

their teaching was spreading throughout the kingdom. The result of this peculiar position of things was, that if a man was a Protestant he might be burned as a heretic; while if he was a Roman Catholic and held that the Pope was the head of the church, he might be beheaded as a traitor. Some of the best men in England were put to death for refusing to agree with the king.

Among those who suffered death for their belief were Sir Thomas More and John Fisher, the aged Bishop of Rochester.

More was one of the most learned men of his time, and had succeeded Wolsey as lord chancellor. When, however, Henry married Anne Boleyn, More resigned his office and retired to his home. He would not admit the legality of the king's marriage with Anne, although quite willing to acknowledge Anne's children to be the lawful successors to the throne, because Parliament had made them so.



SIR THOMAS MORE

The king was furious, and More was sent to the block. Not only England, but all Europe was shocked at his execution.

120. The suppression of the monasteries.—When Henry began his reign, much of the land in the kingdom was in the possession of the church. The cathedrals, monasteries, chapels, and abbeys held estates, by the income of which they were maintained. Though the monasteries were extremely wealthy, their influence over the people had greatly declined. Wolsey had already closed some of the smaller houses and used their revenues to found schools and colleges; now the idea occurred to Henry that he might close all the monasteries and take their estates for himself.

The task of suppressing the monasteries was intrusted to Thomas Cromwell, who for some years after the death of