

## THE SCHOOL OF MORE

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IT is to Saint Thomas More and to the School of More, as his home in Chelsea was called, that honour must be given for leadership and inspiration in the movement for the higher education of women in England and in the subsequent development of education for the people. For the former, the court of Henry VIII and Catherine, his Spanish Queen, the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, provided a model. Around the royal table, More and his daughters and many other scholars stood and took part in the discussions. In his home, More entertained as his friends and as tutors for his daughters learned and scholarly men, Vives, Erasmus, Richard Hyrde, Dr Linacre, John Clement and others. Here round the fire in winter and in the spacious grounds in summer, that intellectual community of scholars was founded, whose life work was to open the gates of learning and scholarship first to women and later to the masses of the people.

More's eldest daughter, Margaret, describes their daily life in her *Libellus, The Household of Sir Thomas More—Libellus a Margareta More, quindecim annos nata, Chelsee inceptus*, a kind of Family Register, wherein she notes the more important events of the family, her father's journeys, the visits of learned men, their notable sayings. Mr Gonnell, one of her tutors, advised her to write the *Libellus* in English, 'which it is expedient for you not altogether to neglect even for the more honourable Latin'. Looking out of her window one day, she saw Erasmus arriving, 'the dear little man, coming up from the riverside', with her father. After dinner, Erasmus was taken 'entirely over the house in a kind of family procession, from the Buttery and scalding-house to our own dear Academia with its cool green curtain flapping in the evening breeze and blowing aside as though, on purpose, to give a glimpse of the clear shining Thames. Erasmus noted and admired the stone jar placed by Mercy Giggs on the table, full of blue and yellow irises, scarlet tiger-lilies, dog-roses, honeysuckles, moonwort and herb-Trinity; and also our various desks, each in its own little retirement, mine own, in special, so pleasantly situate! He protested with every semblance of sincerity

that he had never seen so pretty an Academy. . . . He glanced too at the books on our desks; Bessy's being Livy; Daisy's Sallust; and mine Saint Augustine, with Father's marks where I was to read, and where desist.' From the house, they went to the new building, the Chapel and Gallery, and thence to visit all the dumb animals, from the great horned Owls to Cecy's pet dormice. Erasmus was amused at some of their names, and doubted whether Duns Scotus and Venerable Bede would have been complimented by being made the 'Name Fathers' to a couple of owls. Having admired the pets, More and Margaret sat down with Erasmus to rest and talk in the Pavilion. Erasmus expressed surprise that More with his 'learning and knowledge both of Men and things' had never entered into the King's service, where he could have promoted his own interest, that of his friends and of the public. More answered that he was 'better and happier where he was', adding that the Cardinal had offered him a retaining fee to the King, a little while back, but he had refused it. He preferred to live as he wished with leisure to chat with his wife 'and sport with' his children. He had half-a-dozen blue-coated serving men, a few strong horses for work, none for show, plenty of plain food for a healthy family and enough, with a hearty welcome, for a score of guests. His regular profession supported his house and enabled him to promote peace and justice. They then turned to talk on Plato and Socrates, Erasmus exclaiming: 'What a Christian Plato would have made. . . . He is one now. He and Socrates.' Margaret and her sister Bess found the discussion of such interest that they listened with deep attention. More always addressed Erasmus by his Christian name, Desiderius.

Then one morning, Margaret heard her mother say to Barbara: 'Be sure the sirloin is well basted for the King's physician.' Dr Linacre was a guest to dinner. Margaret writes: 'At table, discourse flowed so quick and fast that I might aim in vain to chronicle it.' More told a funny story. A man owed him money, but put him off with 'Memento Morieris'. 'I bid you', retorted More, "'Memento Mori Aeris'". Linacre laughed heartily at this. Another day there was an evening in the hayfield, More reclining on the hay with his head on Margaret's lap, day-dreaming 'of a far-off future day, Meg, when thou and I shall look back on this hour, and on this hayfield and my head on thy lap'.

