

Utopia



Thomas More

INTRODUCTION

Sir Thomas More, son of Sir John More, a justice of the King's Bench, was born in 1478, in Milk Street, in the city of London. After his earlier education at St. Anthony's School, in Threadneedle Street, he was placed, as a boy, in the household of Cardinal John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor. It was not unusual for persons of wealth or influence and sons of good families to be so established together in a relation of patron and client. The youth wore his patron's livery, and added to his state. The patron used, afterwards, his wealth or influence in helping his young client forward in the world. Cardinal Morton had been in earlier days that Bishop of Ely whom Richard III. sent to the Tower; was busy afterwards in hostility to Richard; and was a chief adviser of Henry VII., who in 1486 made him Archbishop of Canterbury, and nine months afterwards Lord Chancellor. Cardinal Morton—of talk at whose table there are recollections in "Utopia"—delighted in the quick wit of young Thomas More. He once said, "Whoever shall live to try it, shall see this child here waiting at table prove a notable and rare man."

At the age of about nineteen, Thomas More was sent to Canterbury College, Oxford, by his patron, where he learnt Greek of the first men who brought Greek studies from Italy to England—William Grocyn and Thomas Linacre. Linacre, a physician, who afterwards took orders, was also the founder of the College of Physicians. In 1499, More left Oxford to study law in London, at Lincoln's Inn, and in the next year Archbishop Morton died.

More's earnest character caused him while studying law to aim at the subduing of the flesh, by wearing a hair shirt, taking a log for a pillow, and whipping himself on Fridays. At the age of twenty-one he entered Parliament, and soon after he had been called to the bar he was made Under-Sheriff of London. In 1503 he opposed in the House of Commons Henry VII.'s proposal for a subsidy on account of the marriage portion of his daughter Margaret; and he opposed with so much energy that the House refused to grant it. One went and told the king that a beardless boy

had disappointed all his expectations. During the last years, therefore, of Henry VII. More was under the displeasure of the king, and had thoughts of leaving the country.

Henry VII. died in April, 1509, when More's age was a little over thirty. In the first years of the reign of Henry VIII. he rose to large practice in the law courts, where it is said he refused to plead in cases which he thought unjust, and took no fees from widows, orphans, or the poor. He would have preferred marrying the second daughter of John Colt, of New Hall, in Essex, but chose her elder sister, that he might not subject her to the discredit of being passed over.

In 1513 Thomas More, still Under-Sheriff of London, is said to have written his "History of the Life and Death of King Edward V., and of the Usurpation of Richard III." The book, which seems to contain the knowledge and opinions of More's patron, Morton, was not printed until 1557, when its writer had been twenty-two years dead. It was then printed from a MS. in More's handwriting.

In the year 1515 Wolsey, Archbishop of York, was made Cardinal by Leo X.; Henry VIII. made him Lord Chancellor, and from that year until 1523 the King and the Cardinal ruled England with absolute authority, and called no parliament. In May of the year 1515 Thomas More—not knighted yet—was joined in a commission to the Low Countries with Cuthbert Tunstal and others to confer with the ambassadors of Charles V., then only Archduke of Austria, upon a renewal of alliance. On that embassy More, aged about thirty-seven, was absent from England for six months, and while at Antwerp he established friendship with Peter Giles (Latinised Ægidius), a scholarly and courteous young man, who was secretary to the municipality of Antwerp.

Cuthbert Tunstal was a rising churchman, chancellor to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who in that year (1515) was made Archdeacon of Chester, and in May of the next year (1516) Master of the Rolls. In 1516 he was sent again to the Low Countries, and More then went with him to Brussels, where they were in close companionship with Erasmus.

More's "Utopia" was written in Latin, and is in two parts, of which the second, describing the place ([Greek text]—or

Nusquama, as he called it sometimes in his letters —“Nowhere”), was probably written towards the close of 1515; the first part, introductory, early in 1516. The book was first printed at Louvain, late in 1516, under the editorship of Erasmus, Peter Giles, and other of More’s friends in Flanders. It was then revised by More, and printed by Frobenius at Basle in November, 1518. It was reprinted at Paris and Vienna, but was not printed in England during More’s lifetime. Its first publication in this country was in the English translation, made in Edward’s VI.’s reign (1551) by Ralph Robinson. It was translated with more literary skill by Gilbert Burnet, in 1684, soon after he had conducted the defence of his friend Lord William Russell, attended his execution, vindicated his memory, and been spitefully deprived by James II. of his lectureship at St. Clement’s. Burnet was drawn to the translation of “Utopia” by the same sense of unreason in high places that caused More to write the book. Burnet’s is the translation given in this volume.

