

The Catholic Lawyer

Volume 17
Number 4 *Volume 17, Autumn 1971, Number 4*

Article 5

March 2017

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SIR THOMAS MORE

by HOLBEIN*

The subject is seen to below the waist, seated, turned nearly three-quarters right, his eyes looking right. His left thumb is passed through his belt, and he holds a folded paper in his right hand; on his index finger (left hand) a chased gold ring, set with a flat bloodstone. His short-sleeved, dark olive green velvet cloak is fur-lined and has a deep sable collar, over which he wears a heavy gold SS collar, ending in portcullises at the clasp and carrying, as a pendant, the York and Tudor rose. The sleeves of his doublet, puffed above the elbows, are shot black and vermilion. His white shirt shows at throat and wrists. His cap is black, his hair dark brown interspersed with a few gray hairs. The curtain, draped back to the left behind him, is emerald green, its fringe brown and gold. A ruby red cord, fastened in the upper right corner, is stretched across the curtain above his head and falls behind his left arm, cutting the light stone gray background. On the bench-end, or low table, under his right arm, the date •M•D•XXVII•. (Oil, on wood, 28 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{1}{4}$ ins.)

Though we cannot now be certain of the exact sequence in which the varied commissions that Holbein received from Thomas More were executed, this panel which bears the date 1527 is generally believed to be Holbein's earliest surviving portrait of Thomas. (See I CHAMBERLAIN, HOLBEIN 303.)

Two Holbein drawings related to the present portrait are in the Royal Library, at Windsor, England. One, in black chalk, colored crayons, and water-color, on white paper (15 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ ins.), has at the top, in old script, "Sir Thomas More."

The other, in black and colored chalks (16 x 12 ins.) and bearing a later inscription, "Tho: Moor Ld Chancelour," has been pricked for transfer, and has been thought by some to be the drawing Holbein actually used in painting this portrait. It was engraved by Bartolozzi

* Reprinted from 2 CATHOLIC LAWYER 121 (April, 1956).



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for Chamberlain [FACSIMILES OF ORIGINAL DRAWINGS BY HANS HOLBEIN (Plate XLVIII)] and has been frequently reproduced.

Both these drawings are so near the present portrait that no one can say with certainty which is the more directly connected with it. Holbein may have used either, or perhaps both, since the hair on the left of one and on the right of the other shows the arrangement found in this panel. It is also quite conceivable that the original study for our picture no longer exists and that both Windsor drawings may be part of Holbein's preparatory work for More's head in his group of More's family which may have been completed after this panel.

Collections:

1. Possibly Henry VIII's.
2. Almost certainly that of the Duc

d'Orléans, in which case, according to Stryrinski, [LA GALERIE DU REGENT, PHILIPPE, DUC D'ORLEANS, pp. 123-25, 192 (1913)], it would come from the collection of Queen Christine of Sweden and would be the picture which is mentioned in the Orléans inventories of 1752 and 1785.

3. A similar portrait figured as an item in a London sale in 1827 by the Duke of Bedford.

4. I. M. Hade of Chatham, England(?).

5. Chamberlain (I HOLBEIN 303) says that the London dealer, Farrar or Farrer, bought the picture from an Irish family and sold it to Henry Huth in whose possession it was as early as 1866.

6. It was purchased by Henry Clay Frick in 1912.