until he paid a fine of £100. In 1508, Thomas More, now anxious about his future (Henry VII being still alive), paid a visit to Paris and Louvain, having half a mind to emigrate. Soon after his return to London in 1509, Henry VII died, and the sense of

[6] *Id.* at 43.

[7] Act III, scene 3, line 69.

[8] ROPER, LIFE OF SIR THOMAS MORE 7 (Singer-Gollancz ed. 1903).

Courtesy of the British Travel Association.

Houses of Parliament.

relief of young More is expressed in the congratulatory ode he addressed to the young King, Henry VIII, and his Queen, Catherine of Aragon, on their coronation.

The freedom of the Mercers' Company, the premier company of the City of London, had just been granted at his own request, to young More "by the whole company to have it frank and free."[9] The Hall of the Mercers was the headquarters of the Merchant Adventurers, a body of overseas traders, which included drapers, grocers and haberdashers, who "haunted" the quarterly fairs in the Netherlands. At this time the Merchant Adventurers were boycotting the markets of Antwerp, and they nominated young More to organise and direct a conference to be convened by the Mayor with a view to negotiating a settlement with the Pensionary of Antwerp. More conducted the proceedings in Latin, and after a whole week of discussion, the parties reached an agreement. Early in the next year, 1510, young More was chosen to represent the City of London in Parliament, in the room of James Yarford, a mercer, who had resigned on becoming an alderman. In September 1510, More was appointed an Under-Sheriff for the City of London, and held that office until 1518 when he was forced to enter the King's service. As Under-Sheriff he had certain judicial duties to perform, and also acted as adviser to the City in legal matters and in matters of public health and sanitary reform. Thus on one occasion, he was appointed with aldermen and bakers ". . . to go to the kynges Counsell to knowe their pleasure for Bysket etc. for the kyng. . . ."[10]

Another time the records tell us he was employed on business for the fishmongers, and for the staplers also.

In the high summer of 1511 his wife Jane died, leaving him with four young children under the age of six years. He had already been appointed Autumn Reader at Lincoln's Inn, and was immersed in legal work in the City and elsewhere. In the autumn he married, "for the ruling and governing of his children, house and family,"[11] Dame Alice Middleton, a widow and "a stout master woman." The crowded activities of More in the City in the following years are recorded in the journal of the Court of Common Council and in the Letter Book in the City Records. In January 1513, young More with others, interviewed the King's Council in divers causes; in September 1513 he was put in charge and care of London Bridge. In 1514 he was appointed one of the Commissioners of Sewers along Thames Bank between East Greenwich and Lambeth. (In the same year he was admitted to the Society of Advocates or Doctors of Civil Law which afterwards came to be known as Doctors' Commons, though according to Maitland, he never had more than a nodding acquaintance with the Roman Civil Law).

In January 1515 young More was orator for the City at the reception of the new Venetian Ambassador, Sebastian Giustinian. Some weeks later he discharged the high office of Lent Reader at Lincoln's Inn. In the beginning of May, 1515, he was granted leave from his duties as Under-Sheriff to go "on the kinges ambasset"[12] to Flanders, with liberty to appoint a sufficient deputy to his room and office until he re-

[9] REYNOLDS, SAINT THOMAS MORE 73 (1953).

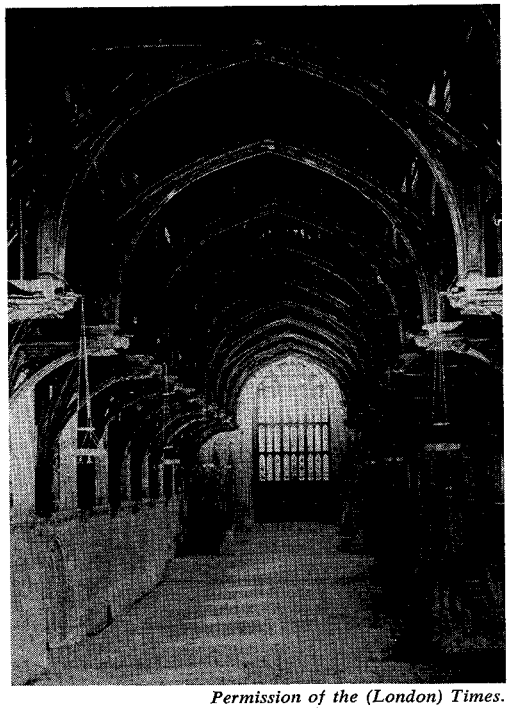
[10] HARPSFIELD, THE LIFE AND DEATH OF SIR THOMAS MORE 312 (Hitchcock & Chambers ed. 1932).