The name of the book has given an adjective to our language—we call an impracticable scheme Utopian. Yet, under the veil of a playful fiction, the talk is intensely earnest, and abounds in practical suggestion. It is the work of a scholarly and witty Englishman, who attacks in his own way the chief political and social evils of his time. Beginning with fact, More tells how he was sent into Flanders with Cuthbert Tunstal, “whom the king’s majesty of late, to the great rejoicing of all men, did prefer to the office of Master of the Rolls;” how the commissioners of Charles met them at Bruges, and presently returned to Brussels for instructions; and how More then went to Antwerp, where he found a pleasure in the society of Peter Giles which soothed his desire to see again his wife and children, from whom he had been four months away. Then fact slides into fiction with the finding of Raphael Hythloday (whose name, made of two Greek words [Greek text] and [Greek text], means “knowing in trifles”), a man who had been with Amerigo Vespucci in the three last of the voyages to the new world lately discovered, of which the account had been first printed in 1507, only nine years before Utopia was written.

Designedly fantastic in suggestion of details, “Utopia” is the work of a scholar who had read Plato’s “Republic,” and had his fancy quickened after reading Plutarch’s account of

Spartan life under Lycurgus. Beneath the veil of an ideal communism, into which there has been worked some witty extravagance, there lies a noble English argument. Sometimes More puts the case as of France when he means England. Sometimes there is ironical praise of the good faith of Christian kings, saving the book from censure as a political attack on the policy of Henry VIII. Erasmus wrote to a friend in 1517 that he should send for More's "Utopia," if he had not read it, and "wished to see the true source of all political evils." And to More Erasmus wrote of his book, "A burgomaster of Antwerp is so pleased with it that he knows it all by heart."

H. M.

DISCOURSES OF RAPHAEL HYTHLODAY, OF THE BEST STATE OF A COMMONWEALTH

Henry VIII., the unconquered King of England, a prince adorned with all the virtues that become a great monarch, having some differences of no small consequence with Charles the most serene Prince of Castile, sent me into Flanders, as his ambassador, for treating and composing matters between them. I was colleague and companion to that incomparable man Cuthbert Tonsal, whom the King, with such universal applause, lately made Master of the Rolls; but of whom I will say nothing; not because I fear that the testimony of a friend will be suspected, but rather because his learning and virtues are too great for me to do them justice, and so well known, that they need not my commendations, unless I would, according to the proverb, "Show the sun with a lantern." Those that were appointed by the Prince to treat with us, met us at Bruges, according to agreement; they were all worthy men. The Margrave of Bruges was their head, and the chief man among them; but he that was esteemed the wisest, and that spoke for the rest, was George Temse, the Provost of Casselsee: both art and nature had concurred to make him eloquent: he was very learned in the law; and, as he had a great capacity, so, by a long practice in affairs, he was very dexterous at unravelling them. After we had several times met, without coming to an agreement, they went to Brussels for some days, to know the Prince's pleasure; and, since our business would admit it, I went to Antwerp. While I was there, among many that visited me, there was one that was more acceptable to me than any other, Peter Giles, born at Antwerp, who is a man of great honour, and of a good rank in his town, though less than he deserves; for I do not know if there be anywhere to be found a more learned and a better bred young man; for as he is both a very worthy and a very knowing person, so he is so civil to all men, so particularly kind to his friends, and so full of candour and affection, that there is not, perhaps, above one or two anywhere to be found, that is in all respects so perfect a

friend: he is extraordinarily modest, there is no artifice in him, and yet no man has more of a prudent simplicity. His conversation was so pleasant and so innocently cheerful, that his company in a great measure lessened any longings to go back to my country, and to my wife and children, which an absence of four months had quickened very much. One day, as I was returning home from mass at St. Mary's, which is the chief church, and the most frequented of any in Antwerp, I saw him, by accident, talking with a stranger, who seemed past the flower of his age; his face was tanned, he had a long beard, and his cloak was hanging carelessly about him, so that, by his looks and habit, I concluded he was a seaman. As soon as Peter saw me, he came and saluted me, and as I was returning his civility, he took me aside, and pointing to him with whom he had been discoursing, he said, "Do you see that man? I was just thinking to bring him to you." I answered, "He should have been very welcome on your account." "And on his own too," replied he, "if you knew the man, for there is none alive that can give so copious an account of unknown nations and countries as he can do, which I know you very much desire." "Then," said I, "I did not guess amiss, for at first sight I took him for a seaman." "But you are much mistaken," said he, "for he has not sailed as a seaman, but as a traveller, or rather a philosopher. This Raphael, who from his family carries the name of Hythloday, is not ignorant of the Latin tongue, but is eminently learned in the Greek, having applied himself more particularly to that than to the former, because he had given himself much to philosophy, in which he knew that the Romans have left us nothing that is valuable, except what is to be found in Seneca and Cicero. He is a Portuguese by birth, and was so desirous of seeing the world, that he divided his estate among his brothers, ran the same hazard as Americus Vesputius, and bore a share in three of his four voyages that are now published; only he did not return with him in his last, but obtained leave of him, almost by force, that he might be one of those twenty-four who were left at the farthest place at which they touched in their last voyage to New Castile. The leaving him thus did not a little gratify one that was more fond of travelling than of returning home to be buried in his own country; for he used often to say, that the way to heaven was the same from all places, and he that had no grave had the heavens still over him. Yet this disposition of mind had cost him dear, if God had

