

Contents

Foreword	v
A Pen Portrait of Thomas More	vii
Utopia	i
<i>Prefatory Letter</i>	3
<i>Book I</i>	7
<i>Book II</i>	49
<i>Correspondence Relevant to Utopia</i>	133
<i>Index of Contemporary Europeans</i>	193
<i>Index of Utopian and Other Exotic Names</i>	206
<i>Notes</i>	209
Extra Material	245
<i>Background</i>	247
<i>Thomas More's Life</i>	249
<i>Utopia</i>	255
<i>Note on the Text</i>	258
<i>Note on Translation and Verse Metres</i>	261
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	264
Acknowledgements	266



1. Sir Thomas More (1478–1535)
at the age of forty-nine, when Chancellor
for the Duchy of Lancaster under Henry VIII,
painted by Hans Holbein Junior in 1527

**Libellus vere aureus nec
MINVS SALVTARIS QVAM FESTI-**

uus de optimo reip. ftatu, deq3 noua infula Vtopia

authore clariffimo viro Thoma Moro inclytæ

ciuitatis Londinenfis ciue & vicecomite cu-

ra M. Petri Aegidii Antuerpiëfis, & arte

Theodorici Martini Aluftenfis, Ty

pographi almæ Louanienfium

Academiae nunc primum

accuratiffime edi

tus.

**A truly golden little book not
LESS INSTRUCTIVE THAN ENTERTAI-**

ning, about the ideal ordering of society and a new island of Utopia

authored by Thomas More a man of the greatest distinction, of the renowned

city of London citizen and undersheriff, through the dili-

gence of Master Pieter Gillis of Antwerp and through the skill

of Dirk Martens of Aalst, prin

ter to the life-enhancing Leuven

University now for the first time

most meticulously pub

lished.

[Transcript of the title page of the first edition of *Utopia*, printed in Leuven, Flemish Brabant, in 1516, with my literal translation]

Utopia
or
The Island of Nowhere
by Thomas More

*De optimo reipublicæ statu deque nova insula Utopia
libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus,
clarissimi disertissimique viri Thomæ Mori
inclytæ civitatis Londonensis civis et vicecomitis*

A truly golden little book, as instructive as it is entertaining,
about the ideal ordering of society and a new island of Utopia,
by Thomas More, man of the greatest distinction and eloquence,
citizen and Undersheriff of the renowned City of London

Utopia or The Island of Nowhere

by Thomas More

The Ideal Ordering of Society

BOOK I OF THE DISCOURSE

GIVEN BY THE REMARKABLE DR RAFAEL CONTRASENSO

AS REPORTED BY THE CELEBRATED THOMAS MORE,
CITIZEN AND UNDERSHERIFF OF THE RENOWNED
BRITISH CITY OF LONDON

Henry VIII, utterly unvanquished King of England,* *More's Visit to Flanders* who displays to the full all the skills of an outstanding ruler, was recently in dispute with His Serene Highness Charles, Prince of Castile, over some issues of importance.* These issues needed to be discussed and settled, and to this end the King appointed me to go to Flanders to assist Cuthbert Tunstall as a member of his delegation. Tunstall is a man of exceptional qualities (and the King has recently appointed him Master of the Rolls to everyone's enormous satisfaction). About his merits, and they are merits indeed, I shall say nothing. It is not that I fear a friend's testimony will be taken as insincere and unreliable, but Tunstall's integrity and learning are beyond my powers to express – and are too widely known and admired to require expression. I don't want to appear (as they say) to hold up a lantern to light the sun.

As arranged, we were met in Bruges by the Prince's delegates, all eminent personages. Their leader and head of delegation was the Burgomaster of Bruges, an imposing figure; but the spokesman and driving force was Joris van Themsecke, Provost of Cassel, a gifted and practised speaker, a brilliant lawyer and a negotiator outstanding for his intelligence and lengthy experience. We met a couple of times but failed to reach agreement on certain points, so the other side took leave of us for some days and departed for Brussels to seek the Prince's instructions.

Meanwhile I travelled to Antwerp on business. During my time there I had frequent callers, but none more welcome than Pieter Gillis, a native of the city. A most creditable young man, he holds a high position among his people and deserves the highest, endowed as he is with learning and good character in almost equal measure. He really is an excellent chap, extremely well read. To everyone he is good-natured, but towards his friends he is so well disposed, so sincerely loving, trustworthy and considerate, that you would hardly find anyone anywhere to match him for friendliness. His modesty is exceptional: no one could be freer of affectation; no one could be more sagely straightforward. By this time I had been away from home for more than four months: I was missing my country, my domestic life, my wife and my children, and was gripped by a desperate yearning to see them again; but his charming talk and inoffensive wit were such that the delightfulness of his company and the pleasure of his conversation did much to relieve my homesickness.

*Meeting with
Dr Rafael
Contrasenso*

One day I attended mass in the church of St Mary's,* an exceptionally beautiful and well-frequented building. After the service I was about to return to my lodgings when I chanced to see Pieter Gillis talking with a stranger. The man was verging on old age, with a sunburnt face, long beard and weatherproof cloak hanging loosely from his shoulder. From his complexion and general appearance he looked to me like a sea captain. When Pieter caught sight of me, he came up and greeted me. As I made to reply, he led me a little aside.

"You see this man?" he said, pointing to the one I had seen him talking to. "I was just going to take him along to see you."

"I'd have been very glad to meet him, for your sake," I replied.

"No," Pieter said, "you'd have been glad to meet him for his own sake, if you'd known who he is. There's no

one alive on earth today who could give you such a full account of unknown lands and peoples; and I know that no one's keener than you to hear about such things."

