

THOMAS MORE AT OXFORD<sup>1</sup>

More's early biographers<sup>2</sup> tell us little about his days as a student at Oxford. They all agree that Archbishop Morton, in whose household he spent a period of his boyhood, was to some degree responsible for his being placed at Oxford, and Stapleton adds: "[Cardinal Morton] sent him to Oxford, continuing there to support him"<sup>3</sup>. The year 1492 seems the most probable date for his 'going up'<sup>4</sup>, counting from earlier dates and from the knowledge that "a sore plague visited the University"<sup>5</sup> in 1493. During this pestilence, "those of the Colleges for the most part retired to their houses in the country"<sup>6</sup> and More refers to this migration when he says "... as an old wife of Culnam did once among the scholars of Oxford that sojourned with her for death [i.e. because of the plague]"<sup>7</sup>. His undergraduate days probably lasted less than

1. My thanks are due to Dr. M. Winterbottom of Worcester College, Oxford, who made some useful suggestions.

For some sources see: R.W. Gibson, *A Preliminary Bibliography*, Yale, 1961; F. and M.P. Sullivan, *Moreana (Material for the Study of St Thomas More)*, Los Angeles, 1964-68.

2. Cf. Roper, *Life of More*. ed. E.V. Hitchcock, London (EETS) 1935: p.5; Harpsfield, *Life and Death of Sir Thomas More*, ed. E.V. Hitchcock (intro. by R.W. Chambers), London (EETS) 1932, p. 12; Stapleton, *Vita Thomae Mori (in Tres Thomae) Douay*, 1588: pp. 11-12; 'Ro. Ba', *The Lyfe of Syr Thomas More*, ed. E.V. Hitchcock & P.E. Hallett, London (EETS) 1950, pp. 21, 93; Cresacre More, *Sir Thomas More (by M.T.M.)*, (1630) Scolar Press facsim., 1971: pp. 20-21. Early spelling has been modernised throughout.

3. "Cardinalis Mortonus ... eum ... Oxonii aliquo tempore aluit", Stapleton, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14. English trans. by P.E. Hallett (ed. E.E. Reynolds) London, 1966: p. 4.

4. Cf. F. Sullivan, *T.L.S.*, LVII (1958), p. 751, "the date rests on scholarly conjecture"; cf. also *Richard III* (C.W. 2) ed. R.S. Sylvester, Yale, 1963: p. lxxi. No help is to be had from the University Register as the relevant years have been lost (see *Register of the University of Oxford*, ed. C.W. Boarse, Oxford, 1885: Vol. 1, p.v.)

5. A. Wood, *History ... of Oxford* (ed. 1792) pp. 650-51. Cf. C.M. Neale, borrowing from Wood, in a MS. in the Bodleian Library (MS. Top Oxon. c. 251) 1917: "From the beginning of April till June 24 Oxford was visited with 'a sore plague'. Many clerks and laics died. Members of the colleges mostly retired to their houses in the country: for example Magdalen men went to Brackley, Oriol to St Bartholomew's; but Merton went to Islip instead of Cuxham, their usual place." He also refers to More being in Oxford "circa 1492", *ibid.*

6. A. Wood, *loc. cit.*

7. *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* (C.W. 8) ed. Schuster, Marius, Lusardi, Schoeck; Yale, 1973: Book iv, p. 477. For Culnam (Culham?) see note in Yale ed., p. 1599. More is here undoubtedly referring to his own experience.

two years<sup>8</sup>, and he was removed from the university by his father who wished him to follow in his own footsteps and study law at New Inn. This, then, brings us to 1494. He was certainly not a student at Oxford when Erasmus spent a few weeks there in 1499<sup>9</sup>.

More would be about fourteen years old when Morton "caused this youth to be sent to Oxford" ('Ro. Ba.') and, according to Cresacre More, "placed him in Canterbury College, now called Christ Church"<sup>10</sup>. In 1652 there appeared a biography<sup>11</sup> by John Hoddesdon which repeats Cresacre More on Canterbury College, being entirely drawn from Cresacre and from Stapleton. The three great modern biographers, whilst acknowledging the existence of other claimants, support the evidence of Cresacre concerning the college<sup>12</sup>. After its foundation in 1363 and subsequent turmoil, Canterbury College settled down as a monastic institute, dependent upon the Cathedral Priory of Christ Church, Canterbury. It comprised a Warden and Fellows, who were monks of Christ Church, five secular scholars, known as the *pueri collegii*, a manciple and a cook, while a varying number of 'sojourners', both religious and lay, lodged in the college but were not members of the official foundation<sup>13</sup>. Now the college has disappeared, but its name is preserved in the Canterbury Quad of Christ Church, which occupies its site.