When Erasmus was leaving, his last saying to More was:

'They will have you at Court yet'. To Margaret he gave a copy of his Testament saying: 'You are an elegant Latinist, Margaret, but if you would drink deep of the well-springs of wisdom apply to Greek. The Latins have only shallow rivulets; the Greeks copious rivers, running over sands of gold. Read Plato; he wrote on marble with a diamond; but above all, read the New Testament. 'Tis the key to the Kingdom of Heaven.'

All parties in England were striving to have Erasmus, but in vain. The Queen wished to have him as her Preceptor, the King and Cardinal pressed on him a Royal apartment and salary, Oxford and Cambridge contended for him, but his reply was: 'All these I value less than my liberty, my studies and my literary toils'.

Margaret describes a visit from the King. The King took us by surprise this morning, she writes, mighty pleasant to all and at going saluted all around. 'He is indeed big enough and like to become too big. . . . His brow betokens sense and frankness, his eyebrows are supercilious, and his cheeks puffy. A rolling, straddling gait and abrupt speech.' Later, the King was again at More's house and walked for an hour or so in the garden, with his arm round More's neck. Will Roper, now Margaret's husband, congratulated his father-in-law on having the King's affectionate regard, to which More replied: 'I feel no cause to be proud thereof, for if my head would win him a Castle in France, it should not fail to fly off'. Yes, More did not misjudge his earthly Lord and Master.

When More and his daughters stood around the Royal table, there was no Academy that could be valued higher. Both the King and Queen delighted in reading. Not only was the Queen 'egregie docta', but other women also joined in the discussions. Erasmus regretted that he was not present in Court when More's daughters were 'disputing before the King's Grace'. The virtue and the learning of Isabella of Spain, whose four daughters were Queens, were well known and her gifted daughter, Catherine, made them known to a later age. Catherine, 'a miracle of her sex' in literature, was the first Royal person in England to support the higher education of women.

This was the group of which Vives became a member. When Catherine did not succeed in securing Erasmus as the Director of Princess Mary's education, she appointed Vives to advise her.

On first coming to London, Vives shared a squalid lodging with a fellow Spaniard. Then came his friendship with More and his introduction to More's 'right fair manor house', with its library and books gallery, its gateway and gardens stretching down to the Thames: Plato's Academy, as it was called, or more properly a University of Christian religion.

Juan Luis Vives was born in Valentia in the year in which his fellow countryman, Columbus, discovered America, 1492. His parents were of noble lineage, but poor. In Valentia, he studied law, in Paris letters and philosophy, in Louvain, where he met Erasmus, he became a University Lecturer and tutored William of Croy, later Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo. After the death of the Cardinal, he sought the interest of Henry VIII, but at first failed. Later, however, he won the approval of the English Court by his book on the *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, dedicated to Catherine. This book marks the beginning of the movement in England for the emancipation of women educationally. He was Professor in Corpus Christi, Oxford.

Vives was not the international leader in Education he should have been—in Germany, due to his lack of sympathy with the Reformation; in England, because of his opposition to the divorce of Henry VIII and Catherine; in France, because of the spirit of revolt that swept the country; in Spain, because of his early departure and associations with the Royal Court of England—but he became one of the most famous of Catholic Humanists in the period when Mediaevalism was merging into the Renaissance.

He met St Ignatius in Bruges between 1529 and 1531. It was in 1531 that his *De Tradendis Disciplinis*, covering the whole of life, appeared. There were so many points in it in common with the *Ratio Studiorum* of St Ignatius, that appeared in 1599 in respect of means and methods of teaching, such as written exercises, memory work, etc., that Ignatius was thought to have borrowed them from Vives. Some of the works of Vives, e.g. *De Conscribendis Epistolis* and *Exercitatio*, were used in Jesuit schools from the beginning. Yet Ignatius forbade his followers to read either Vives or Erasmus. This, however, was not a condemnation of their views but rather a cautionary warning of the dangerous novelties in doctrines at that time.

