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Those attracted to St. Thomas More and eager to absorb his spirit now only need to give their full attention to a recent paperback. Other sources may still help -- More's own writings and correspondence build up his character and person -- but this is most fully revealed in the greatest of his works. *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* is unique. For insight and wisdom, it ranks with the greatest of spiritual classics. His *Dialogue* finished, More left the Tower of London to lay down his life for his beliefs.

Strange as it may seem, Thomas More's last message in English to the world outside the Tower was barely heard. Save in a small academic circle, *the Dialogue of Comfort* lay dormant and unheeded for three centuries. Why, forty years ago, when the present writer studied history at Oxford, the text of More's great work was hard to come by and could be understood only by those with patience enough to manage Early Tudor spelling. The martyr's glorious English had become archaic and his colourful vocabulary now made little sense.

Wonderful progress has been made in the past fifty years. *The Dialogue of Comfort* in its modern garb makes it possible for all to share More's dying view of life and death. The Everyman's edition makes perhaps easier reading, but the Yale paperback is enriched by an expert introduction, with valuable references and notes. Both,while they modernize punctuation and spelling,retain the full flavour of the original.

Frank Manley's introduction is of high importance, not because More is less clear in his thought but, rather, for the need we have of expert guidance as we pass from the words written in the Tower to the genius and holiness of the man. This is not the place to attempt a synopsis of Frank Manley's introduction or to consider in detail the various 'audiences' to which the prisoner addressed himself. We might have expected that a martyr, preparing for death, would have confined himself to prayers, to a fiery act of faith, to an attack on his enemies and a sturdy defence of his position, but St Thomas More differs from the run of men. He defended himself at his trial but not before ; he wrote prayers, galore, in the Tower of London but his *Dialogue of Comfort* was a scholarly treatise on his life and times. History has its place, politics, autobiography, melancholy, laced with both wit and humour and sanctity, always in the third person, overflowing from every page.

The Tower of London was no place in which to attempt a masterpiece. More had prematurely aged ; more than once, he told Meg, he had felt that he was dying ; in the *Dialogue,* he used the example of a candle, spluttering before finally bieng snuffed. He had on his mind not only the

fear of death but the possibility of torture, the constant anxiety at the harassment of his wife and children, the continual pressure brought to bear to make him change his mind. He had a few books in the Tower, for part of the time, but he lacked these and his pen in the closing stages ; Dame Alice, when she visited him in prison, did not fail to remind him of Chelsea, especially of his library and books.

We know of his pain and discomfort from other sources ; *The Dialogue of Comfort* lacks all self-pity, it is a happy, better, a contented book. Frank Manley sets out all those More was hoping to comfort, beginning with his family in Chelsea, ending with ourselves. For the *Dialogue,* embracing as it does the experience of a busy lifetime, enters into the fears and follies of quite ordinary people, those citizens of London whom More knew so well as a cockney, a lawyer, and for so many years what we might now call a police court magistrate. The conquest of fear is for him a major topic and such fear includes scrupulosity, even the temptations to suicide.

The Yale *Dialogue of Comfort* is required reading for all those who long to absorb the spirit of St Thomas More. The footnotes help to show us the martyr's astonishing use of Scripture, his knowledge of history, his abiding interest in the affairs of this world. There are still those who see Thomas More as a layman, a lawyer and a martyr, never entertaining the thought that he comes near to being a Doctor of the Church.

Taking into account his situation as a prisoner in the Tower of London, the *Dialogue of Comfort* reveals the whole More through his choice of style. His genius for dialogue persuades him, even in the Tower, to select an artificial setting and to write as an Hungarian. The very title explains the point:« *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation, made by an Hungarian in Latin and translated out of Latin into French and out of French into English* ». More keeps it up throughout. The conversation between Uncle and Nephew, Vincent, quiet and scared, Antony outspoken and rambling, holds the attention. The Turkish invasion of Hungary is historically accurate. The switch to Henry VIII as 'the great Turk' is done so delicately that it must still fool most readers, though not those who have read Frank Manley's Introduction and Chambers' warning that More took a great risk. The two Hungarians still talk, yet some of their statements mean one thing in Hungary and another in Chelsea to More's stricken family. As the *Dialogue* runs on, we are also involved, for the author is also writing for us. Antony and Vincent are still chatting when a new and startling conversation is heard beneath all the others : still as an Hungarian, Thomas More is making the gift of his life to God.

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