Tradition regards this as More's college. And yet in certain early University histories another establishment is frequently mentioned in connection with More's Oxford days. The earliest of these is quite specific, "... haec sunt praeclara Thomae Mori gesta, Oxoniensis quondam alumni .. in aula S. Mariae ... educati"

8. Harpsfield, *op. cit.*, p. 12: "... for the short time of his abode (being not fully two years)..."

9. For the misconception cf. A. Cayley, *Memoirs of Sir Thomas More*, London, 1808: vol. 1, p. 16 (cites Jortin as his source: cf. J. Jortin, *The Life of Erasmus*, London, 1758, p. 11). See also my note (24).

10. Cresacre More, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

11. John Hoddesdon, *Tho. Mori Vita et Exitus*, London, 1652: p. 3.

12. Cf. T.E. Bridgett, *Life and Writings of Blessed Thomas More*, London, 1891: p. 9; R.W. Chambers, *Thomas More*, London, 1935: p. 65; E.E. Reynolds, *The Field is Won*, London, 1968: pp. 23-4.

13. W.A. Pantin, *Canterbury College, Oxford*, 1950: Vol. 1, p.v. (pref.); Cf. G.C. Brodrick, *A History of the University of Oxford*, London, 1886: pp. 70-1, "[More] deserves to be remembered as the young student of Canterbury College".

(These are the famous deeds of Thomas More, once a student of Oxford, educated at St. Mary's Hall)<sup>14</sup>. St. Mary's Hall had grown up on the corner formed by the High Street and Shidyerd Street<sup>15</sup>, in the old Rectory of St. Mary's Church (which is opposite), when the scholars of Oriel found quarters elsewhere than in their own college<sup>16</sup>. A later Oxford historical study mentions Thomas More as one of St. Mary's Hall's *Viri Clari*<sup>17</sup>. The famous Oxford antiquarian Anthony à Wood quotes a certain Miles Windsor as saying "More had his chamber and studied in the the Hall of St. Mary the Virgin and constant tradition doth say the like and twas never reported to the contrary before these two authors here cited (Tho. More [i.e. actually his brother Cresacre] and J.H. [i.e. John Hoddesdon]) published their respective books"<sup>18</sup>. It is difficult to evaluate the testimony of this Miles Windsor. Twyne styles him "... Antiquae Historiae artifex peritus"<sup>19</sup>, but Wood says "[One volume came into my hands] wherein I find many vain and credulous matters (not all to be relied upon) committed to writing"<sup>20</sup>. Cresacre More had the advantage of being at the centre of the circle of his great-grandfather's descendants ; Miles Windsor's advantage was direct experience of the earlier tradition about St. Mary's Hall<sup>21</sup>. The reasons for Windsor's annoyance are understandable : he presumed that if his tradition was sound, then the Canterbury College tradition was spurious. However, the alternatives, as I hope we shall see, are not mutually exclusive<sup>22</sup>.

14. B. Twyne, *Antiquitatis Acad. Oxon. Apologia*, Oxford, 1608 : pp. 364-65.

15. Cf. C.E. Mallett, *A History of the University of Oxford*, New York, 1923 : Vol. 1, *frontis.*, a map of academeical Oxford c. 1440. Shidyerd Street became St. Mary Lane, which in turn became Oriel Lane (cf. Mallett, p. 263) ; he adds (p. 425), with reference to More's being at Canterbury College, "in the records of Canterbury College in the Chapter Library at Canterbury I have found no proof".

16. The Hall always had close ties with Oriel, indeed it paid rent to Oriel for most of its buildings. Cf. Mallett, *op. cit.*, pp. 263, 266.

17. W. Fulman, *Academiae Oxoniensis Notitia*, Oxford, 1665 : p. 51.

18. A. Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, London, 1691 : Vol. 1, p. 31. Wood claims his source as *Collectaneis quibusdam ad rem Historic. & Antiq. pertinent.*, a MS. which he describes as 'penes me' ('in my possession')

19. B. Twyne, *op. cit.*, bk. 2, sect. 67.

20. A. Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 416.

21. When Wood (*ibid.*) refers to "some late authors" he means writers such as Cresacre More.

22. Cf. J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses 1500-1714*, Oxford, 1891-2, III : p. 1021. Foster says Canterbury College or St. Mary's Hall.

In his introduction to Roper's *Life* Thomas Hearne quotes Wood (v. supra), and adds the following footnote : "I do not doubt but Mr. [Cresacre] More had very good Authority for what he alledged. It is probable he had seen some Papers of his Great Grand-Father to attest the same. Or if not so, I suppose he had his Father's Word for it. It does not follow that he [Thomas] was a Member of St. Mary Hall because he had a Chamber and studied there, any more than that several of Christ-Church as well as Oriel College of the late Years were Members of the same Hall because they had Chambers and followed their studies there - T.H."<sup>23</sup>. It seems that More may have had a room and studied at St. Mary's Hall, but perhaps 'belonged' in some sense to Canterbury College<sup>24</sup>.

