

THOMAS MORE AND THE *IMITATIO CHRISTI*.*Moreana*, no. 21 (Feb. 1969)

The latest Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, (fifth series, vol. 18), published in September 1968, carries an article – in fact the Alexander Prize Essay of 1967 – by Dr Roger Lovatt on “The *Imitatio of Christ* in Late Medieval England”, p. 97-121, in which he shows that by the death of More, the *Imitatio*, popular on the Continent, had scarcely penetrated England: out of a total of more than 800 extant manuscripts, less than 20 are of English origin.

Dr Lovatt begins his article thus: “In a well-known passage at the conclusion of his preface to the *Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer* Thomas More expressed his fears about the possible effect of the public controversy in which he was then engaged... It was inappropriate, More suggested, for the “people unlearned” to be concerned with “what may well be answered unto heretiques”; rather they should occupy themselves “beside their other business in praier good meditation, and reading of such englishe bookes as moste may noryshe and encrease devocion. Of which kind is Bonaventure of the lyfe of Christ, Gerson of the folowing of Christ and the devoute contemplative booke of Scala perfectionis wyth such other lyke”.

More’s choice of these three devotional treatise as more suitable reading for the normal, literate layman than theological polemic provides a revealing insight into his deeply conservative cast of mind... More’s second recommendation, “Gerson of the folowing of Christ”, also involves a mis-attribution. Since 1483, when the name of Gerson had appeared on the title page of the great Venetian edition of the *Imitatio Christi*, this attribution had secured extensive acceptance and there can be no doubt that More is here referring to the *Imitatio*.”

A. J. Stacpoole