

(Part 1)

Introduction

The *History of the Passion* closes the long list of works, both Latin and English, written by St. Thomas More. His imprisonment in the Tower lasted from April 17, 1534, to July 6, 1535, the day of his martyrdom. From the beginning he knew that he was never likely to regain his freedom and determined to make the best possible use of his time as a preparation for death. In all sincerity he expressed his satisfaction at obtaining so valuable a period of quiet and recollection for prayer and study. To Margaret Roper, his beloved daughter, he wrote of his appreciation of the grace of God that 'hath also put in the king towards me that good and gracious mind, that as yet he hath taken from me nothing but my liberty, wherewith (as help me God) his grace hath done me great good by the spiritual profit that I trust I take thereby, that among all his great benefits heaped upon me so thick I reckon, upon my faith, my imprisonment even the very chief.'¹ Similarly on another occasion he said to her: 'They that have put me here ween they have done me a high displeasure.'... 'I find no cause, I thank God, Meg, to reckon myself in worse case here than in my own house. For methinketh God maketh me a wanton and setteth me on his lap and dandleth me.'² He had spent long years in writing against the new heresies the controversial books which form the bulk of his English works, but now, although occasional references to current controversies are still to be found, his chief preoccupation is to prepare himself, and his family, too, for the inevitable separation of death. Thus did he write the *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* and the *History of the Passion*.

Devotion to our Lord's passion was familiar to him. 'Every year on Good Friday,' writes Stapleton, 'he called together the whole of his family into what was called the New Building, and there he would have the whole of our Lord's passion read to them, generally by John Harris. From time to time More would interrupt the reading with a few words of pious exhortation.'³ It may well be that in the present work we have echoes of those exhortations. Another clue to their contents may perhaps be provided by More's words to Tyndale: 'Who can speak of Christ's passion and speak nothing of his mercy?'⁴

Pico of Mirandula, whom More in his early years had chosen as a model, upon his death-bed gazed upon the crucifix, 'that in the image of Christ's ineffable passion, suffered for our sake, he might, ere he gave up the ghost, receive his full draught of love and compassion in the beholding of that pitiful figure, as a strong defence against all adversity, and a sure portcullis against wicked spirits.'⁵

More, too, wished his last thoughts to be with his crucified saviour. To Cromwell, who examined him concerning the new statute by which the king was declared supreme head of the Church, he replied: 'I have fully determined with myself neither to study nor meddle with any matter of this world, but that my whole study should be upon the passion of Christ and mine own passage out of this world.'⁶

From the number of references to our Lord's passion in the letters which he wrote during his imprisonment it is clear that he kept this resolution faithfully. Thus speaking of his death he says: 'The fear thereof, I thank our Lord, the fear of hell, the hope of heaven, and the passion of

Christ daily more and more assuage.’ And in the same letter: ‘I beseech him to...give me grace and you both in all our agonies and troubles devoutly to resort prostrate unto the remembrance of that bitter agony which our saviour suffered before his passion at the mount. And if we diligently do so, I verily trust we shall find therein great comfort and consolation.’⁷ In another he writes of the fall of St. Peter who ‘fell in such fear soon after, that at the word of a simple girl he forsook and forswore our saviour,’ and takes warning to himself by the example.⁸

The *Dialogue of Comfort*, written at the same time, bears similar witness to the constant preoccupation of his mind with our Lord's passion. It is not too much to say that the moving passage on the subject in the last chapter is the grand climax towards which everything else in the book leads. ‘If we could and would,’ he writes, ‘with due compassion conceive in our minds a right imagination and remembrance of Christ's bitter painful passion, of the many sore bloody strokes that the cruel tormentors with rods and whips gave him upon every part of his holy tender body, the scornful crown of sharp thorns beaten down upon his holy head, so straight and so deep that on every part his blessed blood issued out and streamed down, his lovely limbs drawn and stretched out upon the cross to the intolerable pain of his forebeaten and sore beaten veins and sinews, new feeling, with the cruel stretching and straining, pain far passing any cramp in every part of his blessed body at once, then the great long nails cruelly driven with hammers through his holy hands and feet, and in this horrible pain lift up and let hang, with the peise (weight) of all his body bearing down upon the painful wounded places, so grievously pierced with nails, and in such torment (without pity, but not without many despites), suffered to be pined and pained the space of more than three long hours, till himself willingly gave up unto his Father his holy soul, after which yet to shew the mightiness of their malice after his holy soul departed they pierced his holy heart with a sharp spear, at which issued out the holy blood and water whereof his holy sacraments have inestimable secret strength: if we would, I say, remember these things in such wise, as would God we would, I verily suppose that the consideration of his incomparable kindness could not in such wise fail to inflame our key-cold hearts, and set them on fire in his love, that we should find ourselves not only content, but also glad and desirous, to suffer death for his sake that so marvellous lovingly letted not to sustain so far passing painful death for ours.’⁹

Passio Christi, conforta me, prays St. Ignatius, ‘Passion of Christ, strengthen me.’ It was from his meditations upon our Lord's passion that St. Thomas drew the strength to suffer martyrdom. To the very end it was his comfort and his support. Thus he set out upon his last journey up Tower Hill with a cross in his hand, and in his reply to the good lady who offered him wine showed how his thoughts were with him who died for us upon the cross. ‘Christ in his passion,’ he said, ‘was given not wine, but vinegar to drink.’¹⁰

St. Thomas began his history in English and then continued it in Latin. He seems to have written the two languages with equal ease, and why in the middle of his work he should have changed from one to the other we can only conjecture. It was largely, though not entirely, the needs of controversy that had led him to write in English. Latin, on the other hand, was usually the medium of his prayers. A long Latin prayer—a mosaic of verses from the Psalms—concludes the volume of his *Latin Works*.¹¹ The other prayers that Stapleton¹² enumerates as used by him are the Seven Penitential Psalms, the Litanies, the Gradual Psalms, and the *Beati Immaculati*. These would certainly have been recited in Latin. Stapleton mentions some English prayers of his

composition which are to be found in his collected English works. They are, in fact, very few. Apart from a short collect at the end of the sections of the English *History of the Passion*, they fill barely two pages of the *English Works*.¹³ Even the unlearned laity used commonly to say their *Paternoster* and *Ave Maria* in Latin.

