

Thomas More's Prayer Book

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BOOK NOTE

THOMAS MORE'S PRAYER BOOK. Yale University Press, 1969. 206 pages, \$12.50.

Being a companion volume to the Yale Edition of the complete Works of St. Thomas More.

This is not an attempt to review the book, which would lead into fields beyond the competency of the writer of this "Book Note." Indeed, the best introduction to the book is that which appears in the book itself, written by Mr. Martz and Mr. Sylvester, both professors of English at Yale, and chairman and executive director, respectively, of the Yale Edition of the Works of St. Thomas More. They provided the transcriptions and translations of the "marginalia."

Their introduction reads:

"The facsimile pages presented in this volume contain materials which are of the greatest significance for the student of the life and works of St. Thomas More. What we have called 'Thomas More's Prayer Book' is actually two printed books, a Latin Book of Hours and a liturgical Latin Psalter, which are bound together as a single volume now preserved in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University. This volume was in Thomas More's possession while he was a prisoner in the Tower of London (April 17, 1534-July 6, 1535). In the upper and lower margins of 19 pages in the Book of Hours More wrote an English prayer which has long been known as 'A Godly Meditation,' the title given it by his nephew, William Rastell, when he first published it in the 1557 edition of More's English

Works. Often reprinted, and frequently quoted, the 'Godly Meditation,' is justly famous; its lines are resonant with More's intense spirituality as he pondered the death which he knew awaited him, and yet they reflect, deeply and poignantly, the lot of any Christian as he endeavors 'to walk the narrow way.'

"The second item in More's prayer book, his liturgical Psalter, gives us a broader, and perhaps ultimately a deeper, insight into the state of his mind during the period of his imprisonment. In its margins More wrote about 150 notes, each of them carefully related to the verses of the psalms next to which they appear. His annotations reflect his personal griefs and fears as he prayed his Psalter and strove to comfort his soul. Moreover, many of them relate closely to the central situation of his Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation, the best of More's English works, which, all the evidence indicates, he composed in the Tower."

There are chapters on "Bibliographical Descriptions," "Books of Hours and Psalters," "The Marginalia," "The Facsimile Pages," "Transcription and Translation," and "Rastell's 1557 Text of More's English Prayer"; and 12 illustrations.

This book should be a treasured possession for lawyers, book lovers, and libraries.

John B. Gest