

# Thomas Moore's Utopia (condensed into 2,758 words)

## DEDICATION

To the Right Honourable Hieronymus Buslidius, Provost of Arienn - Peter Giles, Citizen of Antwerp, wisheth health and felicity.

THOMAS MORE, the singular ornament of this our age, as you yourself can witness, sent unto me this other day of the Island of Utopia, to very few known, but far excelling Plato's. Thus, O liberal supporter of good learning, and flower of this our time, I bid you most heartily well to fare.

At Antwerp, the first day of November.

## THE FIRST BOOK, OF THE COMMUNICATION OF RAPHAEL HYTHLODAY, CONCERNING THE BEST STATE OF A COMMONWEALTH

The most victorious and triumphant king of England, Henry VIII of that time, for the debatement of certain weighty matters sent me ambassador into Flanders, joined in commission with Cuthbert Tunstall, whose virtue and learning be of more excellency than that I am able to praise them. And whiles I was abiding at Antwerp, oftentimes among other did visit me one Peter Gyles, a citizen thereof whom one day I chanced to espy talking with a stranger, with whom he brought me to speech. Which Raphael Hythloday had voyaged with Master Amerigo Vespucci, but parting from him had returned home by way of Taprobane and Calicut.

Now, as he told us, he had found great and wide deserts and wildernesses inhabited with wild beasts and serpents, but also towns and cities and weal- publiques full of people governed by good and wholesome laws, beside many other that were fond and foolish. Then I urging him that, both by learning and experience, he might be any king's counsellor for the weal-publique -

"You be deceived," quoth he. "For the most part all princes have more delights in warlike matters and feats of chivalry than in the good feats of peace."

Then he speaking of England, "Have you been in our country, sir?" quoth I.

"Yea, forsooth," quoth he, "and there was I much bound and beholden to John Norton, at that time cardinal, archbishop and lord chancellor, in whose counsel the king put much trust.

"Now," quoth he, "one day as I sat at his table, there was a layman cunning in the law who began to praise the rigorous justice that was done upon felons, and to marvel how thieves were nevertheless so rife.

"'Nay, sir,' said I; 'but the punishment passeth the limits of justice. For simple theft is not so great an offence that it ought to be punished with death, nor doth that refrain them, since they cannot live but by thieving. There be many servitors of idle gentlemen who, when their master is dead, and they be thrust forth, have no craft whereby to earn their bread, nor can find other service, who must either starve for hunger or manfully play the thieves.

"Moreover, look how your sheep do consume and devour whole fields, houses and cities. For noblemen and gentlemen, yea, and certain abbots, holy men, God wot, where groweth the finest wool, do enclose all in pastures, pluck down towns, and leave naught standing but only the church, to make it a sheep-house. Whereby the husbandmen are thrust out of their own; and then what can they do else but steal, and then justly, God wot, be hanged? Furthermore, victuals and other matters are dearer, seeing rich men buy up all, and with their monopoly keep the market as it please them. Unless you find a remedy for these enormities, you shall in vain vaunt yourselves of executing justice upon felons.

"Beside, it is a pernicious thing that a thief and a murderer should suffer the like punishment, seeing that thereby the thief is rather provoked to kill. But among the polyerytes in Persia there is a custom that they which be convict of felony are condemned to be common labourers, yet not harshly entreated, but condemned to death if they seek to run away. For they are also apparelled all alike, and to aid them is servitude for a free man.'

"Now the cardinal pronounced that this were a good order to take with vagabonds. But a certain parasite sayeth in jest that this were then an excellent order to take with the friars, seeing that they were the veriest vagabonds that be; a friar thereupon took the jest in very ill part, and could not refrain himself from calling the fellow ribald, villain and the son of perdition; whereat the jester became a scoffer indeed, for he could play a part in that play, no man better, making the friar more foolishly wroth than before.

"Now, none of them would have harkened to my counsel until the cardinal did approve it. So that if I were sitting in counsel with the French king, whose counsellors were all urging him to war; and should I counsel him not to meddle with Italy, but rather to tarry still at home; and should propose to him the decrees of the Achoriens which dwell over against the Island of Utopia, who, having by war conquered a new kingdom for their prince, constrained him to be content with, his old kingdom and give over the new one to one of his friends; this, mine advice, Master More, how think you it would be heard and taken?"