There is something noteworthy in the fact that St. Thomas, as his life drew to an end and his preparation for death became more absorbing, should desert the English of his social life and of his controversies, and betake himself to the language of the Mass, of the Divine Office, of the Vulgate and of the whole western Church.

The first part, then, of the *History of the Passion* is in English only, and was printed for the first time in the magnificent volume of More's *English Works* which William Rastell published in 1517 and dedicated to Queen Mary. It has never been reprinted, but it is hoped that the new edition of the saint's *English Works*, of which Messrs. Eyre and Spottiswoode have already published two volumes, will include it in its proper place.

The second part was printed for the first time in the volume of More's *Latin Works* which appeared at Louvain in 1566. Although William Rastell's name does not appear in this edition, it seems most likely that he helped in its preparation. He possessed More's papers, and it would seem natural that after publishing his *English Works* he should turn his attention to his Latin writings. Moreover, it was in Louvain that he was in exile. He did not, however, live to see the volume published. He died on August 27, 1565, and was buried beside his wife in the church of St. Peter in that city. The Latin portion of the *History of the Passion* was reprinted in the Frankfurt edition of More's *Opera Omnia* in 1689.

Although More himself did not translate this second part of his work into English, yet an English version was printed in Rastell's volume of 1557, following the earlier English portion and occupying fifty-four pages.¹⁴ It is the work of Mary Basset, More's granddaughter, as we are informed in Rastell's prefatory notice. Because of its excellence, many persons, as he tells us, wished it to be published separately, so that it might reach a wider circle of readers. 'Which more would buy, set out alone, than with so many other of his works, and *haply so shall it be hereafter at more leisure*.'¹⁵ The fulfilment of Rastell's pious wish has been delayed for nearly four centuries, for Mrs. Basset's version has never been reprinted until now. We may be allowed to express the hope that his anticipation of large sales may be fulfilled!

More's manuscript of the *History of the Passion*, or at least its latter pages, must have been among the papers seized by the King's agents when the martyr's correspondence with St. John Fisher was discovered. The fact is mentioned in an editorial note at the end of the Latin work, which Rastell or Mrs. Basset has translated in the English version. That this should have occurred just as More had written the words: 'They laid hands upon Jesus,' has often been pointed to as a remarkable coincidence. But somehow or other the MS. came into the possession of the martyr's family. Perhaps it was amongst the books and papers for retaining possession of which Margaret Roper was brought before the King's Council.¹⁶ She pleaded that she had hardly any books and papers but what had already been published (there is much virtue in a 'hardly,' *vix*) and was allowed to keep them. We must remember that she had many influential and wealthy connections and friends. It was certainly among the papers to which William Rastell refers in his

dedication to the Queen. 'I did diligently collect and gather together, as many of those, his works, books, letters, and other writings, printed and unprinted in the English tongue, ¹⁷ as I could come by, and the same (certain years in the evil world past keeping in my hands very surely and safely) now lately have caused to be imprinted in this one volume.'

Rastell was at the very centre of the More circle, both at home in Mary's reign and abroad in exile in the reign of her successor, being doubly connected with the chancellor, first as his sister's son, and then as the husband of Winifred Clements, the daughter of John Clements, tutor to More's children, and of Margaret Gigs, More's adopted daughter.

It is time to speak of Mary Basset, the translator of the portion of More's *History* now published. She is introduced to us in the preface of 'The Printer to the Gentle Reader,' as the daughter of William Roper and Margaret, St. Thomas More's favourite child. The Ropers were married in 1521, and according to William's epitaph, ¹⁸ had five children, two boys and three girls. The names are given in the *Life of More* in the Lambeth Library by Ro. Ba. ¹⁹ : 'two sons, Thomas and Anthony, and three daughters, Elizabeth, Marie, and Margaret.' Nicholas Harpsfield, writing just before the publication of More's *English Works* in 1557, implies that Elizabeth and Margaret were already dead. ²⁰ Writing of More's Latin exposition of the passion of Christ, he adds that it 'is so plainly and exquisitely translated into English by...Mistress Basset, that it may seem originally to have been penned in English by Sir Thomas More himself.' ²¹

Elsewhere he gives a fuller account which we must quote in full. She is 'late wife to Master Clarke, and now wife to Master Basset, one of our gracious sovereign Queen Mary's privy chamber, who in the late King Edward's days, because he would the better preserve himself not to be entangled with the schism, withdrew himself into Flanders. This Mistress Basset is very well experted in the Latin and Greek tongues: she hath very handsomely and learnedly translated out of the Greek into the English all the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius, with Socrates, Theodoret, Sozomen, and Evagrius, albeit of modesty she suppresseth it and keepeth it from the print. She hath also very aptly and fitly translated into the said tongue a certain book that Sir Thomas, her grandfather, made upon the passion, and so elegantly and eloquently penned that a man would think it were originally written in the said English tongue.' ²²

The British Museum ²³ has a Latin version of the First Book of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and an English version of the first five books translated by 'Mary Clarcke' and dedicated, during the reign of Edward VI, to the Lady Mary. It seems to be the actual manuscript presented to the future queen, but it has lost its original binding of purple velvet. ²⁴

According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, the Basset family was originally Cornish, but in the sixteenth century one branch settled in Devonshire. James Basset, who married Mary Clarke (*née* Roper), was the third son of Sir John Basset of Umberleigh, Devon (who died in 1529), by his second wife, Honora, daughter of Sir Thomas Granville. He became a gentleman-servant to Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, and at the latter's trial in 1551 deposed that he had been in his service twelve years and was now about twenty-four years old, ²⁵ that as wages he had four pounds and livery; also fourteen pounds annuities, viz., four pounds out of the manor of Taunton, and ten pounds out of the lordship of Eastmere. ²⁶ As one of the most active proctors

for the accused bishop, he took a prominent part in the trial. His self-imposed exile, of which Harpsfield speaks, presumably followed after these proceedings.

