



SLAYING THE DRAGON & SAVING THE INNOCENT: ALUMNI EDUCATORS



By Hannah O'Connor '11

Not only did St. George slay the dragon, but he saved the princess and the innocent children demanded as its sacrifice. “Children are still offered up to dragons today,” says Michael Verlander '00, “in the form of today’s schools.” I caught up with Mr. Verlander on a Saturday morning, in between meetings with families regarding the opening of his new school, Ave Maria Academy in Newnan, Georgia. “We’ve taken St. George as our patron because his story outlines our mission: to slay the dragon which preys on the young and innocent in the form of modern education.”

During his senior year in high school, Verlander fell in love with the pursuit of truth. He also knew he wanted to teach. It was this twin vocation that first drew him to Thomas More College. “Seeing the fullness of Catholic faith lived out opened my eyes to the world outside

the cave,” he explains, referencing Plato’s *Republic*. “The Thomas More community introduced me to an integrated view of Catholic education and life.” Among the many influences he cites are classes not being scheduled during Mass, student rosaries closing out the day in the chapel, communal celebrations on feast days, and especially the Rome semester. “The way Dr. Connell taught and took us on trips was experiential. He walked us through the beauty of a Catholic world view, showing and teaching along the way.”

When Verlander graduated from TMC he almost immediately began teaching in a high school, attempting to inspire high schoolers to begin a lifelong pursuit of truth. “The high school was looking for trips to take the students on. I suggested Rome as a capstone experience for seniors and have now been leading it for over ten years.”

This past year he turned his attention to founding a new school under the patronage of St. George. “There will be stories of heroes and saints told to the children. It may only be a grade school, but that is the perfect place to start opening up the child to the

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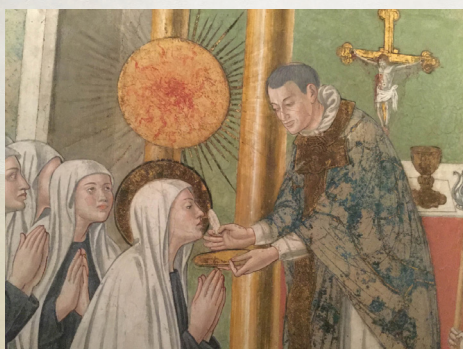
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LETTERS FROM ROME



DAWN AT PIAZZA
DI SANTA CECILIA

READING HAWTHORNE'S
THE MARBLE FAUN

DANCING THE VIRGINIA REEL
ON THE JANICULUM

I wish I could explain what it feels like to sing for Mass in Saint Cecilia's church, or how stunning it is to watch the sky from Piazza di Santa Cecilia at six in the morning, as it turns from dark to pale blue while smoke puffs from a nearby chimney and the smell of baking bread wafts through the air. Then there was the time my roommate and I stood in Piazza di San Pietro Montorio, eating gluten-free pizza as we gazed out over the city and wondered aloud what it is about Roma that looses one's tongue as it does. A few days ago, I haggled for the price of a scarf and got my way, but I don't know how to explain how much fun it is to communicate in a garble of Italian and English with laughing vendors.

—Eileen Lloyd

For every church in Rome we enter, the legend of the saint beneath the altar tucked firmly beneath our belts, there is also an alleyway down which we do not walk, and the surrounding story can only be imagined. The image of the faun in Hawthorne's story suffices as a stand-in for this sort of phenomenon. Part human, but tinged with the bizarre, the faun dances between the natural and the supernatural realms.... We are living among some of most beautiful ruins in the world. Let us follow the faun for a time, trusting that we still have growing to do, and by surrendering a bit of pride, and accepting our ignorance, we can be shown what God wants to teach us here.