[11] REYNOLDS, *op. cit. supra* note 9, at 78.

[12] CHAMBERS, THOMAS MORE 118 (London 1935).

turned. On this embassy to the Low Countries the *Utopia,* or rather one book of the *Utopia,* was written. In the introductory letter to Peter Giles he gives a description of his daily round in London during these years:

> Whiles I doo dayelie bestowe my time aboute lawe matters: some to pleade, some to heare, some as an arbitratoure with myne awarde to determine, some as an umpier or a Judge, with my sentence finallye to discusse. Whiles I go one waye to see and visite my frende: another waye about myne owne privat affaires. Whiles I spende almost al the day abrode emonges other, and the residue at home among mine owne: I leave to my self, I meane to my booke no time. For when I am come home, I must commen with my wife, chatte with my children, and talke with my servauntes. All the whiche thinges I reckon and accompte amonge businesse, forasmuche as they muste of necessitie be done: and done muste they nedes be, onelesse a man wyll be straunger in his owne house. And in any wyse a man muste so fashyon and order hys conditions, and so appoint and dispose him selfe, that he be merie, jocunde, and pleasaunt amonge them, whom eyther nature hathe provided, or chaunce hath made, or he hym selfe hath chosen to be the felowes, and companyons, of hys life: so that with to muche gentle behavioure and familiaritie, he does not marre them, and by to muche sufferaunce of his servauntes, make them his maysters. Emonge these thynges now rehearsed, stealeth awaye the daye, the moneth, the yeare. When do I write then? And all this while have I spoken no worde of slepe, neyther yet of meate, which emong a great number doth wast no lesse tyme than doeth slepe, wherein almoste halfe the life tyme of man crepeth awaye. I therefore do wynne and get onelye that tyme, whiche I steale from slepe and meate. Whiche tyme because it is very litle, and yet somwhat it is, therefore have I ones at the laste, thoughe it be longe first, finished Utopia, and have sent it to you, frende Peter, to reade and peruse.[13]



Permission of the (London) Times.
Westminster Hall, After Restoration.

In *Utopia,* More advocates a complete system of health reform greatly in advance of his time and many social reforms also.

In the year 1517, there happened in London an outbreak of lawlessness directed against foreigners which is known to history as the Ill May Day. Rumours that some kind of demonstration was being planned reached the Council, and a warning was sent to the Mayor through the Recorder and the Under-Sheriff that householders should remain indoors from the eve of May Day until an early hour the next morning. On the arrest of some apprentices for disobeying the order, a cry of "Prentices and Clubs" was raised; and out of every door came into Cheapside serving men and maids and watermen.

There met with them Sir Thomas More

[13] MORE, UTOPIA 13 (Bohn ed. 1910).

and others, desiring them to go to their lodgings. . . . Then a sergeant-of-arms . . . who was there with Master More entreating them, being sore hurt . . . , cried "Down with them!" Then all the misruled persons ran to the doors and windows . . . and spoiled all that they found, and cast it into the street.[14]

In the Elizabethan play entitled *The Boke of Sir Thomas More,*[15] in a scene of three pages which are now believed to be in the autograph of Shakespeare, More is represented as succeeding in his efforts to quiet the rioters:

Lincoln Nay this [is] a sound fellow, I tell you; let's mark him.