Returning to England he obtained, as did his wife, a position of trust in personal service upon Queen Mary. The Record Office contains a series of letters, from May 3, 1555, to November 29 of the same year, which passed between Edward Courtenay, Earl of Devonshire, exiled in Brussels, and Basset in London. They are mostly concerned with business affairs and the money of which Devonshire seems constantly to have been in need. It is interesting to come across in this correspondence the name of 'Mr. Bonvise', who promised to advance the Earl money on Basset's credit. This can be none other than the wealthy Antonio Bonvisi, More's greatest friend, who gathered around him in Louvain so many exiles from the More circle. As just before his death More wrote that Bonvisi had been his friend for nearly forty years, the Italian must now have been very old. He died at Louvain on December 7, 1558. ²⁷

On January 10, 1558, Basset left London and after a six days' journey—owing to bad weather—arrived at Brussels, where he was commissioned to bear to King Philip the tidings that his wife the Queen of England was pregnant. ²⁸

On January 20, 1566, Mary Basset, now a widow for the second time, with two sons by her second husband, Philip and Charles, made her will, from which we take the following details. ²⁹ She left £100 for 'prayers,' i.e. Masses. To Charles, her younger son, she left lands near Sandwich in the parish of Wodnesborough 'which I purchased with that portion that his father gave him in his last will, and a great deal more of my own.' To Philip, 'my lands in Devonshire.' Bequests to her two brothers, Thomas and Anthony Roper, to 'Reynold Bray, my sister Bray's son and my godson,' ³⁰ and to Bridget Clements, Dr. John Clements' daughter and her goddaughter. Legacies to servants. 'To my son (Philip) a ring that was my grandfather More's, and a great hoop of gold that Mr. Basset gave me for a wedding ring, and a gold ring that King Philip gave me set with a great ruby and a cross of gold with pointed diamonds in the corner and pearls hanging to the cross, also a gilt cup with a cover to the same which cup King Philip gave him at his christening.' The residue of her estate she left to Charles, the younger son. Her legacies to her sons are to become void 'if they become heretics or vicious livers or cause trouble to executors.' As executors she named her 'dear father, Mr. W. Roper, Esq.,' and Mr. Thomas Welles, a priest. They were to manage the property 'till they think my children fit to manage,' and if the children should die, they were to give everything to charity.

The scanty notices we have been able to collect concerning Philip and Charles show them to have been sons worthy of such staunch Catholic parents.

A paper drawn up by the vile apostate and traitor, George Elliot, for the information of the Earl of Leicester, and endorsed August 10, 1581, mentions the two brothers amongst those 'Papists' living in London who 'carry the countenance of gentlemen.' ³¹ Later on, in the same report, Judas Elliot (for so he was called) writes that Mr. Charles Basset should be able to tell the whereabouts of the Jesuits, for he was often in their company.

The Jesuits are, of course, Fathers Campion and Persons, who came to England in 1580 and worked so zealously for the Catholic faith. Elliot's information was correct; indeed both Philip

and Charles were members of Campion's Catholic Association--a band of young men, the chief of whom was George Gilbert, who helped the future martyr in his printing and other activities. For Gilbert's arrest a trap was laid by Sir George Carey, afterwards Lord Chamberlain. Gilbert escaped and was sent abroad out of harm's way by Fr. Persons, but Charles Basset and another were arrested. Two or three months later, however, Basset was again at large, for he travelled to Rome bearing a letter, dated August 30, 1581, from Fr. Persons to the Rector of the English College. Fr. Persons writes: 'In my former letter I commended to you, with all the affection I could, my son, friend, patron, and most generous benefactor, George Gilbert...Now to that commendation I associate...Charles Basset... Such are his virtues that I doubt not you will be grateful to me for having directed him to your college. He is a youth of an illustrious and wealthy family. Had he no other recommendations, he should be dear to you on this sole account, that he is the great-grandson of the illustrious martyr, Thomas More. But he has better gifts in himself: he has talents, manners, virtues worthy of himself and his ancestors...' ³²

Basset caught up with Gilbert in France, and they both made generous benefactions to the English College at Rheims (whither it had migrated from Douai) and to the nuns of Rouen. Together they travelled on to Rome, where Basset, described as belonging to the diocese of London, was on November 19, 1581, admitted to the English College. ³³ His health, however, broke down very seriously, and in April, 1583, it was thought wise to send him back to France. According to Fr. Persons he earnestly desired to enter the Society of Jesus. ³⁴

By the beginning of June he was in Paris, whither Dr. (afterwards Cardinal) Allen, who was anxiously expecting him at Rheims, went to visit him and Fr. Persons. Basset is, writes Allen, *mihi amantissimus*. ³⁵

We next hear of him, again in the company of Fr. Persons, at Rouen on September 30, 1584, but two months later he died a most holy death at Rheims, leaving all his possessions to the English College or other charities. ³⁶