—Joshua Dionne

It seemed too absurd, too out-of-place to dance our rural TMC dance in the middle of Rome. But the music was in our bones, and we are used to eking out these reels whenever the music allows us, and there were as many boys as girls. Each boy grabbed a girl, we formed our lines, and off we went, frisking like careless New England fauns over the Roman grass. The natural order of things was reversed: the eager Americans were no longer the ones taking pictures of all the Italian sights; rather, the Italians began to take pictures of us.

—Bridget Lawler

All TMC sophomores spend a semester in Rome at no additional cost. Follow the Class of 2018 at Rome. ThomasMoreCollege.edu.



A LETTER FROM THE SEMINARY

By Joshua Keatley '14

Whether it was during the glorious New England autumns or the dusty splendor of the Rome semester, my experience at Thomas More College was above all a joyful one. The classical liberal education opened a space of freedom and intellectual avidity that deeply affected me. This was especially the case due to the sense of community present among my fellow students and fostered by the faculty. Unless one tried very hard to avoid company, being swept into the flood of lively discussion and cultural creativity was nearly irresistible. For four years, it was a Last Homely House for me, and the education I received there had a central influence on my discernment of the priesthood.

I actually came across the College by accident, shortly after I had watched the film, *A Man for All Seasons*. One survey of the catalog and I knew that this was the school I wanted to go to: a small campus, strong affirmation of a Catholic identity, and a rigorous classical curriculum. Suffice it to say that Thomas More (the school and the saint) exceeded my expectations.

There are so many good memories from Thomas More College! Some apt words stand out: comradeship, wonder, reverence, festivity, patrimony. I mean, who even talks about these things anymore? Images stand out as well. Latin conjugations. Stargazing on winter nights. Reading Robert Frost in the New England autumn. Sitting under a maple tree with an apple, a pipe, and a copy of Plato's *Republic* or Benedict's *Rule* or a collection of Hopkins's poems. Community banquets replete with speeches, songs, dancing, and laughter. Chanting and the heavy swell of incense at Mass. Stopping awestruck at the sight of the snow-dusted Roman aqueduct in Spoleto during the Rome semester, or strolling through Port Meadow on our way back to Oxford, as the English rain drizzled down and Christ Church's spires stood dun and dull in the distance.

I graduated from TMC in 2014 and am completing my master's in philosophy at Mount Angel, a Benedictine-hosted seminary in Western Oregon. This is my second year of priestly formation, and I am looking forward to continuing my five-year formal theologate in the fall (also at Mount Angel) as a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Portland.

"For four years, TMC was a Last Homely House for me; it had a central influence on my discernment of the priesthood."

—Joshua Keatley '14

one incident very clearly. We were going through the church of San Damiano, and since I was last in line, I stopped to watch the snow falling softly into the cloister. There was utter silence. Then the thought came to me, and left just as suddenly: "What am I going to do with myself after TMC? What about the priesthood?" That moment was a gentle nudge for me, and over the next two years I began discerning the right way to radically give myself to other people out of love for Jesus Christ.

Seminary life has been challenging and joyful: challenging because it requires generosity and sacrifice, joyful because of the freedom to love that comes with those things. Of course, there's still a long way for me to go to the priesthood. But God willing, that is where I will be in five years, *ad altare Dei, qui laetificat juventutem meam*. As a central step in my path there, I can only offer my profound gratitude for the education that I received at Thomas More College.



Joshua Keatley '14 is a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon.



Below: Magdalene College, where C.S. Lewis was a Fellow and Oscar Wilde read *Greats*.

Bottom: Oxford Programme participants, including TMC seniors Isabel Anderson and Theresa Scott, punt down the Cherwell.



WHERE IT IS ALWAYS TIME FOR TEA: TMC'S OXFORD PROGRAMME

By Carley Novotny '15

It was a temperate evening in a place called Port Meadow on the outskirts of Oxford, England. I was ambling down the dirt paths through the meadow after dusk, my belly filled with crêpe and ale and blackberries from along the way, my mind filled with the night's conversation, and the air filled with the laughter of my friends and myself. This happy memory comes to me, and I wonder, "How did I find myself there, in that Arcadian dreamland, that world of Bridesheadian wonder, in Oxford where it is always time for tea?" Through Thomas More College, of course.

