



**JEROME DE BUSLEYDEN TO
THOMAS MORE, GREETINGS**

IT WAS NOT enough, my accomplished friend More, that you formerly spent all your care, labor and study upon the interests and advantage of individuals; but you must bestow them (such is your kindness and generosity) on the community at large. You thought that this benefit of yours, whatever it might be, deserved the greater indulgence, courted the greater favor, and aimed at the higher renown, on this very account, that it was likely to profit the more, the more widely it was diffused and the more there were to share it. To confer this benefit has always been your object on other occasions, and of late you have, with singular good fortune, been most successful in attaining it: I mean, in that “afternoon’s talk,” which you have reduced to writing and published, about the right and good constitution, that all must long for, of the Utopian commonwealth.

In your happy description of that fair institution, we nowhere miss either the highest learning or

This commendation letter appeared in all four of the original editions of Utopia, starting out in the front of the book in 1516, and moving to the back for the later printings.

consummate knowledge of the world. Both those qualities are blended together in the work, meeting on such equal terms that neither yields to the other, but both contend on an equality for the palm. The truth is, you are the able possessor of such varied learning, and on the other hand of so wide and exact a knowledge of the world, that, whatever you write, you assert from full experience, and, whatever assertion you have decided to make, you write most learnedly. A felicity this as rare as it is admirable! What makes it rarer is that it withholds itself from the many, and only imparts itself to the few—to such above all as have the candor to wish, the knowledge to understand, the credit which will qualify, and the influence which will enable them to consult the common interest as dutifully, justly, and providently as you now plainly do. For, deeming yourself born not for yourself alone, but for the whole world, you have thought fit by this fair service to make the whole world itself beholden to you.

And this result you would not have been able to effect so well and rightly by any other means, as by delineating for rational beings themselves an ideal commonwealth, a pattern and finished model of conduct, than which there has never been seen in the world one more wholesome in its institution, or more perfect, or to be thought more desirable. For it far surpasses and leaves a long way behind the many famous states, that we have heard so much about, of Sparta and Athens and Rome.

Had these been inaugurated under the same favorable conditions, with the same institutions, laws, enactments and rules of life to control them as this commonwealth of yours, they would not, we may be sure, have by this time been lying in ruins, leveled with the ground, and now alas! obliterated beyond all hope of renewal. On the contrary, they would have been still unfallen, still fortunate and prosperous, leading a happy existence, mistresses of the world meanwhile, and dividing a widespread empire by land and sea.

Of these commonwealths you compassionated the unhappy lot. And so you wished to save other states in like manner, which now hold the supreme power, from undergoing a like vicissitude, by your picture of a perfect state; one which directed its chief energies not so much to framing laws as to appointing the most approved magistrates. (And with good reason: for otherwise, without them, even the best laws, if we take Plato's word for it, would all be counted dead.)* Magistrates these, above all, after whose likeness, pattern of uprightness, ensample of conduct, and mirror of justice, the whole state and right course of any perfect commonwealth whatever ought to be modeled; wherein should unite, above all things, prudence in the rulers, courage in the soldiers, temperance in the private individuals, and justice in all.†

* See Plato's *Laws*, VI, 751, B and C.

† Busleyden is summarizing Plato's arguments in Book IV of the *Republic*.

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And since the commonwealth you make so famous is manifestly formed, in fairest manner, of these principles, it is no wonder if on this account it comes not only as an object of fear to many, but also of reverence to all nations, and one for all generations to tell of; the more so, that in it all competition for ownership is taken away, and no one has any private property at all. For the rest, all men have all things in common, with a view to the commonwealth itself; so that every matter, every action, however unimportant, whether public or private, instead of being directed to the greed of many or the caprice of a few, has sole reference to the upholding of one uniform justice, equality and communion. When that is made the entire object of every action, there must needs be a clearance of all that serves as matter and fuel and feeder of intrigue, of luxury, envy, and wrong; to which mankind are hurried on, even at times against their will, either by the possession of private property, or by the burning thirst of gain, and that most pitiable of all things, ambition, to their own great and immeasurable loss. For it is from these things that there often suddenly arise divisions of feeling, taking up of arms, and wars worse than civil;* whereby not only is the flourishing state of wealthy republics utterly overthrown, but the renown they won in other days,

* Busleyden borrows the line "wars worse than civil" from the opening of Lucan's epic poem *Pharsalia* about the war between Julius Caesar and the Roman Senate.

the triumphs celebrated, the splendid trophies, the rich spoils so often won from conquered enemies, are all utterly effaced.

If on these matters the words I write should chance to be less convincing than I desire, there will at any rate be ready at hand the most sufficient witnesses for me to refer you to: I mean, the many great cities formerly laid waste, the states destroyed, the republics overthrown, the villages burnt and consumed. As scarce any relics or traces of their great calamity are to be seen at this day, so neither are their names preserved by any history, however ancient it be, and however far back its records extend.

These memorable disasters, devastations, overthrows, and other calamities of war our states, whatever they be, will easily succeed in escaping, if they only adapt themselves exactly to the one pattern of the Utopian commonwealth, and do not deviate a hair's breadth from it. By so acting alone, they will at length most fully recognize by the result how greatly they have profited by this service you have rendered them; especially since by its acquisition they have learnt to preserve their own state in safety, unharmed, and victorious. It follows that their debt to you, their present deliverer, will be no less than is the just due of those, who have saved—I do not say some one member of a state, but the whole state itself.

Meanwhile farewell. Go on and prosper, ever devising, carrying out and perfecting something, the bestowal

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of which on your country may give it long continuance and yourself immortality. Farewell, learned and courteous More, glory of your island, and ornament of this world of ours.

From my house at Mechlin, 1516