Philip Basset is harder to trace. In a return of recusants for 1577, amongst those in Lincoln's Inn who 'upon suspicion had of their religion were appointed to receive the Communion...but have not yet done the same' is 'Philip Basset, son and heir of Mrs. Basset, late of the Privy Chamber.' He is in the good company of his grandfather and uncles, for first in order amongst the sturdy recusants of the Inn stand: 'William Roper, of Kent; of yearly revenue £1000, as we think: Thomas Roper, his eldest son; one of the two protonotaries of the Queen's Bench: Anthony Roper, his brother, clerk of the papers in the same court.' ³⁷

In a search conducted on August 27, 1584, by Sheriff Spencer, 'in the house of Roger Smith, gent., in Holborn,' was found Philip Basset who had been 'expelled out of Lincoln's Inn for Papistry.' That he was still a wicked Papist was evident from 'a Papistical book' upon his table. It would seem certain that this notice refers to Mary Basset's son, although he is described as 'of Collond John (sic)...in the county of Derby.' ³⁸

A further penalty for Catholic loyalty seems to be indicated in the following notice, the last we have been able to discover concerning him. The Sheriff of Devon reports on October 24, 1585, that Philip Basset has disappeared and is probably in the Fleet Prison. ³⁹

Mary Basset long outlived her second husband and died on March 20, 1572. Her will was proved in London on April 19 of the same year. Her father, William Roper, survived until January 4, 1578, when he was in his eighty-second year. His wife, Margaret, had died as early as Christmas 1544.

A Latin *Vita Henrici VIII*, attributed (wrongly) to Nicholas Harpsfield, gives the interesting information that Mary Basset contributed largely towards the expenses of Rastell's 1557 edition of More's *English Works*. * His preface to her translation, which here we are printing, bears witness to her devotion, her modesty, and other virtues.

There can be no doubt that her translation is an excellent piece of work. It is scrupulously accurate, and even when she corrects a mistake (for St. Thomas was never able to revise the whole of his MS.) she apologises for doing so. Perhaps in order not to miss any shade of meaning, perhaps in deference to More's own custom, as shown in his translation of Richard III, * she is fond of writing two English words in place of one Latin word. Thus we find for *confitendum*, 'praise and thank,' for *pinguissima*, 'very fat and plentiful,' for *homuncio*, 'a silly wretched man,' for *anima*, 'soul and life,' for *abluere*, 'clean, purge, and wash away,' for *spiritus promptus*, 'the spirit prompt and ready,' for *caro infirma*, 'the flesh frail and weak,' etc. A Latin sentence will usually require a larger number of English words to render it, but sometimes Mrs. Basset seems unnecessarily prolix. Take the very first sentence as an example. There the words 'yet forgot he not at his departing to make an end of all together, with thanksgiving to God' represent but five Latin words. Yet the translation is always smooth and easy, and though sentences are often much longer than modern idiom requires, it is always readily intelligible and at the same time attractive.

Whether the claim made for it that it is indistinguishable from More's own writing can be justified or not, must be decided by each reader for himself. Perhaps she has not quite so wide a range of vocabulary—More was never afraid to coin new words if necessary—and though alliteration is common, it is not quite so thorough as it is in More's writing. Thus she has: 'like a slothful sluggard straightways wert fallen asleep,' 'sundry matters as in such a sudden stir very sore perplexed them,' 'driven down deep into the dark flaming fire of hell,' etc., but she never reaches such tremendous vehemence as, for example, this sentence of her father's: 'this drowsy drudge hath drunken so deep in the devil's dregs, etc.' *

Mrs. Basset's object in translating her grandfather's Latin was a practical one, and with the same practical object in view we have modernised her spelling and punctuation. In both respects there have been difficulties. Sometimes words which in the sixteenth century were not distinguished in spelling are now utterly distinct. We refer in our notes to one such example, the words 'council' and 'counsel.' At other times words have changed their meaning so considerably that it would be misleading to give, without annotation, the modern English equivalent. Thus 'sely' means pitiable and not silly. Such obsolete words as we have thought it necessary to retain have been glossed in footnotes.

Regarding the earlier method of punctuation, Professor Reed has some valuable remarks in the Introduction to More's *Dialogue*. * Quoting Ben Jonson, he shews that it was based upon the

natural pauses that would be made by one who was reading aloud. Nowadays, on the contrary, it is the grammatical form of the sentence which more commonly determines the punctuation. We have tried to conform to modern usage, but sometimes the length or the structure of the sentence—very different from what is now customary—have made it difficult.

One other point calls for mention. In quoting the texts of the Gospel narrative upon which the exposition is based, Mrs. Basset, or perhaps Rastell, has reproduced the Latin as well as translating them into English. As the book is professedly a translation, we have not thought it necessary to do more than print the English version.

As St. Thomas More wrote them, the earlier English portion of the history is, in number of words, more than three times as long as the Latin part. Even when account is taken of Mrs. Basset's expansion of the original in her translation—which has more than doubled the number of words—the second part is still only about two-thirds the length of the first. Yet, paradoxically, it contains far more of the history of the passion. For the saint begins very far away from his immediate subject, and treats of the creation, the fall of the angels and of man, the decree for man's redemption and many incidental questions. He then treats of the conspiracy of the high-priests (whom he calls 'bishops') and ancients against Jesus, the treason of Judas and the washing of the disciples' feet, and when he comes to the institution of the Holy Eucharist he writes what is almost a separate work upon the real presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, with a long series of quotations from the Greek and Latin Fathers.

Thus it is only in the portion translated by Mrs. Basset that the history of the passion proper begins, i.e., the leaving of the Upper Room and the journey to Gethsemani. For the order of the text and the concordance of the four accounts given by the evangelists, More, as he explains in the first part, follows the *Monatessaron* of John Gerson, for whose writings he had the greatest respect. He speaks of him "as 'an excellent learned man, and a gentle handler of a troubled conscience.'