The Oxford Programme, a cooperation between TMC and the Second Spring Center for Faith & Culture, consists of a series of lectures, seminars, and tours on the phases of Catholic spirituality in England. It opens with classes at TMC's Merrimack, NH campus before continuing in Oxford. My fellow scholars included current TMC seniors Isabel Anderson, Abigail Howard, and Theresa Scott. Armed with tweed, elbow patches, and more editions of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

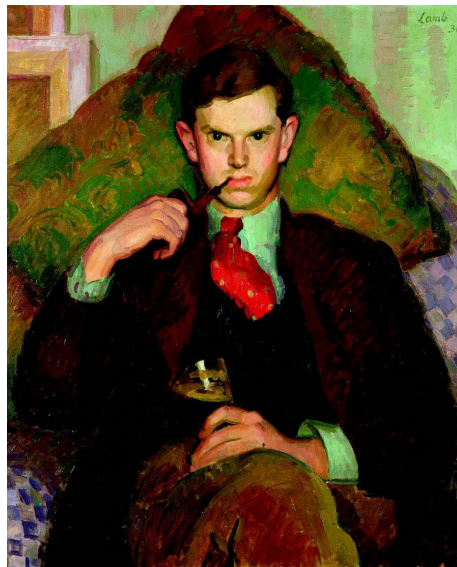
than were really necessary, we set out upon our exploration of English culture and history: the medieval marriage of spirituality and public life, the causes and effects of the Reformation, the eradication of the Catholic faith and way of life, the suppression of artistic freedom, and the thinkers and poets who, through the written word, gave a voice to that stifled culture. Leonie Caldecott, director of the Second Spring Center for Faith & Culture, spoke on the English cultural dilemma, as well as the ongoing cultural revival which takes place through art and literature: "We became a culture of the word. Things have been reconstructed through the voices of the poets."

Shakespeare, of course, was one of the primary literary figures treated in our lectures. We undertook in-depth study of the Bard under the tutelage of Lady Claire Asquith whose theory regarding anti-Reformation "code" in Shakespeare's works was the subject of her 2005 book *Shadowplay*. Our study of Shakespeare culminated in a viewing of his comedy *As You Like It* at his own theater in London, the Globe.

For my companions and me, much of the enchantment of Oxford came from the abiding presence of those literary giants who had been there before us whose work we know so well. During class, we explored the thought of the Inklings, namely Tolkien and Lewis, focusing on their employment of myth and fantasy to portray theological realities in literature. During the evenings, we would often duck into The Eagle and Child pub, just down the road from our lodging at St. Benet's Hall. The pub was a famous meeting spot of the Inklings where they gathered to discuss the methods and aims of storytelling, to share their work with one another, and, of course, to enjoy a good pint or two. Decades after the Inklings, I found myself at The Eagle and Child in a similar spirit, reading *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* aloud with my friends in homage to our literary loves.

But a Catholic Anglophile cannot speak about literary loves without immediately uttering the names of G.K. Chesterton and Evelyn Waugh. At the G.K. Chesterton Library, located at the Oxford Oratory, we studied the writer's critique of post-industrial society and viewed many of his personal belongings, including his own books inscribed with his own doodles. Wandering in Oxford's Botanic Gardens and punting down the

Cherwell at Magdalen College, we made our own the words of Sebastian Flyte: "If it could only be like this always—always summer, always alone, the fruit always ripe and Aloysius in a good temper."



*Portrait of Evelyn Waugh by
Henry Lamb, 1930*

Our time in Oxford ended too soon—just when the place had begun to become our own. Near the end of our stay, I started to see the same people all over town: the barkeep from our favorite pub riding his bicycle past St. Benet's, the woman who sat across from me in Evensong at Christ Church chatting with her friends at the Perch Pub, the

young man from the fine stationery shop hurrying past me on my way home from the Oratory. It would have been a joy to linger, but the Christian knows well that he is a pilgrim, and the pilgrimage continues.