More Let me set up before your thoughts, good friends,
One supposition, which if you will mark,
You shall perceive how horrible a shape
Your innovation bears; first, 'tis a sin
Which oft th' apostle did forwarn us of,
Urging obedience to authority; . . . . . .What do you, then,
Rising 'gainst him that God himself enstalls
But rise 'gainst God? What do you to your souls,
In doing this? O, desperate as you are,
Wash your foul minds with tears, and those same hands,
That you, like rebels, lift against the peace,
Lift up for peace: and your unreverent knees
Make them your feet, to kneel to be forgiven.[16]

On 12th May, 1517, the City Records state that young More was one of a commission appointed

to go to the kinges grace and to know his plesure when the Mayor and aldermen and diverse of the Substancyall Comeners of this Citie shall sue to beseche his grace to be good and gracious lord un to theym and to accept theym nowe beying most Sorowfull and hevye for thees late Attemptates doon ageynst their wylles; and also to fele my lord Cardynalles mynde concernyng the nombre of persones that shall cume to the kinges grace for the seyd Sute to be made.

In July of the same year (1517) young More was appointed with the Recorder of London to arbitrate between the parishioners of St. Vedast and the Fellowship of Saddlers; in the following month he was appointed to supervise the health measures to be taken in an emergency arising from a virulent outbreak of sweating sickness and the plague. He instituted a method of notification of the disease and segregation of the victims. "The more one reads . . . ," says Sir Arthur MacNalty (sometime Chief Medical Officer to the Ministry of Health in London), "the more one marvels at his wisdom and his outlook upon hygiene and public health."[17] That he was a consistent protagonist of hospital reform appears from the scheme set forth in the *Utopia.* Sir Arthur adds:

Had England then been ruled by an enlightened monarch, . . . public health reform would have been inaugurated on wise lines in the sixteenth century, for Sir Thomas had the root of the matter in him.[18]

In the autumn of 1517 More accompanied an English mission to Calais to negotiate with French merchants in a trade dispute. In 1518 he was Orator for the mayor and aldermen at the reception given by the City of London to Cardinal Campeggio when he came to win support for the Pope's proposed crusade against the Turks.

In July 1518 More surrendered the office

[14] REYNOLDS, SAINT THOMAS MORE 127-28 (1953).

[15] SCHELLING & BLACK, TYPICAL ELIZABETHAN PLAYS 1001 (1949).

[16] *Id.* at 1007.

[17] MacNalty, *Sir Thomas More as a Public Health Reformer*, 158 NATURE 732, 734 (1946).

[18] *Id.* at 735.

of Under-Treasurer, being *forced* (it is his own word) to enter into the service of the King. Many times, in conversation and in correspondence, he records that he always bore in mind the most godly words that the King spoke to him at his first coming into his noble service, willing him to look "firste uppon God and nexte uppon the Kinge."[19]

The appointment of More in 1518 to the King's Court, and his resignation from the office of Under-Treasurer formally marks the end of his official connection with the City of London. But it did not end the exchange of courtesies and good offices on the part of the former Under-Sheriff. In 1520 he begged the Court of Aldermen for the reversion of a certain office for one Richard Staverton who had married his sister. In 1521 the Under-Sheriffs were told to present to the King's Council, and especially to Mr. More, two officials who were ordered to appear before the council to be censured. On at least two occasions in 1521 More was present at the Court of Aldermen at a time when the King was displeased with divers persons in the City, and it was suggested that all the harness of the City should be brought to certain places there to pacify and please the King. In 1522 the records show that the next reversion to a clerkship in the Mayor's Court was promised to one of the attorneys of the Sheriff's Court at the request of Sir Thomas More, Under-Treasurer of England, "a special lover and friend in the business and causes of the City." At a later date Sir Thomas More as Under-Treasurer required the Mayor and Aldermen to search for and imprison Frenchmen and attach their goods. In November 1522 the City Records show that it was agreed that Sir Thomas More, Under-Treasurer of England, for the labour and pains that he took for the City in making a speech at the coming and receiving of the Emperor's Grace to the City, should have towards a gown of velvet the sum of ten pounds.[20] Under another date is a record of the exhibition by Sir Thomas More to the Court of Aldermen of the King's letter about the exercising of physic in the City. There is also an entry in the City Records of his acting as arbitrator in the case of *Coke v. the City* touching the setting up of mills on the Thames.