It is not, however, in order to discover Gerson's views on the harmony of the gospels that modern readers will read More's *History of the Passion*, but to know the bases of More's own faith and courage. No writer of so strong a personality as he can fail to reveal the secrets of his own heart when dealing with such a theme. What gives supreme interest to the discussions upon our Lord's hiding himself from his enemies or offering himself openly to them is the knowledge that here we have a reflection of what was going on in More's own conscience. In this work we have a commentary on what More said to Cromwell, as he afterwards related it to Margaret: 'Whereto I answered, as the truth is, that I have not been a man of such holy living, as I might be bold to offer myself to death, lest God for my presumption might suffer me to fall, and therefore I put not myself forward, but draw back. Howbeit, if God draw me to it himself, then trust I in his great mercy that he shall not fail to give me grace and strength.' " In the long meditation upon our Lord's fear in the Garden of Olives, More refers continually to the martyrs of early times, and clearly he is thinking also of himself. For St. Thomas was indeed of a fearful nature and dreaded pain, but he had the supreme heroism which in spite of fear and dread goes forward steadily to the martyr's death. As he wrote to his daughter: 'Surely, Meg, a fainter heart than thy frail father hath canst thou not have. And yet I verily trust in the great mercy of God, that he shall of his goodness so stay me with his holy hand that he shall not finally suffer me to fall wretchedly from

his favour.... The more weak that man is, the more is the strength of God in his safeguard declared.' ⁴⁶ 'Virtue is made perfect in infirmity,' said St. Paul. ⁴⁷

When, in the early morning of July 6, 1535, St. Thomas More stood smiling upon the scaffold on Tower Hill, he might have repeated, with still greater reason, what he had said, over a year ago, to his faithful son-in-law, as they were rowed down the Thames from Chelsea, where all his hopes of earthly happiness were enshrined, to Lambeth where he was to make his fateful decision: 'Son Roper, I thank our Lord the field is won.' Now, in virtue of the passion of Christ, he had gained his greatest triumph and received the martyr's palm.

P. E. HALLETT.

WONERSH,
Passion Sunday, 1940.

ADDITIONAL NOTE
(*v. supra* , p. xiv)

This entry in the State Papers, the correct dating of which is obvious from its reference to the fall of Calais, makes impossible the day given for James Basset's death in *Notes and Queries* (reference *supra* , p. xiv, footnote 3), viz. November 21, 1557. The authority for that date may have been Vivian's *Visitations of the County of Devon*, p., 47, which is on the shelves of the British Museum Reading Room, 2098 a. If the dispersion of the records consequent upon the war did not hinder the following up of Vivian's reference, 'Inq. p. m., I Eliz., pt. I, no. 30' (*Inquisitio* taken on the death of his sister-in-law, Jacquetta Jones), the solution of the puzzle might have been found.

AN EXPOSITION OF A PART OF THE PASSION
of our Saviour Jesus Christ, made in Latin by Sir Thomas
More knight, while he was prisoner in the Tower of
London, and translated into English by Mistress Mary
Basset, one of the gentlewomen of the queen's majesty's
privy chamber, and niece * to the said Sir Thomas More.

THE PRINTER TO THE GENTLE READER

Lo here, good reader, I put into your hands another work of Sir Thomas More's, compiled in Latin by him in the tower, in the year of our Lord 1534 and lately englished by Mistress Mary Basset (a near kinswoman of his own), daughter to William Roper, Esq., and Margaret his wife, daughter to the said Sir Thomas More. A work, of truth, full of good and godly lessons, which he began being then prisoner and could not achieve and finish the same, as he that ere he could go through therewith (even when he came to the exposition of these words, *Et injecerunt manus in Jesum*), was bereaved and put from his books, pen, ink, and paper, and kept more straitly than before, and soon after also was put to death himself.

This work in Latin hath been by sundry great clerks read and weighed, and very well liked, and is again so set out in our tongue, and goeth so near Sir Thomas More's own English phrase that the gentlewoman (who for her pastime translated it) is no nearer to him in kindred, virtue, and literature, than in his English tongue. So that it might seem to have been by his own pen indited first, and not at all translated. Such a gift hath she to follow her grandfather's vein in writing.

Somewhat I had to do ere that I could come by this book. For the gentlewoman which translated it seemed nothing willing to have it go abroad, for that (she said) it was first turned into English, but for her own pastime and exercise, and so reputeth it far too simple to come into many hands. And some there were that fain would have had it set forth in print alone, because the matter is so good and eke so well handled, that it were to be wished it might be read of all folks: which more would buy, set out alone, than with so many other of his works. And haply so shall it be hereafter at more leisure. But in the meanwhile, take it and read it thus with the rest, and give God thanks, and pray for her that took the pains in this wise to translate it.

OF THE SORROW, WEARINESS, FEAR, AND PRAYER OF CHRIST BEFORE HIS TAKING, AS IT IS WRITTEN IN THE XXVI CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW, THE XIII OF ST. MARK, THE XXII OF ST. LUKE, AND THE XVIII OF ST. JOHN.

'When Jesus had spoken these words, and said grace, they went forth into the mount of Olivet.' Albeit that Christ at the time of his supper had had so much godly communication with his apostles, yet forgot he not at his departing to make an end of all together, with thanksgiving to God. But how unlike, alas! be we to Christ, which bear the name of Christian men, and yet at our table do use, not only many vain and idle words (whereof Christ hath given us warning that we shall yield a full strait account), but also very hurtful and perilous, and at last when we have eaten and drunk our fill, unkindly get us our way, forgetting to give thanks unto God the giver of all, that hath so well fed and refreshed us.

