

THE FIELD IS WON: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF ST THOMAS MORE, by E. E. Reynolds, *Burns and Oates*, 50s.

Mr Reynolds, to whom so much is owed by us all for his work on More, brings his studies up to date in this volume, and so enables the general reader to appreciate the remarkable increase in the knowledge of More's life which has rewarded the work of Mr Reynolds himself and of the members of the *Amici Thomae Mori*. Furthermore, there has been an impressive movement among historians to evaluate afresh the Tudor period in English history, and this book in consequence gives us the new knowledge of More set in focus. It is important to emphasise that this is not just another book on More.

Apart from this exposition of what is new—and a good example of this is the document, discovered by the author in the Record Office, which gives us at any rate the gist of the conversation between More and Rich—the book has the great virtue of clarity. The issues are kept clear and distinct. This is of great value as we move onwards and into the trial. Part of the greatness of More is to be found in the professional skill with which he faced his trial. There could, of course, be but one conclusion to a state trial for treason, but that conclusion had to be achieved according to the rules; this is brought out better and with greater exactitude than anyone has so far done. As someone once put it, one can study the martyrdom of More not only with edification but with all the intellectual enjoyment which is generally to be found in watching a first-rate chess player in action.

Has one any reservations about Mr Reynolds's book? So far as I am concerned, there are two. The first is merely a matter of apparatus which can be remedied in the next edition. There should be a full-scale genealogical table of the More family and its connexions and ramifications for the convenience of the average reader. Where kinship and family connexions counted for so much, the old saying that, until one knows who's who, one does not really know what's what, is of particular application.

The second is one of omission. I should have liked a much fuller treatment of the controversy with Tyndale. For, as the late Mgr Philip Hughes so admirably put it, 'The *Dialogue* and the works of Tyndale which it controverted

are the opening broadsides of the one classic literary duel of the English Reformation, and they are, at the same time, the last passage at arms between orthodox and heretic in an England that is still Catholic . . . the only reply to heretics written in English'. Many of the issues which engaged More and Tyndale are, moreover, very much alive today, yet it is remarkable how few English Catholics have any idea of what More had to say to them. Of More, too often we can only with reservations say *defunctus adhuc loquitur*.

Mr Reynolds's book brings out three all-important points. The first is More's intellectual integrity. In an age when so many were concerned primarily with the surface eddies of opinion and with the conflicting moods of the day, More was prepared to read, to think and to pray. It was precisely because of this that he was able finally to write of the Papacy, 'we shall find that on the one hand every enemy of the Christian faith makes war on that See, and that, on the other hand, no one has ever declared himself an enemy of that See who has not also shortly after shown most evidently that he was the enemy of the Christian religion'. As Mr Reynolds points out, the full irony of this can only be appreciated against the background of Henry VIII's *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*.

Again, it was this integrity, founded on humility, which enabled More to overcome a situation which, sooner or later, honest men discover to be a permanent problem in every age. In 1943, Bishop Henson put it very neatly: 'The enormous multiplication of flatteries, and veiled bribes, and a thousand other pseudo-ethical histrionics threatens to confuse beyond repair the boundary lines of truth and falsehood and immerse us all in a quagmire of co-operative humbug.' Unlike most Tudor Englishmen, More picked his way round that quagmire.

Finally, the price which More had to pay for this was isolation and loneliness. Much has been written and rightly of More's genius for friendship; too little attention has been paid to that prayer written in the margin of his *Book of Hours* which Mr Reynolds's perspicacity has reproduced for us on pages 355-357. *The Field is Won* is a very good book.

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