"So God help me, not very thankfully," quoth I.

"Howbeit, Master More," quoth he, "doubtless, wheresoever possessions be private, where money beareth all the stroke, it is almost impossible that the wealpublique may be justly governed and prosperously flourish. And when I consider the wise and goodly ordinances of the Utopians, among whom, all things being in common, every man hath abundance of everything, yet are there very few laws; I do fully persuade myself that until this property be exiled and banished, perfect wealth shall never be among men. Which, if you had lived with me in Utopia, you would doubtless grant."

"Therefore, Master Raphael," quoth I, "pray you describe unto us this land."

## **THE SECOND BOOK, CONTAINING THE DESCRIPTION OF UTOPIA, AND OF ALL THE GOOD LAWS AND ORDERS OF THE SAME ISLAND.**

The island of Utopia is shaped like a new moon, in breadth at the middle 200 miles, narrowing to the tips, which fetch about a compass of 500 miles, and are sundered by eleven miles, having in the space between them a high rock; so that that whole coast is a great haven, but the way into it is securely guarded by hidden rocks. It hath fifty-four large and fair cities, all built in one fashion and having like manners, institutions and laws. The chief and head is Amaurote, being the midmost. Every city hath an equal shire, with farms

thereon; and of the husbandmen, half return each year to the city, their place being taken by a like number.

The city of Amaurote standeth four square, upon the River Anyder, and another lesser river floweth through it. The houses be fair and gorgeous, and the streets twenty foot broad; and at the back of each house a garden, whereby they set great store.

Each thirty families choose an officer, called a Siphogrant, and over every tenth siphogrant is a Tranibore. The prince is chosen for life by the siphogrants. All other offices are yearly, but the tranibores are not lightly changed. The prince and the tranibores hold council every third day, each day with two different siphogrants. They discuss no matter on the day that it is first brought forward. All the people are expert in husbandry, but each hath thereto his own proper craft of masonry or cloth-working, or some other; and, for the most part, that of his father. They work only six hours, which is enough - yea, and more for the store and abundance of things requisite, because all do work. There be none that are idle or busied about unprofitable occupations. In all that city and shire there be scarce 500 persons that be licensed from labour, that be neither too old nor too weak to work. Such be they that have license to learning in place of work. Out of which learned order be chosen ambassadors, priests, tranibores and the prince.

For their clothing, they wear garments of skins for work, and woollen cloaks of one fashion and of the natural colour; and for the linen, they care only for the whiteness, and not the fineness; wherefore their apparel is of small cost.

The city consisteth of families; and for each family the law is there be not fewer than ten children, nor more than sixteen of about thirteen years. Which numbers they maintain by taking from one family and adding to another, or one city and another, or by their foreign cities which they have in the waste places of neighbour lands. The eldest citizen ruleth the family. In each quarter of the city is a market-place whither is brought the work of each family, and each taketh away that he needeth, without money or exchange.

To every thirty families there is a hall, whither cometh the whole siphogranty at the set hour of dinner or supper; and a nursery thereto. But in the country they dine and sup in their own houses. If any desire to visit another city, the prince giveth letters of licence. But wherever he goeth he must work the allotted task. All be partners, so that none may be poor or needy; and all the cities do send to the common council at Amaurote, so that what one lacketh another maketh good out of its abundance.

Their superfluities they exchange with other lands for what they themselves lack, which is little but iron; or for money, which they use but seldom, and that for the hiring of soldiers. Of gold and silver they make not rich vessels, but mean utensils, fetters and gyves; and jewels and precious stones they make toys for children.

Although there be not many that are appointed only to learning, yet all in childhood be instructed therein; and the more part do bestow in learning their spare hours. In the course of the stars and movings of the heavenly sphere they be expert, but for the deceitful divination thereof they never dreamed of it.

They dispute of the qualities of the soul and reason of virtue, and of pleasure, wherein they think the felicity of man to rest; they believe that the soul is immortal, and by the goodness of God ordained to felicity, and that to our virtues and good deeds rewards be appointed hereafter, and to evil deeds punishments. Which principles, if they were disannulled, there

is no man but would diligently pursue pleasure by right or wrong. But now felicity resteth only in that pleasure that is good and honest. Virtue they define to be life according to nature, which prescribeth us a joyful life.