In 1529 the City Fathers decided that Sir Thomas More, now Lord Chancellor, should have a tun of good red claret wine. In 1530 there is a record of another gift of a tun of good red wine at Christmas.

In 1524 Thomas More, having sold the lease of Crosby Place in Bishopsgate to his friend Antonio Bonvisi, transferred his home to Chelsea. It was to this home that his wife Alice More referred years later in the Tower when she reproached Sir Thomas with being content to

> . . . so play the fool to lie here in this close filthy prison, . . . shut up among mice and rats, when you might be abroad at your liberty, with the favour and good will both of the king and his council, if you would but do as all the bishops and best learned of this realm have done. And seeing you have at Chelsea a right fair house, your library, your gallery, your garden, your orchard, and all other necessaries so handsome about you, where you might in the company of me your wife, your children, and household, be merry. I muse what a God's name you mean here still thus fondly to tarry.[21]

After he had quietly heard her, with a

[19] ROGERS, THE CORRESPONDENCE OF SIR THOMAS MORE 557 (1947).

[20] REYNOLDS, SAINT THOMAS MORE 174 (1953).

[21] ROPER, LIFE OF SIR THOMAS MORE 81-82 (Singer-Gollancz ed. 1903).

cheerful countenance (we are told) he said to her, "Is not this house [that is, the cell in the Tower] as nigh heaven as mine own?"[22]

On 1st July 1535, Sir Thomas More was tried for treason, the first count in the indictment being that he maliciously kept silence *(maliciose poenitas silebat)* when asked whether he accepted and reputed the King as the Supreme Head on earth of the Church in England, answering only in the English tongue,

> I will not meddle with any such matters, for I am fully determined to serve God, and to think upon His passion and my passage out of this world.[23]

On this charge he was found guilty of treason by the Court and the jury; guilty, that is to say, not of silence, for as he, following Thomas Aquinas and Christopher St. Germaine, told his judges, no human court has jurisdiction to try the silences and secrets of the mind; guilty of treason therefore for the words that were included in the indictment,

> I will not meddle with any such matters, for I am fully determined to serve God, and to think upon His passion and my passage out of this world.

According to the record of the court Sir Thomas More was found guilty of treason for saying that he was determined to serve God and think upon His Passion.