Thus we left Oxford with an appropriate feeling of sadness, but also with the invigoration of one who has been charged with a worthy task—the renewal of Catholic culture through art and through the word. It is the sort of endeavor which necessarily calls for community. In our closing discussion, Leonie Caldecott told us: "Ideology is always going to be weaker than the truth. But we must be sure not to become ideological ourselves. We have to act from our humanity. You don't just sit there in isolation and write your novel. You're part of a culture and a community, and these things spring up from friendships. So drink good beer, and keep good company."

The Oxford Summer Programme is a joint initiative of Thomas More College and the Second Spring Centre for Faith and Culture. The full three-week programme includes six hours of course credit. For more information or to apply, visit ThomasMoreCollege.edu/SummerProgram or email Dr. William Fahey at wfahey@thomasmorecollege.edu.

C.S. Lewis's house and garden



Immaculate Conception Banquet and Procession



Christmas Cookie Party



Oktoberfest



Fr. Rale Thanksgiving Dinner



Fall Tea and Shoot



Convocation Mass



A CONT FEAS THOMAS COLL

March for Life in Washington, D.C.



Thomas More Birthday Banquet



Robert Burns Supper and Poetry Contest



Easter Banquet



Commencement



Spring Soirée



ALUMNI EDUCATORS

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transcendence which education today otherwise rejects. They will be introduced to poetic knowledge in the experience of the story. We will use our eyes to see God's creation and practice science by observation."

Mr. Verlander offers encouragement to TMC students seeking teaching jobs after graduation: "Visit the schools. Speak to the leadership and don't be afraid to ask questions. Discern if the school is carrying out the type of education you have experienced. There is a great desire in families and in the human heart for the pursuit of truth. People yearn to participate—and have their children participate—in this type of education. These places can exist in life, not just on paper. We need teachers and schools like this."

TMC FORMS TEACHERS

Today at Thomas More College 35% of the Class of 2015 are teaching and 31% of upcoming graduates plan to teach. Who knows how many more homeschool another generation or teach at a local co-op? That's a lot of lives being affected by each TMC graduate.

Recognizing the widespread vocation to teach among TMC students, Fellow Dr. Ryan Topping developed a tutorial for juniors and seniors "contemplating a career as an educator." The Theory and Practice of Christian Education combines "the reading and discussion of foundational works in educational theory"—including Aristotle, Newman,

Dewey, and Montessori—with "classroom observation and apprentice teaching at a local parish, homeschool cooperative, or school."

Last semester, Junior Elise Grahek, Class of 2017, was placed at a local Catholic grade school, St. Francis of Assisi in Litchfield, New Hampshire. Her experience working with 5th and 6th grade religion students revealed how open to being formed children are. "The formation they have now is going to stick with them and—hopefully—get them through a lot in life," she notes.

Mr. Stephen Lajoie '15, is also a graduate of the Topping tutorial. He is now a full-time 3rd grade teacher at St. Francis. Teaching had always been on his radar, though he had been considering a career in politics. "Then, through attending TMC and taking Dr. Topping's tutorial, I landed the job I have today—and recognized my calling."

Alumni teachers are also drawing students to TMC. Mr. Joseph Rudolph '11 teaches poetry and physics at New England Classical Academy in Claremont, NH. "There was something different about him in the classroom," says Annette Lamontagne, Class of 2019. "He spoke so highly of Thomas More and its community that my interest was sparked."

ALUMNAE EDUCATE EDUCATORS

Miss Glenna Walsh '15 took Dr. Topping's teaching tutorial alongside Mr. Lajoie. "What I took away was that all education starts with the Faith. Both in the class and in the school." While not currently teaching at a school,

Miss Walsh is actively aiding Catholic educators.