But of what they call counterfeit pleasures they make naught; as of pride in apparel and gems, or in vain honours; or of dicing; or hunting, which they deem the most abject kind of butchery. But of true pleasures they give to the soul intelligence and that pleasure that cometh of contemplation of the truth, and the pleasant remembrance of the good life past. Of pleasures of the body they count first those that be sensibly felt and perceived, and thereto the body's health, which lacking, there is no place for any pleasure. But chiefest they hold the pleasures of the mind, the consciousness of virtue and the good life. Making little of the pleasures of appetite, they yet count it madness to reject the same for a vain shadow of virtue.

For bondmen, they have malefactors of their own people, criminals condemned to death in other lands, or poor labourers of other lands who, of their own free will, choose rather to be in bondage with them. The sick they tend with great affection; but, if the disease be not only incurable but full of anguish, the priests exhort them that they should willingly die, but cause him not to die against his will.

The women marry not before eighteen years, the men four years later. But if one have offended before marriage, he or she whether it be, is sharply punished. And before marriage the man and the woman are showed each to the other by discreet persons. To mock a man for his deformity is counted great reproach.

They do not only fear their people from doing evil by punishments, but also allure them to virtue by rewards of honour. They have but few laws, reproving other nations that innumerable books of law and expositions upon the same be not sufficient. Furthermore, they banish all such as do craftily handle the laws, but think it meet that every man should plead his own matter.

As touching leagues they never make one with any nation, putting no trust therein; seeing the more and holier ceremonies the league is knit up with, the sooner it is broken. Who perchance would change their minds if they lived here? But they be of opinion that no man should be counted an enemy who hath done no injury, and that the fellowship of nature is a strong league.

They count nothing so much against glory as glory gotten in war. And though they do daily practise themselves in the discipline of war, they go not to battle but in defence of their own country or their friends, or to right some assured wrong. They be ashamed to win the victory with much bloodshed, but rejoice if they vanquish their enemies by craft. They set a great price upon the life or person of the enemy's prince and of other chief adversaries, counting that they thereby save the lives of many of both parts that had otherwise been slain; and stir up neighbour peoples against them.

They lure soldiers out of all countries to do battle with them and especially a savage and fierce people called the Zapoletes, giving them greater wages than any other nation will. But of their own people they thrust not forth to battle any against his will; yet if women be willing, they do in set field stand every one by her husband's side, and each man is compassed about by his own kinsfolk; and they be themselves stout and hardy and disdainful to be conquered. It is hard to say whether they be craftier in laying ambush or

wittier in avoiding the same. Their weapons be arrows, and at handstrokes not swords but pole-axes; and engines for war they devise and invent wondrous wittily.

There be divers kinds of religion. Some worship for God the sun, some the moon; some there be that give worship to a man that was once of the most excellent virtue; some believe that there is a certain godly power unknown, everlasting, incomprehensible; but all believe that there is one God, Maker and Ruler of the whole world. But after they heard us speak of Christ, with glad minds they agreed unto the same.

And this is one of their ancientest laws, that no man shall be blamed for reasoning in the maintenance of his own religion, giving to every man free liberty to believe what he would. Saving that none should conceive so base and vile an opinion as to think that souls do perish with the body, or that the world runneth at all adventures, governed by no divine providence.

They have priests of exceeding holiness, and therefore very few. Both childhood and youth are instructed of them, not more in learning than in good manners.

"This," quoth he, "is that order of the commonwealth which, in my judgement, is not only the best, but also that which alone of good right may claim and take upon it the name of a commonwealth or weal-publique."

Thus when Raphael had made an end of his tale, though many things came to my mind, which in the manners and laws of that people seemed to be instituted and founded of no good reason; yet because I knew he was weary of talking, I said that we would choose another time to weigh and examine the same matters. But, in the meantime, I, Thomas More, as I cannot agree and consent to all things that he said, so must I needs confess and grant that many things be in the Utopian weal-publique which in our cities I may rather wish for than hope after.