More, who was born in 1478, went to St Anthony's School in

Threadneedle Street. He was placed in the household of Cardinal Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury, and later went to Oxford, where Linacre was his Master in Greek. His father, Judge Moore, recalled him from Oxford, as students of Greek were suspect as revolutionaries and also because of his interest in the new learning. In both Vives and More, there was this new note of the Renaissance. The mere passion for scholarship was developing into an enthusiasm for humanity. 'We scholars', said Vives, 'must transfer our solicitude from princes to the people. We must turn our knowledge to usefulness and apply it to the common good.' He aimed at the emancipation of the ordinary student from the subtleties of the professional dialectician. The personal affection of More for Vives was due to their similarity in outlook, scholar to scholar, but with a deepening love of mankind. They had much in common. They were both attached to the Court, but were enemies of empty ceremonial and compliments. They were both intensely and simply pious. For both, scholarship and the pursuit of knowledge and truth were directly and inextricably associated with religion taken in the sense of the spiritual bond which unites men to God. Culture for them was *Pietàs Literata* with the stress on the *Pietàs*. They were both in touch with Syon Abbey, the famous house of the Order of Saint Bridget of Sweden, founded in 1415 by King Henry V. When facing death on the field of Agincourt, he begged God to spare him so that he might fulfil his promise of founding this Abbey in expiation of the sins of his father. 'Not today, O Lord, not today. Think not upon the fault my father made in compassing the crown.' More was a frequent visitor to the monks' parlour in Syon, for as in all the Bridgettine Convents of that time, Syon was a double house of nuns and monks. Scholars of All Souls, Oxford, often became priests in Syon, the Abbess being the head in temporal matters and the Confessor General in spiritual. The name of Syon Abbey should be associated with those of More and Vives as workers in the cause of the higher education of women. Syon was the nearest approach to a learned institution for women in England. It is significant that the Queen and Vives visited it together and returned by boat to Richmond Castle. Syon was dissolved by Henry VIII and its priceless books scattered.

Vives's *Instruction of a Christian Woman* was translated into English by Richard Hyrde. It was Hyrde who wrote a Prefatory

note to Margaret Roper's translation of the Commentary by Erasmus on the Lord's Prayer. Hyrde's Preface is probably the first document in English in which the higher education of women is publicly advocated.

Vives in his treatise on Poor Relief, *De Subventionem Pauperum*, advocated the extension of the responsibility for the well-being of the very poor to civic and lay authorities. He stressed the importance of co-ordinating all organizations for helping the poor and proposed outdoor and home relief. Provision should be made for the education of the submerged poor, for the relief of the mentally defective, the blind, the deaf and the insane. This was the practical expression of the deepening love of the Christian scholar for mankind. This was his method of turning his knowledge to usefulness and applying it to the common good. The development of the well-being of the community he considered more urgent than the self-absorption of the scholar in purely scholarly attainments.

For the Princess Mary he wrote, in 1524, *Symbola*, a little book of maxims to serve as a bodyguard for the child's mind. He also wrote *Satellitium, Introductio ad Sapientiam*, which has been compared with the *Imitation of Christ*. It was from the *Satellitium* that Mary took her motto, *Veritas Temporis Filia*, 'Truth the Daughter of Time'. His *Colloquia*, of which a new edition was published in 1934, is an account in Latin of the everyday life of a family—Father, Mother, Children, Teachers—of 400 years ago.

It has been said that More, Erasmus and Vives, working together, might have repeated in England in the sixteenth century, on a vastly larger scale, the age of Bede, Boniface and Alcuin, when England would be a centre of European scholarship, a refuge from which learning would have spread over war-troubled Europe, but Henry, under the influence of Anne Boleyn, had More beheaded, scared away Erasmus, and held Vives in 'libra custodia', the 'protective custody' with which we have become familiar in the twentieth century. The scholarly king, once the Defender of the Faith, the Prince Philosopher, had descended to the lowest levels of his own passionate nature, but maybe, as Margaret wrote in the last page of her *Libellus*: 'Good Christian folks, as they hereafter pass this spot . . . will . . . point this way and say "There dwelt Sir Thomas More",' adding: *Interfecisisti Hominem omnium Anglorum optimum.*