What then could More's relationship be towards these two establishments? The 'College' and the 'Hall' differed radically from each other. The *aula* was an academic hall managed by a Principal in a hired house, and approved by the University from year to year. The *collegium*, on the other hand, had a permanent corporate existence, with a common seal, endowments, a Warden, and Fellows. Our information about how the halls of the time operated is scanty<sup>25</sup>, yet I think it is possible to suggest, as Hearne seems partly to have implied, that More officially belonged to Canterbury, because of his ties with Morton, the Archbishop of Canterbury, but lived and studied in St. Mary's Hall. It is worth noting that these two separate institutions were only a stones throw away from each other on the same street<sup>26</sup>. That a student could have some kind of connection with both establishments is exemplified by the Cardinal Morton Scholar of 1508, who was paid a scholarship of twenty shillings, probably by the

23. *Gulielmi Roperi Vita D. Thomae Mori*, ed. Tho. Hearne, 1716 : p. xxix.

24. Cf. A. Cayley, *loc. cit.* There is a confused reference to More's being at St. Mary's Hall in a letter of William King to Swift. This is of little evidence, but it does show the influence of the St. Mary's Hall tradition. (*Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. F. Elrington Bell, London, 1914). But this also includes Erasmus, who was in fact associated with St. Mary's College (sic), a different establishment. But see A. Wood, *History and Antiquities of the Colleges and Halls etc.*, Oxford, 1786 : pp. 670-75.

25. For a brief outline, cf. A. Wood, *Survey of the Antiquities of the City of Oxford etc.*, Oxford, 1889, Vol. 1 : p. 662.

26. Cf. my note (15). In effect, they were as close as are now the back of Christ Church (Canterbury Quad) and that part of Oriel on the High Street (which was St. Mary's Hall).

Warden of Canterbury College, though he lodged elsewhere in a most interesting place. The entry for this payment reads thus : "Soluciones scholasticorum domini cardinalis ... anno regis Henrici septimi vicesimo tercio. - In primis solutum ... (Item) domino Glower in aula sancte Marie moranti - XX s." (Payments to the Lord Cardinal's scholars, twenty-third year of Henry VII's reign - Paid to ... Master Glower, lodging in St. Mary's Hall - 20 shillings)<sup>27</sup>. This scholarship was not founded until after Morton's death (in 1500), but it does show the sort of dual relationship that was possible, and thus gives us an example perhaps not unlike More's own case.

This is not the place to discuss the details of More's Oxford<sup>28</sup>, but it is interesting to see how Oxford life affected him. Most instructive in this regard is his letter of 1518 to Oxford University<sup>29</sup>. He says there that he is loyal friend of the University and would not wish to be regarded as ungrateful ; that the chief reason men go up to Oxford is for a humanistic education ; that Oxford has always outshone Cambridge and that the college endowments are unrivalled by any other university outside the kingdom. In his 1515 letter to Martin Dorp<sup>30</sup>, he had said that he saw no reason why he should not send his own children to Oxford and Cambridge.

More felt the pinch of poverty at Oxford<sup>31</sup>, and later he was to say that if his family's income would not stretch to New Inn fare, "then we will the next year after fall to Oxford fare, where many grave and ancient fathers be continually conversant ; which if our power stretch not to maintain, then may we, like poor scholars of Oxford, go a-begging with our bags and wallets, and sing *Salve Regina* at rich men's doors, where for pity some good folks will give us their merciful charity and so still keep company and be merry together..."<sup>32</sup>. There is perhaps also a reminiscence

27. W. A. Pantin, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 243 (MS. ref : Cart, Ant. 0.138.b.)

28. It is done briefly and brilliantly by R.W. Chambers, *op. cit.*, pp. 386-87. For an interesting, if fanciful, account, see F. Seebohm, *The Oxford Reformers*, London, 1887.

29. Abingdon, 29th March. Cf. *Selected Letters* (trans.) ed. E.F. Rogers, Yale, 1961, p. 94ff.

30. Bruges, 21st October. *Ibid.*, p. 6ff.

31. The examples are many and famous : particularly striking is Stapleton, *op. cit.*, p. 12 "... vt nec ad reficiendos attritos calceos, nisi a patre peteret, pecuniam haberet" (... he had no money even to get his boots mended unless he asked his father for it - trans. Hallett, p. 3).