Burgensis, * a man well learned and deeply travailed in divinity, upon probable conjectures doth think that the grace, which Christ at the same time said with his apostles, was those six psalms which, as they stand together, the Hebrews call the great Alleluia: that is to wit, the hundredth and twelfth psalm with the five next following in order. For those six psalms, which they name the great Alleluia, they were wont of an old custom to say instead of grace at Easter and certain other high feasts. And the selfsame grace as yet to this day at the said feasts commonly use they to say. But as for us, whereas we have been accustomed in times past, for grace both before meat and after, to say at sundry seasons sundry psalms such as be most convenient for the time, we have nowadays given them over almost every one, so that with three or four words, whatsoever suddenly cometh to our minds, and those hoverly ^{so} mumbled up at adventure, shortly make we an end and depart.

'They went forth unto the mount of Olivet.'

Forth they went, but not to bed. 'I rose at midnight,' saith the prophet, 'to give praise and thanks to thee.' ⁵¹ Howbeit Christ did not so much as once lay him down on his bed. But at the leastwise, would God we could truly say: 'I remembered thee in my bed, good Lord.' ⁵²

And it was not in the summer season neither that Christ after his supper took his way to the mount. For it was even shortly after the spring of the year, when the days and the nights be all of one length. And that it was a cold night appeareth also by this, that the servants were warming themselves by the fire in the bishop's hall. And that this was not the first time that he so did, well witnesseth the evangelist where he saith: '*According to his custom.*'

He went up to the mount to pray, willing us thereby to understand that when we set ourselves to pray, we must lift up our hearts from the cumbrous unquietness of all worldly business, to the end we may wholly set our minds upon God and godly matters.

This mount of Olivet which was all full of olive trees, containeth in it a certain mystery. For a branch of an olive tree was commonly taken as a token of peace, which Christ came himself to make betwixt God and man, who had so long before been enemies.

Besides this, the oil that cometh of the olive tree doth signify the grace of the Holy Ghost, whom Christ did come to send down to his disciples after his return to his Father: to the end that by the grace of the same Holy Spirit, they might within short space after be able to learn those things which, if he had told them then, they could not well have borne.

'Over a river called Cedron into a village which is named Gethsemani.'

This river Cedron runneth between the city of Jerusalem and the mount of Olives. And this word Cedron, in the Hebrew tongue, signifieth sorrow or heaviness. And Gethsemani in the same speech is as much to say as a very fat and plentiful valley, or otherwise the valley of Olivet.

We have therefore good cause to think that the evangelists not without great consideration did so diligently rehearse the names of these places, for else they would have thought it sufficient to have shewed that he went forth unto the mount of Olivet, had it not been that God, under the names of those places, had secretly covered some high mysteries, which, by the rehearsal of those names, good men and studious should have occasion afterwards, through the aid of his Holy Spirit, to search out.

For since we may in no wise think that there is any superfluous syllable in the sacred scripture, which the apostles wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and that not so much as a sparrow lighteth upon the ground without the will of God, ^s I must needs believe that neither the evangelists made mention of those names without some good cause, nor yet that the Hebrews so named them (whatsoever their purpose was when they did so call them), but by some secret motion (albeit to themselves unknown) of God's own Holy Spirit, which under those names had closely hid certain notable mysteries, and at length should be brought to light.

And since Cedron signifieth sorrow and blackness too, and besides that is the name, not of the river only which the evangelists do here make mention of, but also, as we may well perceive, of the valley that the river passeth through, which valley lieth betwixt Jerusalem and Gethsemani, these names (but if we be too slothful and negligent) do put us in remembrance that as long as we live here (as the apostle with), like strangers sequestered from our Lord, ^s we must needs pass over, ere ever we come unto the fruitful mount of Olivet, and the pleasant village of Gethsemani (a village, I say, not displeasing or loathsome to look upon, but full of all delight and pleasure),

we must first pass over, as I said, this valley and river called Cedron, a vale of misery and river of heaviness, the water whereof may clean, purge, and wash away, the foul black filthiness of our sins.

But now if we, to avoid grief and pain, go about by a contrary way, to make this world, which should be a place of pain and penance, to be a place of ease and pastime, and so turn it unto our heaven, both do we clearly exclude ourselves from the very true felicity for ever, and drown us all too late in fruitless sorrow and care, and further bring ourselves into intolerable and endless wretchedness. And this wholesome lesson are we put in mind of by the well-placed rehearsal of Cedron and Gethsemani.

Now because the words of holy scripture have not one sense alone, but are full of many mysteries, the names of these places do so well serve to the setting forth of this history of Christ's passion, as though for the same purpose only God had from the beginning ordained those places long before to be called by such notable names, as being compared with those things that Christ did many years after, might declare that they were appointed aforehand to be as it were witnesses of his most bitter passion. For since Cedron signifieth black, doth it not seem to express the saying of the prophet, which was spoken of Christ going to his glorious kingdom by most shameful death, disfigured with stripes, blood, spiteful spitting, and such other filthiness, where it is written: 'Neither comeliness nor beauty is there in him.' ⁵⁵ And that the river which he passed over did not without cause betoken sorrow and heaviness, himself right well witnessed where he said: 'My soul is heavy even to the death.' ⁵⁶

'And his disciples went with him.'

It is to be understood of the eleven only which still remained with him. For the twelfth, whom the devil entered into after he had eaten the sop, and carried forth from the residue of the apostles, waited now no longer upon his master as his disciple, but like a traitor laboured to destroy him. And so proved these words of Christ too true: 'He that is not with me is against me.' ⁵⁷ For against Christ was he indeed, even at that time most especially, craftily contriving his destruction, when the rest of his disciples went after him to pray with him.