not been very gracious to him; for after he, with five Castilians, had travelled over many countries, at last, by strange good fortune, he got to Ceylon, and from thence to Calicut, where he, very happily, found some Portuguese ships; and, beyond all men's expectations, returned to his native country." When Peter had said this to me, I thanked him for his kindness in intending to give me the acquaintance of a man whose conversation he knew would be so acceptable; and upon that Raphael and I embraced each other. After those civilities were past which are usual with strangers upon their first meeting, we all went to my house, and entering into the garden, sat down on a green bank and entertained one another in discourse. He told us that when Vesputius had sailed away, he, and his companions that stayed behind in New Castile, by degrees insinuated themselves into the affections of the people of the country, meeting often with them and treating them gently; and at last they not only lived among them without danger, but conversed familiarly with them, and got so far into the heart of a prince, whose name and country I have forgot, that he both furnished them plentifully with all things necessary, and also with the conveniences of travelling, both boats when they went by water, and waggons when they travelled over land: he sent with them a very faithful guide, who was to introduce and recommend them to such other princes as they had a mind to see: and after many days' journey, they came to towns, and cities, and to commonwealths, that were both happily governed and well peopled. Under the equator, and as far on both sides of it as the sun moves, there lay vast deserts that were parched with the perpetual heat of the sun; the soil was withered, all things looked dismally, and all places were either quite uninhabited, or abounded with wild beasts and serpents, and some few men, that were neither less wild nor less cruel than the beasts themselves. But, as they went farther, a new scene opened, all things grew milder, the air less burning, the soil more verdant, and even the beasts were less wild: and, at last, there were nations, towns, and cities, that had not only mutual commerce among themselves and with their neighbours, but traded, both by sea and land, to very remote countries. There they found the conveniences of seeing many countries on all hands, for no ship went any voyage into which he and his companions were not very welcome. The first vessels that they saw were flat-bottomed, their sails were made of reeds

and wicker, woven close together, only some were of leather; but, afterwards, they found ships made with round keels and canvas sails, and in all respects like our ships, and the seamen understood both astronomy and navigation. He got wonderfully into their favour by showing them the use of the needle, of which till then they were utterly ignorant. They sailed before with great caution, and only in summer time; but now they count all seasons alike, trusting wholly to the loadstone, in which they are, perhaps, more secure than safe; so that there is reason to fear that this discovery, which was thought would prove so much to their advantage, may, by their imprudence, become an occasion of much mischief to them. But it were too long to dwell on all that he told us he had observed in every place, it would be too great a digression from our present purpose: whatever is necessary to be told concerning those wise and prudent institutions which he observed among civilised nations, may perhaps be related by us on a more proper occasion. We asked him many questions concerning all these things, to which he answered very willingly; we made no inquiries after monsters, than which nothing is more common; for everywhere one may hear of ravenous dogs and wolves, and cruel men-eaters, but it is not so easy to find states that are well and wisely governed.

As he told us of many things that were amiss in those new-discovered countries, so he reckoned up not a few things, from which patterns might be taken for correcting the errors of these nations among whom we live; of which an account may be given, as I have already promised, at some other time; for, at present, I intend only to relate those particulars that he told us, of the manners and laws of the Utopians: but I will begin with the occasion that led us to speak of that commonwealth. After Raphael had discoursed with great judgment on the many errors that were both among us and these nations, had treated of the wise institutions both here and there, and had spoken as distinctly of the customs and government of every nation through which he had past, as if he had spent his whole life in it, Peter, being struck with admiration, said, "I wonder, Raphael, how it comes that you enter into no king's service, for I am sure there are none to whom you would not be very acceptable; for your learning and knowledge, both of men and things, is such, that you would not only entertain