Upon graduation Walsh began working for the Sophia Institute for Teachers, alongside fellow alumna Elisabeth Rochon '13. The



The Verlander Family

Institute's mission is two-fold: to write supplemental workbooks for the classroom, and to go to schools and train teachers. Miss Walsh, who is the Communications Coordinator, says, "We see there are a lot of Catholic schools out there where students are not receiving the solid and beautifying classical formation. Christ is not being encountered in the classroom. Our mission, between literature for teachers and teacher retreats, is to insert orthodoxy into the curricula of these schools, and to help the Catholic teachers to be Catholic as well as teachers."

Whether through founding schools, teaching or forming teachers, TMC alumni are clearly slaying the dragon and saving the innocent.

Learn more about Ave Maria Academy at avemariaga.com.

For free teaching resources or more information about the Sophia Institute, visit sophiainstituteforteachers.org.



INCORRUPT POLITICIAN:

AN INTERVIEW WITH JESSE O. KURTZ '07

A few weeks after graduating from Thomas More College in 2007, Jesse O. Kurtz married Cara. Today, they are homeschooling a family of five in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and are active members of Mater Ecclesiae Parish in the Diocese of Camden. Mr. Kurtz works as Senior Manager of Web Systems and Marketing at Atlantic Cape Community College and operates Kurtz Web Services, a consulting firm specializing in websites and social media. He was recently elected to represent Atlantic City's 6th Ward in the City Council. Communitas caught up with Mr. Kurtz in February.

Communitas: What was your upbringing like? Did politics play a role? What about the Great Books?

Jesse: I was born and raised in Atlantic City, New Jersey, the oldest of three children in a practicing Catholic family. As a boy, I remember slipping political fliers under doors in our apartment complex. We were homeschooled, though the philosophy was closer to "unschooling." I learned about the Great Books while visiting the annual conference of CHAPLET (Catholic Homeschooling Association with Papal Loyalty Educating Together) at Mater Ecclesiae Parish. That conference prompted my research into Great Books colleges.

Communitas: What made TMC stand out from other Great Books schools?

Jesse: I realized that a lot of Great Books colleges approached the classics merely as tools for understanding what Western civilization has been, or as a starting point for subverting the tradition. I was drawn to schools that saw enduring value in the Great Books. Of course that's what Thomas More is all about.

Communitas: Once you arrived at TMC, which books or thinkers most resonated with you?

Jesse: Reading Plato's *Republic* was a revelation. It awakened me to the breadth of political thought. Probably the most formative thinker for me was St. Thomas Aquinas, particularly his ethics. I did my Junior Project on Aquinas's treatise on law. I also enjoyed reading Robert Penn Warren's novel, *All the King's Men*.

Communitas: Inside and outside of the classroom, how did TMC shape your political vocation?

Jesse: Thomas More gave me a foundation in political theory that continues to ground me. Some of my best memories are of strongly felt

conversations in the cafeteria, over Chef Pat's meals. Being in New Hampshire gave me a taste of a presidential election. I had started a student newspaper, so we were able to be accredited as members of the press and follow the various campaigns. I remember meeting Senator John McCain right down the road in Nashua.

Communitas: What can politics learn from TMC?

Jesse: TMC helped me to understand the nature of prudence, and how to put that into practice. Namely, something has to be good not only in itself, but good for the actor and good in context. This has immediate application in public office.

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Jesse O. '07 and Cara Kurtz with their children (L to R) Ambrosius, Anastasia, Caecilia, Benedict, and Blasius

KURTZ

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Communitas: What do you hope to achieve as Atlantic City Councilman for the 6th Ward?

Jesse: The city is on the brink of bankruptcy. We have a structural deficit. What I hope to bring to City Council is prudence in financial decisions and integrity. I believe that I can help put Atlantic City on a sounder financial basis.