32. 'Ro. Ba.', *op. cit.*, p. 74. Twyne, *op. cit.*, p. 331, says that in later life More handed over all gifts made to him to the poor scholars of Oxford ("pecunias ... quas ille statim elusis civibus, ad levandam scholarium inopiam, Oxoniam transmittendas curavit").

of the ascetic days at Oxford in the Utopia, "For it is their custom that public lectures are daily delivered in the hours before daybreak. Attendance is compulsory only for those who have been specially chosen to devote themselves to learning"<sup>33</sup>, for in winter at Oxford lectures began at about six in the morning<sup>34</sup>. The severity of More's father<sup>35</sup>, the austerities of Oxford, and More's industrious application left their mark. Stapleton quotes Horace, "Quo semel enim est imbuta recens servabit odorem / testa diu" (For a vase which is once impregnated with perfume when it is new, will retain the scent long.)<sup>36</sup>

*Worcester College, Oxford.*

Howard BAKER.

33. "Solenne est enim publicas cotidie lectiones haberi, antelucanis horis, quibus ut intersint, ij dumtaxat adiguntur, qui ad literas nominatim selecti sunt" *Utopia* (C.W. 4) ed. E. Surtz & J.H. Hexter, Yale, 1965 : p. 128-9.

34. Cf. H. Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, Oxford, 1936, Vol. 3 : p. 401. For studies and student life generally, cf. Rashdall, *passim*.

35. Stapleton, *loc. cit.* "Sic enim [i.e. because of his father], inquit, factum est vt nulli me vitio aut voluptati dare, vt horas meas noxiis & vanis lusibus non impenderem, vt quod esset luxus vel luxuria nescirem, vt pecunia male vti non addiscerem, denique vt nil nisi studia mea amarem & cogitarem" (Thus it came to pass - he would say - that I indulged in no vice or vain pleasure, that I did not spend my time in dangerous or idle pastimes, that I did not even know the meaning of extravagance and luxury, that I did not learn to put money to evil uses, that, in fine, that I had no love or even thought, of anything beyond my studies - trans. Hallett, p.3).

36. Stapleton, *op. cit.*, p.13, quoting Horace, *Epist.* II, 69-70 (trans. Hallett, p. 3).

Ne media quidem pagina remaneat vacua (quando charta tam magni venditur), habes hic, optime lector, aliqua verba ex literis desumpta quibus Oxoniensis Academia gratias egit Thomæ Moro in patronum (High Steward) ascito :

QUIS ENIM NON SUMME LETARETUR TALEM SE HABERE PATRONUM, QUI EAM HABET IN ABSOLUENDIS CONFICIENDISQUE CAUSIS, TUM PUBLICIS, TUM PRIUATIS, DEXTERITATEM QUAM NEMINEM TOT SECULIS ANTEA ASSECUTUM ESSE NON DUBITAMUS? TANTA EST TUA SINGULARIS PRUDENTIA, SOLERTIA VNICA, FERTILISSIMA SIMUL ET VBERRIMA SAGACITAS, TAM TORRENS ET EXUBERANS FACUNDIA, QUIBUS QUI EST PREDITUS QUID NON POTEST ILLUSTRARE, QUID NON ILLUSTRIBUS HISCE (VT CAETERAS SILEAMUS) VIRTUTIBUS DECORARE, QUID TANDEM NON ASSEQUI, QUOD HOMINI FAS SIT OPTARE?

(Rogers, p. 308/19-24).

From *DIALOGUE OF COMFORT*  
to the cover of *MOREANA* 42

Monica Stevens, who edited More's *Dialogue of Comfort* in 1951, is now Dame Gertrude at the Benedictine monastery of St. Scholastica, near Carlisle, in Cumberland. We sent her a few tear sheets of no. 42 because the reprint of her Sheed & Ward edition is mentioned p. 110. She replies :

*I was glad to see the reprint of the Sheed and Ward edition mentioned as reprint, because it is in fact nearly 25 years old. If I were doing it now I might do it differently, for better or worse...*

*I wonder what you are doing about the title of the Dialogue of Comfort in your French translation. In English editions, when the whole title appears on the title page, they usually put only Dialogue of Comfort (which is what everyone calls it) on the backbone. But I have seen one edition with the backbone reading Dialogue against Tribulation. It then struck me that better than either would be Comfort against Tribulation, leaving dialogue for the title page.*

*The French version published by Soleil Levant in 1959 contains some misunderstandings, such as the one about the Hungarian king's saying that he did not object to Gloria Patri, provided that it was sicut erat - i.e., in accord with the facts. "But lift me not up with lies, for I love it not," he goes on - one instance of that lovely old English alliteration, which takes one right back to Piers Ploughman. Are you able to retain any of it in the French translation, or must it all go ? (At MacMillan we had a pretty little typist who labelled the paste-pot "Do not tip over, top is not tight.")*

*May I raise a quibble, perhaps a petty one, over a word in Fr. Schroeder's article about the fresco ? The reproduction on your cover plainly shows Fisher's body as lying not prone but supine. Because "supine" is so often used figuratively in English, people tend to avoid it in literal use and instead fall back upon "prone" - which means exactly the opposite.*

Sr Gertrude Stevens