



THOMAS MORE TO PETER GILES,
GREETINGS

I WAS EXTREMELY pleased with the criticism of my work, with which you are acquainted, by a clever person,* who put this dilemma about Utopia: “If the facts as reported are true, I see some absurdities in them; but if fictitious, I find More’s finished judgment in some respects wanting.” Whoever he was, I am much obliged to him, Peter; I suspect him to be learned, and I can see he is friendly. By this frank criticism he has obliged me more than anyone else since the appearance of the book. For in the first place, attracted by interest in me or the work, he seems not to have wearied of the labor, but read it all through, not perfunctorily and hastily, as priests go through the Hours, but so slowly and carefully as to pay attention to details. Secondly, by objecting to some things, he has given a tacit approval to the rest. Finally, in the very words in which he censures me, he gives me more praise than all who have praised me of set purpose.

This second letter of More to Giles appeared only in the 1517 edition of Utopia.

* This “clever person” is never identified, and may very well be another invention of More’s.

UTOPIA

For he shows that he thinks highly of me, when he complains of disappointment when he reads something not finished, since it would be more than I could hope if I did not write some things that are absurd among so many.

Yet if I may in my turn deal faithfully with him, I do not see why so sharp-eyed a critic, because he has detected some absurdities in the institutions of Utopia, or I have devised some things inexpedient in the framing of a constitution, should be so minded as if there were nothing absurd in the world, or as if any philosopher had ever ordered the state, or even his own house, without instituting something that had better be changed. Why, if the memory of great men were not hallowed by time, I could in each of them quote points, in the condemnation of which I should get a unanimous vote. Now, when he doubts whether Utopia is real or fictitious, I find his finished judgment wanting.

I do not pretend that if I had determined to write about the commonwealth and had membered such a story, I should have shrunk from a fiction, by which the truth, as if smeared with honey, might more pleasantly flow into men's minds. But if I wanted to abuse the ignorance of common folk, I should certainly have been careful to prefix some indications for the learned to see through my purpose. Thus if I had put nothing but the names of prince, river, city and island such as might suggest to the learned that the island was nowhere, the city a phantom, the river without water, and the prince

without a people, this would not have been hard to do, and would have been much wittier than what I did; for if the faithfulness of an historian had not been binding on me, I am not so stupid as to have preferred to use those barbarous and meaningless names, Utopia, Anyder, Amaurot and Ademus.*

But, Gilles, since I see some people are so wary, that they can hardly be induced to believe what we simple and credulous folk have written down on the relation of Hythloday, lest my credit be in danger with them as well as the faithfulness of history, I am glad I may say on behalf of my offspring, what in Terence Mysis says about Glycerium's boy, lest he should be regarded as a changeling: "I thank the gods that some free women were present when I was brought to bed."† For this also has fallen out very conveniently, that Raphael told his tale not merely to you but to many other respectable and worthy men, perhaps still more lengthily and weightily, certainly no less so, than he did to ourselves.

But if these unbelievers will not believe them either, let them go to Hythloday himself; for he is I not yet dead. I heard lately from some who came from Portugal,

* "Utopia," of course, means nowhere (or no-place), as "Amaurot" means phantom, "Anyder," without water, and "Ademus," without a people. In other words, More has done exactly what he claims he has not, and is, in fact, quite "careful to prefix some indications for the learned to see through my purpose."

† Terence, or Publius Terentius Afer, was a Roman playwright. The line cited is from the character Mysis in Terence's *The Girl of Andros*, and refers to reputable witnesses being present at a birth.

UTOPIA

that on March 1st last he was as hale and sprightly as ever. So let them inquire the truth of him or, if they like, try him with questions, only I would have them understand that I am only responsible for my part and not for the credit of another.

Farewell, dear Peter, and greet for me your charming wife and pretty little daughter, to whom my wife wishes long life.