Let us follow Christ therefore, and by prayer call upon his Father with him. And let us not, as Judas did, slip aside from him, after we have been relieved by his gracious goodness, and well and liberally supped with him, for fear this saying of the prophet be verified in us: 'If thou sawest a thief thou didst run with him, and with adulterers didst thou pay thy shot.' ⁵⁸

'And Judas that did go about to betray him, knew right well the place, because Jesus used often times to come thither with his disciples.'

Now by occasion of the traitor do the evangelists yet once again both beat into us, and with oft rehearsal thereof much commend also, the blessed custom of Christ who was wont to resort thither with his disciples to pray. For if he had not gone to the same place so commonly in the night time, but now and then among, ⁵⁹ the traitor could not have been so well assured to find our Lord there, that he durst have conducted thither the bishop's servants and a band of the Roman soldiers, as to the thing they should not miss to meet withal; since if they had found it otherwise, they would have went ⁶⁰ he had mocked them, and so ere he could have escaped away, haply have done him some displeasure.

But now where are these folk become, that stand very much in their own conceit, and as though they had done a great feat, fondly glory in themselves, if it hath fortified them at one time or other, on high evenings, ^{as} either to watch anything long in prayer by night, or else for the same purpose to rise in the morning somewhat early? Our saviour Christ customably used to persevere in prayer all the whole night without any sleep at all.

Where be they also which, because he refused not to eat and drink with the publicans, nor disdained not to receive kindness and service of sinners, called him a glutton and a drunkard, and in comparison of the Pharisees, whose profession was very strait, counted him to be scant in virtue so perfect as one of the common sort? And yet while these sour lowering Pharisees, to be seen of the world, were praying openly abroad in corners of the streets, he therewhiles full mildly and lovingly taught sinful men, while he ate and drank with them, to amend their lives. Again while the false dissembling pharisee lay at his ease routing ^{as} in his soft bed, Christ continued without doors painfully all night in prayer.

Oh, would God we which are so slack and slothful that we cannot follow the good example of our saviour in this behalf, would yet at the least wise, when we turn ourselves in our bed even ready to fall asleep, have in remembrance Christ's continual watch, and although it were in few words, till sleep come on us again, give him hearty thanks, both misliking our own sluggishness and therewithal desiring him to endue us with more of his grace. Surely if we would accustom ourselves to do but even so much, I nothing doubt but that God would within short space help us with his grace and make us much better.

'And sit you here,' quoth he, 'whiles I go yonder and pray.' Then took he Peter with him, and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be heavy and sad, and to wax somewhat afraid and weary. Then said he unto them: 'My soul is heavy even unto the death. Abide ye here and watch with me.'

Whereas Christ willed the other eight of his disciples to stay somewhat behind him, Peter, John, and his brother James caused he to go further with him, as those whom he had always used more familiarly than all the rest of his apostles. Which thing although he had done for none other respect but only for that it liked him so to do, no cause yet had any man to be grieved therewith to see him so good and gracious. Howbeit great considerations were there besides, which as it seemeth moved him thereunto. Forasmuch as Peter for the fervour of his faith, John for his virginity, and his brother James for that he was the first of his apostles that should suffer martyrdom for his sake, did indeed far pass and surmount all the rest. And these three also had he long erst ^{as} vouchsafed to admit both to be privy to his glorious transfiguration, and also presently to see it. Convenient was it therefore that they whom he had afore all other called with him to so wonderful a sight, and there had comforted for the while with the clear light of his eternal glory, convenient was it, I say, that these three in especial, who as reason would were more strong hearted than the other, should be placed nearest about him at the time of his painful pangs foregoing his bitter passion.

Now when he was gone a little beyond them, straightways he felt himself oppressed with such an horrible heaviness, sorrow, fear, and weariness, and that with so great extremity that by and by

even before them, he letted not ^{as} to utter these lamentable words, that evidently declared the marvellous inward anguish of his sore troubled heart.

'my soul is heavy even to the death.'

For the blessed and tender heart of our most holy saviour was cumbered and panged with manifold and hideous griefs, since doubtless well wist he, that the false traitor and his mortal enemies drew near unto him, and were now in manner already come upon him; and over this that he should be despitefully bounden, and have heinous crimes surmised against him, be blasphemed, scourged, crowned with thorns, nailed, crucified, and finally suffer very long and cruel torments. Moreover much did it disquiet him, that he foresaw the fear and dread which his disciples should fall in, the mischief that should light on the Jews, the destruction of the false traitor Judas, and last of all, the unspeakable sorrow of his dear beloved mother. The storms and heaps of so many troubles coming upon him all at once, as doth the main sea when it violently breaketh down the banks over the land, sore oppressed his most holy and blessed heart.

Some man may haply here marvel how this could be, that our saviour Christ, being very God equal with his almighty Father, could be heavy, sad, and sorrowful. Indeed, he could not have been so, if as he was God, so had he been only God, and not man also. But now seeing he was as verily man as he was verily God, I think it no more to be marvelled that inasmuch as he was man he had these affections and conditions in him, such I mean as be without offence to God, as of common course are in mankind, than that inasmuch as he was God he wrought so wonderful miracles. For if we do marvel that Christ should have in him fear, weariness, and sorrow, namely seeing he was God, then why should we not as well marvel that he was hungry, athirst, and slept, since albeit he had these properties, yet was he nevertheless God for all that? But hereunto peradventure mayst thou reply and say: albeit I do now marvel no more that he could so do, yet can I not but marvel still why he would so do. For what reason is it that he which taught his disciples ^{as} in no wise to fear those that could but kill only their bodies, and when that was done had no further thing in their power wherewith they could do them harm, should now wax afraid of them himself, namely ^{as} since against his blessed body they could no more do, than it liked his holy majesty to permit and suffer them?

