



expression of a deep religious conviction.

We think of him as the centre of a host of friends, but we must also see him as one who deliberately chose to tread the last stage of his life's journey alone. Once he had resolved to serve God rather than the king, he kept silent. Neither his family, not even his beloved daughter Margaret, nor his closest friends were allowed to break the privacy of his conscience. He would not implicate them in the consequences that he knew would follow his decision. He could quite easily have formed a party in the State, and perhaps have shaken the throne; but his sense of duty to the king forbade that. So he went forward alone, this man of a host of friends. They were as bewildered as his own wife and children were. Nor were they at his trial and execution; that was probably at his wish, but we recall how grateful he was that they were allowed to be "at my burial".

So we get this great contrast: a life filled with friends; a death on the scaffold without a friend at his side - alone.

In the centuries that have followed his martyrdom, his friends have multiplied a thousandfold. They began to gather as soon as his head was displayed on London Bridge, and in the reign of Elizabeth, Anne Boleyn's daughter, a group of playwrights, perhaps Shakespeare among them, wrote a drama they were not allowed to act. His memory fortified the martyrs who followed in his steps. They knew, as we know, but as his own friends did not understand at the time, why he chose death rather than life. Listen to the words of St Robert Bellarmine; he was writing in 1607 to an English priest who was prepared to take an oath of allegiance to James I:

"Neither can you be ignorant that those

most holy and learned men, John, Bishop of Rochester, and Thomas More, within our memory, for this one and weighty point of doctrine, the Primacy of the Apostolic See, led the way to martyrdom to many others, to the exceeding glory of the English nation".

So we too can join that great host of friends of Saint Thomas More, surely the most beloved of the laymen saints.

(Message sent to the Founder Members by President E.E. Reynolds, and read by the Vice-Chairman in the Town-Hall of Brussels, on December 29, 1962).