Communitas: Everyone knows Atlantic City from Monopoly. What would you like the city to be known for?

Jesse: Atlantic City was a hub for swing music in the 1940s and '50s—acts like the Glenn Miller Orchestra and Frank Sinatra. That's something a lot of people have forgotten.

Communitas: Many young people today are deeply discouraged about the state of American politics. Consequently, there is widespread apathy. What message about politics would you like to share with TMC?

Jesse: It is absolutely essential for practicing Catholics who are concerned with the current state of affairs in America and see how America fits into Western Civilization to get their hands wet, especially at the local level. There are great opportunities out there; we just have to seek them out.

Communitas: Can a serious Catholic make it as a politician? Isn't the electorate alienated by Catholic teaching on hot-button issues?

Jesse: At times it can be difficult to reach people who are not willing to consider a Catholic perspective. However, I've found that if you establish yourself as having a principled, well-rounded vision, most people have an overall respect for the consistency and breadth that Catholicism brings to politics.

Communitas: How did TMC shape you as a husband and paterfamilias?

Jesse: When I was a senior, five guys in our class were engaged. I was number two; I got married in June. That last year we were all preparing together,



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sharing insights and readings. I found Dietrich von Hildebrand's short book, *Marriage: The Mystery of Faithful Love*, to be the most succinct and compelling explanation of marriage. It was extraordinary to be part of a community of young gentlemen, united by a lofty vision of marriage.

Communitas: How did TMC shape you as a Catholic?

Jesse: I came into TMC as a cradle-Catholic, raised in a Catholic household. TMC gave my faith much greater depth. It so happened that we were in Rome when John Paul II passed away and Benedict XVI was elected. That left a big impression on me. I also remember talking with Fr. Healey. Both inside and outside of the classroom, TMC took

my fundamental conviction about the Faith and gave it a substance and an intelligibility it didn't have before.

Communitas: Do you have any words of wisdom for this year's graduating class?

Jesse: Yes: persevere in the job market. Sometimes TMC graduates can be discouraged because companies seem to be looking for applicants with specialized training. It may take a little longer, or a little more convincing, to break into a career. It's after getting that first break that a TMC graduate really shines. There is no substitute for being a Christian gentleman. There is no substitute for virtue.

TREASURES FROM THE LIBRARY:

SHAKESPEARE COMMENTARY BY ETHAN ALLEN'S GRANDSON

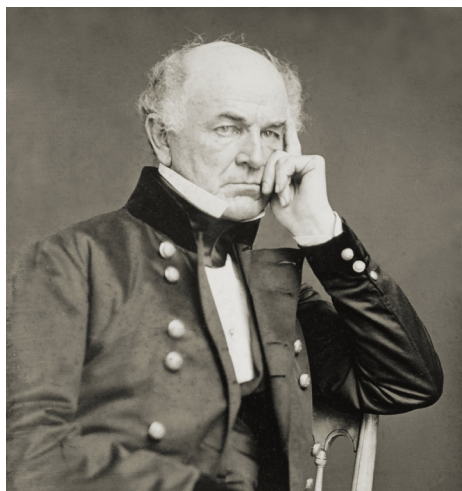
The Warren Memorial Library has a new librarian: Alexis Rohlfing—née Recchia, '08, wife of MacKenzie Rohlfing, '05. In this new Communitas feature, Mrs. Rohlfing highlights some of the hidden gems of the collection. Mrs. Rohlfing maintains a library blog, A Library for All Seasons, at tmcwarrenlibrary.wordpress.com.

By Alexis Rohlfing '08

The collection in the Warren Memorial Library is eclectic, to say the least. Back when the College started, when love of learning and books was larger than the available budget, a large portion of the library's collection was built through the deselections of other libraries. What does that mean? In a phrase, "one man's trash is another man's treasure." A person or library may remove a book for a variety of reasons, and we take all kinds. While the vast majority of books are your standard paperback or hardcover, we do have a number of interesting pieces in the collection. The first that we will share with you is *Remarks on the Sonnets of Shakespeare* by Major General Ethan Allen Hitchcock.