Over this seeing (hereof we be well assured), that his martyrs joyfully and courageously hasted them toward their death, not letting ^{as} even then boldly to rebuke and reprove the tyrants and their cruel tormentors, how unseemly might it be thought that Christ himself being, as a man might say, the chief banner-bearer and captain of all martyrs, should, when he drew near to his passion, be so sore afraid, so heavy, so wonderfully unquieted and troubled. Had it not been meet that he which did all things himself before he taught the same, should in this point especially in his own person, have given other men example to learn of him, for the truth's sake cheerfully to suffer death; lest such as in time to come would be loath and afraid to die for the defence of the faith, might haply, to excuse their own faint and feeble hearts, bear themselves in hand, that they did none otherwise therein than Christ had done before them. And so doing yet should they both not a little dishonour so good and worthy a master, and besides that much discourage other folk, to see them in so great fear and heaviness.

From *St. Thomas More's History of the Passion* , Ed. P. E. Hallett, Trans. Mary Bassett. London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1941, pp. v-xxii, 1-14.

¹ *English Works* , 1557, p. 1442 E.

² Roper's *Life of More* , E.E.T.S., p. 76.

³ *Life of Sir T. More* , Eng. trans., p. 96.

⁴ *E.W.* , p. 408, B.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 8, F.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 1452, A.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 1431, E. and H.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 1442, G.

⁹ *E.W.*, p. 1260, E.

¹⁰ Stapleton, l.c. 209.

¹¹ Louvain, 1566.

¹² l.c., 67.

¹³ pp. 1416-1418.

¹⁴ pp. 1350-1404.

¹⁵ *infra* , p. 4.

¹⁶ Stapleton, l.c., p. 215.

¹⁷ He collected the Latin works and papers as well, but in this preface he is accounting for his publication of the English works only.

¹⁸ given by Lewis in his edition of Roper's *Life of More* , p. 6.

¹⁹ printed in Wordsworth's *Ecclesiastical Biography* , II, p. 111.

²⁰ *Life of More* , E.E.T.S., pp. 83 and 100.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 107.

²² *ibid.*, p. 83.

²³ Harleian MSS. 1860.

²⁴ I owe this information to Professor R. W. Chambers' historical notes (Harfsfield, l.c., p. 334) as well as some other valuable references.

²⁵ Similarly Sir Thomas More, as a boy, was received into the household of Archbishop (afterwards Cardinal) Morton at Lambeth.

²⁶ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* , ed. 1838, VI, pp. 231 and 236.

²⁷ *D.N.B.*

²⁸ *State Paper, Venetian* , Vol. VI, part 3, no. 1146. (v. *infra* , p. xxii).

²⁹ *Notes and Queries* , 11th Series, Vol. VI, Aug. 3, 1912, p. 87.

³⁰ Mrs. Basset's sister Elizabeth married Sir Edward Bray who possessed Baynards, Surrey, from 1535 to 1558 (Brayley's *History of Surrey*). Here, for some time before its removal to the vault of St. Dunstan's, Canterbury, was kept the skull of St. Thomas More which Margaret Roper had rescued. The present owners of Baynards still have the ancient chest in which, according to tradition, it reposed.

³¹ *Landsown MSS., Burghley Papers, 33 Plut.*, n. 16, printed by Foley, *Records of the English Province, S.J.*, Vol. II, p. 586.

³² *Cath. Record Soc.* , Vol. 4, pp. 13-15.

³³ Foley, op. cit., Vol. VI, pp. 77, 153.

³⁴ *C.R.S.*, IV, pp. 69-71.

³⁵ Allen's *Letters* , ed. Knox, pp. 194, 195, and 197.

³⁶ *C.R.S.* , l.c., *Troubles of our Catholic Forefathers*, Ser. II, p. 39.

- ³⁷ *ibid.*, XXII, p. 102.
- ³⁸ Foley, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, p. 716.
- ³⁹ *Cal. S. P. Dom.*, 1581-1590. I owe most of these references concerning Charles and Philip Basset to the Rev. Bernard Basset, S. J., of Heythrop College.
- ⁴⁰ See Professor Chambers' notes in Harpsfield (l.c. ccvii and 333).
- ⁴¹ Cf. More's *English Works*, Vol. I, 1931, p. 191.
- ⁴² *E.W.*, 679, H.
- ⁴³ Vol. II of his *English Works*, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1927, p. [45].
- ⁴⁴ *E.W.*, 1376, C.
- ⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 1454, F.
- ⁴⁶ *E.W.*, 1449, H.
- ⁴⁷ 2 Cor. xii, 9.
- ⁴⁸ Like the Latin *neptis*, this word is used indifferently for niece or, as here, granddaughter.
- ⁴⁹ Paul of Burgos, a converted Jew, who afterwards became Patriarch of Aquileia and died in 1435.
- ⁵⁰ carelessly.
- ⁵¹ Ps. cxviii, 62.
- ⁵² *ibid.*, lxii, 7.
- ⁵³ Matt. x, 29.
- ⁵⁴ 2 Cor. v, 6.
- ⁵⁵ Isa. liii, 2.
- ⁵⁶ Matt. xxvi, 38.
- ⁵⁷ Matt. xii, 30.
- ⁵⁸ share. Ps. xlix, 18.
- ⁵⁹ occasionally.
- ⁶⁰ thought.
- ⁶¹ the vigils of great feasts.
- ⁶² snoring.
- ⁶³ before.
- ⁶⁴ allowed himself.
- ⁶⁵ Matt. x, 28.
- ⁶⁶ especially.
- ⁶⁷ hesitating.