

BLACKFRIARS

in Plato and the classics) took as his theme the maxims of Natural Law; because he has left a loop-hole for his *laissez-faire* devotees. But a theologian will not let these complacent people escape far—aware (as More himself) that Nature is worked upon, not antagonized by Grace. The argument is implicit in the *Utopia* (without even adverting to Monastic Communism or the Apostolic Socialism of the Acts).

In September, 1933 (cf. BLACKFRIARS Editorial for that month), the late Father Bede Jarrett predicted that it would not be long before Moscow would learn from Rome and Bolsheviks seek reinstatement in the one, transcendent comity of nations. Who dare say that it may not be through him—and through his prayers—at whose feet they sit, the author of the *Utopia*, who died rather than deny a principle which would unite us all in the One True Commune upon Earth?

J. F. T. PRINCE.

ST. THOMAS MORE: A LAST WORD

“FIRST to respect and regard God and afterwards the King, thy master.”

This “notable and woorthye lesson and charge” was the first instruction given by Henry VIII to Thomas More on the first entry of the latter into the King’s service. The occasion of this entry has a certain historical interest and significance. It happened after the decision of a legal dispute between the Pope and the King concerning a ship belonging to the Pope which the King claimed as forfeit.

“There chaunced a great shippe of his that then was Pope to arriue at Southampton, the which the King claymed as a forfeiture. Wherevpon the popes ambassadour, then resident in the Realme, vpon sute obteyned of the King that he might retaine for his master some Consailers learned in the lawes of the Realme, and that in his owne presence (him selfe being a singuler Ciuilian) the matter might in some

publike place be openly heard, debated and discoursed. Among all the lawyers, no one could be founde so apte and meete as *Master More*, as one that was able to report to the *Ambassadour* all the reasons and argumentes on both sides proposed and alleaged. Vpon this the Counsailers of either partie, in the presence of the *Lorde Chauncellour* and other the *Judges* in the *Starre chamber*, had audience accordinglye. At what time *Master More* was not onely a bare reporter to the *Ambassadour*, but argued himselfe also so learnedly and so substantially that he recovered and wonne to the pope the saide forfeiture, and to himselfe high commendation and renowne."

After this manifestation of *More's* ability and power the King insisted that he leave his office of undersheriff in the city and enter into the royal service.

And the instruction that the King gave to *More*, that in all his doings and affairs touching the King he should first respect and regard God and afterward the King his master, appears to have been understood by *More* not as a mere pious phrase but as an undertaking that he should always have freedom of conscience. Some ten years later when *More* was now Lord Chancellor the King approached him and invited him to weigh and consider the great matter of his marriage: upon which, we are told, the Lord Chancellor falling down upon his knees humbly besought His Highness "to stand his gracious Sovereign as he ever since his entry first into his Grace's service had found him, saying there was nothing in the world that had been so grievous unto his heart as to remember that he was not able, as he willingly would with the loss of one of his limbs, for that matter anything to find whereby he could with his conscience safely serve His Grace's contention: as he alway bare in mind the most godly word that His Highness spake unto him at his first coming into his noble service, the most virtuous lesson that ever Prince taught his servant, willing him first to look unto God, and after God unto him, as in good faith he said he did, or else might His Grace well account him his most unworthy servant." To which the King answered that if *More* could not in this matter with his conscience

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serve him he was content to accept his service otherwise; and would nevertheless continue his gracious favour towards him and never with that matter molest his conscience further.

After he had ceased to be Lord Chancellor and when he was now suffering imprisonment in the Tower, More refers (in the letters which have survived) no less than three times to this instruction and undertaking of the King; once in a letter to the King's secretary Thomas Cromwell; once in a letter to his fellow sufferer Dr. Wilson; and once (towards the end) in a letter to his daughter Margaret Roper.

At the last, even on the morning of his execution, an old friend of More, Sir Thomas Pope, arrived with a message from the King that he must die that day before 9 o'clock. More thanked his friend for the news he brought and expressed his gratitude to the King for placing him where he had had so much leisure to prepare for his last end. "And so, God help me, am I bounden unto His Highness most of all that it pleaseth him so shortly to rid me from the miseries of this wretched world and therefore will I not fail earnestly to pray for His Grace both here and also in the world to come."

"The King's pleasure is further," said the royal messenger, "that at your execution you shall be brief and shall not use many words."

Even at the last the King's command would be obeyed. His last words would be not to the people but to the King. He would speak a word that the King would recall and understand. He asked the people simply to pray for him as he would pray for them in the next world. And he asked them to pray to God to give the King good counsel. And he added this word which would convey to Henry that in all things he had obeyed the instruction of His Majesty:

"I call you to witness, brothers, that I die in and for the Faith of the Catholic Church, the King's loyal servant, but God's first."

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