



JOHN DESMARAIS OF CASSAL
TO MASTER PETER GILES,
GREETINGS

I HAVE READ the *Utopia* of your friend More, along with his epigrams, and I do not really know whether I read these with greater pleasure or admiration. O fortunate Britain, which now flourishes with talented men of such a kind that they are able to contend with antiquity itself. O we foolish men, and even worse than worthless: if we cannot be aroused by the examples so nearby us to endeavor for like praise; “it is disgraceful to remain silent,” Aristotle says, “when Isocrates is speaking.”* But for us, it ought to be shameful to give so much time to profits and pleasures, since among the British, who occupy the remotest parts of the world, learning thrives due to the favor and kindness of princes. Although such praise was all but the exclusive property of the Greeks and Italians, nevertheless, among the ancients, Spain also has some splendid

This letter and accompanying poem appeared in the 1516 and 1517 editions of Utopia.

* Isocrates was a leading orator of Aristotle’s time. The line is attributed to Aristotle by Quintilian in *Education of the Orator*, vol. III.

names on which she prides herself. Untamed Scythia has her Anacharsis. Denmark has her own Saxo. France has her own Budé.* So many men celebrated for their writings does Germany have, and equally England has many such men, and these noteworthy. For what conclusion must be drawn about the rest, if More, though first of all still a young man, then having been distracted by public as well as domestic business, and finally following anything else as a pursuit more readily than his writings, stands out to such a degree? And we alone seem to ourselves to be happy enough, if our money chests and appearances have been properly taken care of. There is no reason why we ourselves, after our sluggishness has been cast aside, should not also gird ourselves for this most honorable contest. A contest in which it would not be shameful to be conquered, and indeed most honorable to conquer. So many examples from every quarter call us forth to this contest: that most virtuous prince, Charles,† he under whose charge no other matter bears more reward than learned virtue; as does the one and only Maecenas, that patron of all good pursuits, Jean le Sauvage, the Chancellor of Burgundy.‡

* Anacharsis was a well-known sixth-century Scythian sage; Saxo likely refers to Saxo Grammaticus, who wrote the first history of Denmark, in the twelfth century; Budé was the contemporary French Humanist scholar who contributed a commendation to *Utopia*.

† Prince Charles of Castile, who is also praised by More in the opening of Book I of *Utopia*.

‡ Maecenas was an early Roman politician and legendary patron of the arts. Jean le Sauvage was an influential political figure in Flanders and an official under Charles V, who helped Erasmus obtain

On a more pressing matter, I ask you, O most learned Peter Giles, to, as soon as it will be possible, see to it that *Utopia* be published. For in this work, as though in a mirror, anything which pertains to properly establishing a constitution may be discerned. If only it would happen that, just as those men have elected to adopt our religion, so we might borrow from them their manner of administering their Commonwealth. This, perhaps, could easily happen, if some prominent and unconquerable men among the theologians would gather themselves on that island, in order to advance the faith of Christ already springing up there, and at the same time to bring back to us the customs and institutions of those people. Utopia owes much to Hythloday, through whom a land not deserving to be left unknown has become familiar. She owes even more to the most learned More, by whose pencil she was so expertly depicted for us. Furthermore, that of the thanks which is owed to both of them, not the least part of this ought to be set aside for you, who will bring to light both the speech of the former and the writing of the latter, which will be a not moderate delight for all, and an even greater profit. If only they should weigh each element carefully.

Utopia has awakened my soul in such a way, that now, having long ago been forgotten by the muses, I once again have called them forth, how happily, you will judge.

his appointment as councilor to the king.

UTOPIA

Farewell most honest Peter Giles, you who are both
a patron and initiate of good learning.

*From our house at Louvain on the Calends of
December [December 1, 1516]*

From the same John Desmarais, Teacher of Oratory at
the University of Louvain, a poem on the new island of
Utopia:

*Brave men Rome gave,
and honored Greece gave eloquent men,
strict men gave renowned Sparta.
Marseilles gave honest men,
and Germany, moreover, hardy men.
Courteous and charming men,
the Attic land gave.
Illustrious France at one time gave pious men,
Africa cautious men.
Munificent men, once upon a time,
Britain gave.
And examples of other virtues
are sought in different peoples,
and that which is absent from one,
abounds in another.
Only one ever gave the total sum of all virtue to
earth-born men, the island of Utopia.*