My first question for you is, have you ever heard of Major General Ethan Allen Hitchcock? If the answer is no, don't worry; I hadn't either. Ethan Allen Hitchcock was born in Vergennes, VT in 1798. Vergennes is a beautiful little town about seven miles away from Lake Champlain and not so very far away from Merrimack. The trip is three hours by car through the flatter countryside of New Hampshire and the Green Mountains of Vermont. The town was named after the Comte de Vergennes at the suggestion of Ethan Allen—Ethan Allen being the grandfather of Ethan Allen Hitchcock, and famous for a great many things in his own right.

Ethan Allen likely needs no introduction, but we shall give him one anyway. On May 10, 1775 Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys, with Benedict Arnold along for kicks, captured Fort Ticonderoga in what is now upstate New York. The cannon would prove to be important to breaking the siege of Boston, and the Fort's location was significant as well. It would be one of the defining moments of Ethan Allen's career, and there can be little doubt it is what he is most remembered for. He did also help found the state of Vermont, in which he would live and die, and in which his daughter would marry an accomplished man of law and raise her six children.



Major General Ethan Allen Hitchcock

Samuel Hitchcock, our major general's father, was a lawyer turned Attorney General for the state of Vermont. He was also one of Vermont's delegates to the Constitutional Convention in 1787, and wrote the charter for the University of Vermont.

With those antecedents, the good (eventual) General had a lot to live up to. After graduating from the US Military Academy, Hitchcock moved through the ranks, serving in the Seminole War and the Mexican-American War. He was out of service for a time before returning to

serve in the Civil War, attaining the rank of Major General. He was a military man, through and through. And yet, somewhere in between marching all over the country and commanding troops during a war that was the bloodiest to date, he found time to write. The flute and alchemy were his two loves, but he clearly had a soft spot in his heart for Shakespeare, as this little volume attests.

Remarks on the Sonnets of Shakespeare was published in 1865, five years before Ethan Allen Hitchcock passed away. It was the last book he wrote that was published in his lifetime. His journals, *Fifty Years in Camp and Field* and *A Traveler in Indian Territory* would only be published posthumously. The work is credited to "The Author of 'Remarks on Alchemy,' 'Swedenborg A Hermetic Philosopher,' 'Christ the Spirit,' and 'The Red Book of Appin with Interpretations.'" It was, in fact, that title page that first caught my eye. The publisher at the time clearly felt that Hitchcock needed no introduction; the audience 151 years later clearly does. After falling down the rabbit hole of research, it's clear why those at the time might have thought the title page credit enough.

The copy we possesses is not in the best condition: it has visible wear on the spine and there are sections that are detaching from the spine. That's to be expected of a little book from 1865 that has rattled around for slightly over 150 years. It is an unassuming green volume with an embossed cover. Perhaps my favorite part is the mere existence of the volume: it was written by a man whose grandfather is inextricably tied to the foundation of the country, published the year the Civil War ended, and yet the final work of the author was published posthumously in 1930, between the first and second World Wars. Such a timespan for a small, mostly forgotten book!



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THE SOCIETY PAGE



1.



2.



3.

AnnMarie Lidman Photography



4.

ENGAGEMENTS: 1. Allison Welton, Class of 2016, and Vincent Deardurff '15; 2. Kristina Landry '14 and Devin King '14

CONGRATULATIONS: 3. *The Golden Princess and the Moon*, a fairy tale novel by Anna Maria Mendell '08, will be published by Angelico Press this spring.

ORDINATION: 4. Matthew Schultz, TMC friend and seminarian for the Diocese of Manchester, will be ordained to the diaconate in May.

Share your alumni news and pictures in the next *Communitas*! Email athompsonbriggs@thomasmorecollege.edu.