Thomas More

 Thomas More was born 1478, in Milk Street, London and was the eldest son of a lawyer Sir John More. After contemplating become a monk, Thomas More followed in the footsteps of his father and trained to be a lawyer at Oxford University. Although he decided against becoming a monk, he did remain deeply religious throughout his life. He took upon himself various forms of self-punishment such as wearing a hair shirt.

In 1504 he became a member of Parliament and shortly after married Jane Colt, with whom he had four children.

From 1510, More, served as one of the two under sheriffs of the City of London. More soon gained a reputation as an efficient and honest public servant, which gained him the notice of Henry VIII and in 1518, he became counsellor to the King.

More soon found himself at the heart of the government. He was elected to the Speaker of the House of Commons in 1523 and served as an important liaison with the Lord Chancellor Thomas Wolsey.

More was also a prolific and influential writer. One of his seminal works was his Utopia. This was a forerunner for ‘utopian’ philosophical pieces. His work was influenced by his religious beliefs and was based on the Biblical communalism within the New Testaments. It was later admired by Socialists who saw it as a powerful critique of economic exploitation by European states.

More defended the Catholic Church against the Reformation. As Chancellor, six Protestant heretics were burned at the stake for heresy. He denied torturing and whipping Protestants, but he approved of death by burning at the stake for heresy. More passionately believed that Protestantism was contrary to God’s will and dangerous for society.

Henry VIII sought to distance himself from the Pope, so More faced a crisis of conscience. Though he wished to be loyal to the King, he could not bring himself to accept separation from the Catholic church which he had for so long defended.

In 1534, More was asked to swear allegiance to the Parliamentary Act of Succession. But, More refused for the anti – papal references he could not support.

As a result More was imprisoned in the Tower of London and tried in 1535. Many time Cromwell tried to get More to take the oath, but, he refused. He was eventually convicted of treason and sentenced to death by – hanging, drawing and quartering. But, the King commuted this to death by beheading.

“the King’s good servant, but God’s first.”

– Thomas More – said to be his final words on the scaffold before his execution.

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