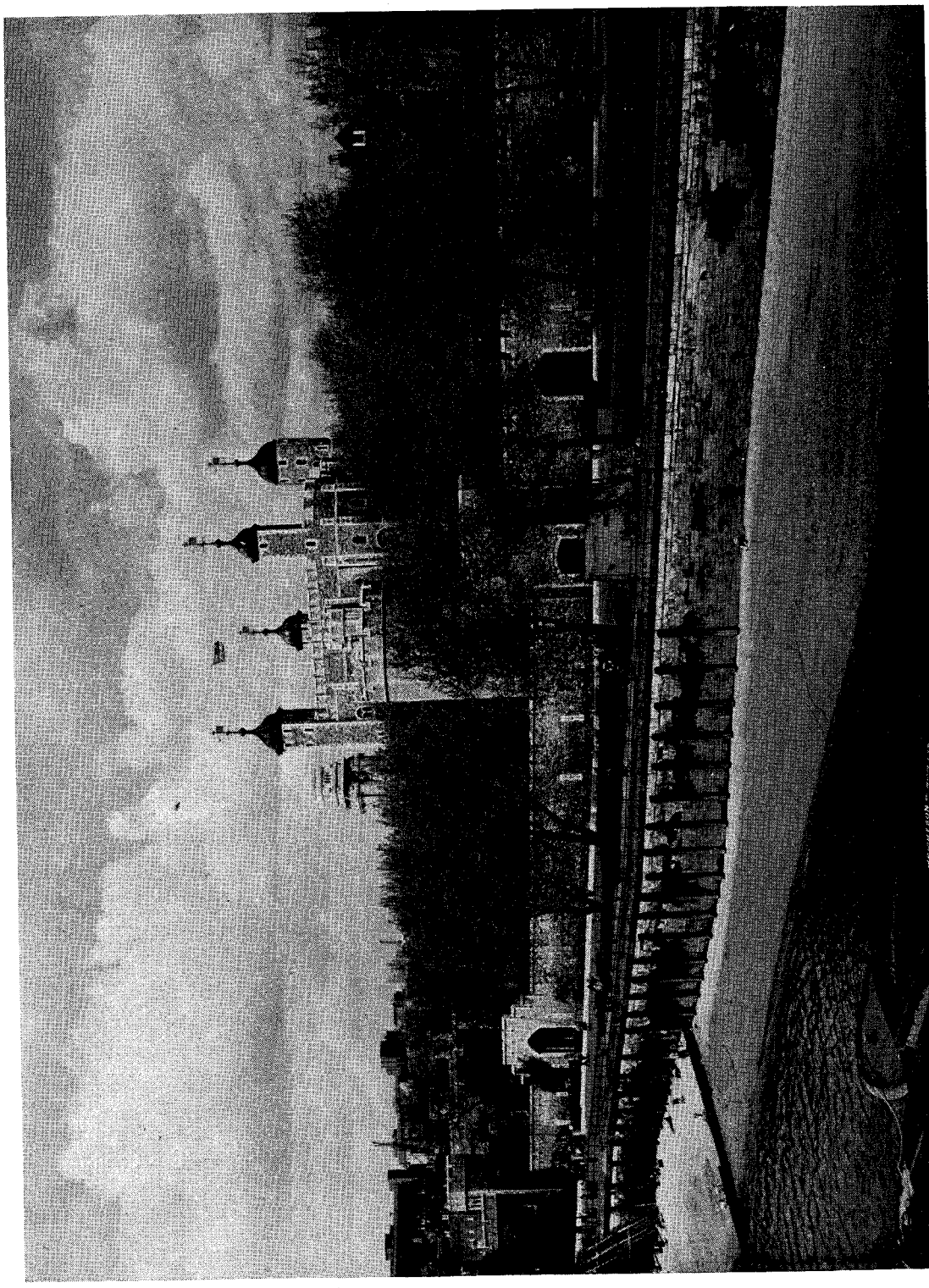
On 6th July many people of the London which he loved waited in sad and respectful silence as he was led out to the place of execution on Tower Hill. A woman offered him a cup of wine which he put aside with a word, "My master had easell and gall, not wine, given him to drink."[24] To a man who had come all the way from Winchester he spoke words of comfort, "Go thy way in peace and pray for me, and I will not fail to pray for thee."[25] A second London woman, if we are to believe the tradition that is recorded by Shakespeare, spoke to him out of the crowd:

> "Ah, gentle heart, my soul for thee is sad,
> Farewell, the best friend that the poor e'er had."[26]

Of his own household, Margaret Clement was there, and in the background Margaret Roper and Dorothy Colly waited afar off like the faithful women at another Death. They were, as we know, intending to buy a winding sheet and to bury his body in the Chapel of St. Peter ad Vincula in the Tower. And at the last, on that little hill by the Tower of London, obedient to the message from the King that he was not to use many words, he spoke few words only. He asked the bystanders to pray for him in this world and promised that he would pray for them elsewhere. And he begged them earnestly to pray for the King that it might please God to give him good counsel, protesting that he died "the King's good servant but God's first."[27]

It was a message to the citizens of London standing there and to the citizens of all the world, ". . . the most weighty and the most haughty [words] ever spoken on the scaffold."[28] It was a special message also for the conscience of the King spoken by one who was to die as a traitor, reminding him of the promise taken and given long ago at his first entry into the King's most noble service, "willing him first to look unto God and after God unto the King."

[22] *Id.* at 82.
[23] CHAMBERS, THOMAS MORE 336 (London 1935).
[24] *Id.* at 348.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] *Id.* at 47.
[27] REYNOLDS, SAINT THOMAS MORE 359 (1953).
[28] CHAMBERS, THOMAS MORE 350 (London 1935).



Courtesy of the British Travel Association.

Tower of London.