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A Man Born Again: Saint Thomas More

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BOOK REVIEW

A MAN BORN AGAIN: SAINT THOMAS MORE, by *John E. Beahn*, 208 pp., The Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, 1954, \$3.00.

Reviewed by

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It is a truism that the lives of the saints are rarely dull. Contrary to the misconception in the minds of some who have never taken advantage of the abundant opportunities to familiarize themselves with the trials and torments that are usually the prelude to sanctity, saints are, first of all, human beings.

With the ever-increasing literature concerning Saint Thomas More, there is at hand a wide choice for the reader who wants to learn something of the life of the patron saint of lawyers. These books range from the first authoritative biography by More's son-in-law, William Roper, through fictionalized stories based upon authentic historical incidents, to the present apocryphal "autobiography," *A Man Born Again*, by Edward Beahn.

In another medium the title, taken from the opening verses of the third chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, would serve as the text for a sermon, and in this readable account of More's life it presages the lesson that More had to learn before acquiring sanctity.

The principal facts in More's life are generally well-known and any controversy outside the Church regarding his martyrdom can be considered well settled by Lord Campbell's statement in his *Lives of the Chief Justices*:

No one can deny that Lord Chief Justice Fitzjames was an accessory to this atrocious murder.

The form chosen by Beahn, though verging on fiction, is admirably suited to a "subjective" study of More's pursuit of sanctity. Written in the first person it affords many opportunities to express the thoughts that might very well have been occupying him

throughout the various stages of his life.

Although there is slight authentic record of Thomas More's childhood, Beahn presents a readable account of his time spent as a page in the residence of Archbishop Morton, Lord Chancellor of England. There are, in this book, numerous suggestions of a cold relationship between Thomas and his father, which seems unfortunate to this reviewer, unless they are intended to emphasize Thomas' spiritual rebirth. Roper makes specific reference to humility and the respect displayed toward his father.

With respect to More's indecision between following a priestly or a lawyer's life, the author has Father Paul asking him, "Which is better, Master More, to be a learned layman of great holiness or a learned priest of little holiness?"

According to this account More had a great deal to overcome in his attitude towards his father and in his pride. The author attributes the beginning of More's spiritual rebirth in large part to his father's reaction when More had him released from the Tower through the payment of funds that More had begged from his father's friends.

Concerned, as this book is, with "the inner thoughts, feelings, motives, and goals, of a saint," it could have been merely a pious account of the struggle for sanctity. Instead the author has given us an interesting story unmarred by lengthy soliloquies or soul-searchings. Although it does not pretend to be a definitive, documented biography it does fulfill its author's purpose in an entertaining and informative manner. It is particularly recommended to those who prefer a lighter treatment of the lives of the saints and it need not be overlooked by the more serious student.

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