"Then I made a good guess," I said, "because when I first saw the man I realized he was a ship's captain."

"But you couldn't have been more wrong," he answered. "He's travelled the seas not as a Palinurus, but as an Odysseus, or rather a Plato.* You see, this Rafael (that's his name, Dr Rafael Contrasenno) – this Rafael knows some Latin, but he's particularly well versed in Greek. He studied Greek more than Latin because he'd become completely engrossed in philosophy, and he realized that there's nothing on philosophy of any importance in Latin apart from some bits of Seneca and Cicero.* Anyhow, all the property he had at home (he's Portuguese) he left to his brothers, and he joined up with Amerigo Vespucci to explore the globe. You know of Vespucci's four voyages, which everyone's now reading about. On the three later trips Rafael was Vespucci's constant companion, except that he didn't return with Vespucci from the last one. He got Amerigo – he had to twist his arm, actually – to include him among the twenty-four men Amerigo was leaving behind in the fort where he turned back on his final voyage.*

"Rafael stayed back there out of intellectual curiosity: he was more interested in travel than in dying at home. He always has these two sayings on his lips –

High heaven covers him who has no grave for cover.*

and –

The way to heaven's just as long from anywhere.*

If God in his kindness hadn't been with him, this attitude might well have cost him dear. As it is, once Vespucci had left, Rafael, with five companions from

the fort, travelled vast distances, till at length, by extraordinary good fortune, he landed in Ceylon. From there he reached Calicut,* where he had no difficulty in finding Portuguese ships, and so against all odds he finally made it back to his homeland.”*

That was what Pieter told me. I thanked him for so thoughtfully spotting a man whose conversation I hoped would interest me and for giving me the chance of a chat with him. I then turned to Rafael. We greeted each other, saying the things strangers usually say at a first meeting. Then we departed for my house and, sitting down in the garden there on a bench spread with green turf, we started talking.

Rafael's Travels After Vespucci's departure, Rafael told us, he and the comrades who had stayed behind in the fort made contact with the local tribes and treated them in a friendly manner. In this way they began slowly to develop close ties with the natives, moving around among them not only safely but even on amicable terms. They also won the acceptance and favour of one of the chiefs (I forget his name, and that of his country). Rafael and five of his companions decided to go on an expedition, using rafts over water and wheeled conveyance over land. Through the chief's generosity they were plentifully supplied with means of transport, with provisions for the journey and with a thoroughly reliable guide, who was to bring them, with suitable introductions, to other rulers on their route; and indeed (as Rafael went on to say), after travelling many days they came across not only towns and cities, but well-governed countries with large populations.

Rafael explained that along the line of the Equator and almost as far as the tropics in both directions lie vast deserts scorched with perpetual heat. The whole region is a dismal wasteland, harsh and uncultivated, inhabited by wild animals and snakes, and indeed by humans as savage and dangerous as the beasts. As you

travel farther, however, things gradually get easier. The sky becomes less glaring, the ground softer and greener, the fauna less intimidating. Finally one comes to peoples, cities and towns where trade flourishes by sea and land, not only locally and with close neighbours, but also with far distant nations.

From there it became possible for the adventurers to visit lands in many directions, since vessels were being fitted out for voyages of all kinds, and Rafael and his companions were made more than welcome to sail on any of them. He explained that the ships they saw in the places they first came to had flat hulls; their sails were lengths of papyrus stitched together, or wickerwork, or else leather. Farther on they found sharp-keeled boats with canvas sails, in all respects like ours. The sailors were well versed in sea and sky, but he made himself extremely popular by introducing them to the magnetic compass. This was something they had been quite unaware of before and, as a result, had always been chary of venturing into the open sea, doing so with confidence only in summer. Now, though, trusting in the lodestone, they have no fear of winter. So they are free from anxiety, but not free from danger, the risk being that the very discovery they thought would bring them great benefit might, by leading to carelessness, cause them great misfortune.

To set down all that Rafael told us he had seen in each place would be a long task and is not the purpose of this work. Maybe we shall give an account of it elsewhere, especially any useful items of knowledge, such as, first and foremost, any sound and sensible arrangements he observed in civilized societies. We did indeed question him intently on these subjects, and he was more than happy to give us information. The only things we did not enquire about were those hackneyed monstrosities – Scyllas, predatory Harpies, man-eating Laestrygonians* and other hideous apparitions. You

will come across these all over the place; but you will not everywhere find a citizenry with sound education and rational institutions. Of course Rafael observed among these new peoples much that was misguided, but he also recorded numerous examples that may be helpful in correcting the faults of our European cities, races, nations and kingdoms. As I have already said, these I must note down elsewhere. I only intend now to relate what he said about the customs and way of life of the people of Utopia, though I shall preface it with the conversation that led him to mention that country.*

*Conversation
with Rafael
– Should
One Go into
Politics?*

Rafael recounted with great insight the various errors made both in that hemisphere and in ours – plenty in each – along with the more sensible measures adopted in both regions. He recalled the customs and institutions of each nation in such detail that he gave the appearance of having lived all his life in each place he had visited.

Pieter was astonished at the man. He said: “I’m really surprised, Rafael, that you don’t attach yourself to some monarch; I’m sure any one of them would give you an enthusiastic welcome. With your learning and your knowledge of geography and anthropology you’d be well qualified not just to entertain them; you could also instruct them from your experience and help them with your advice. In this way you’d hugely advance your own interests and have the chance to be of great help and benefit to all your folk.”

“I’m not much concerned for ‘my folk’,” Rafael replied. “I think I’ve fulfilled my duties to them pretty well. Most people give things away only when they’re old and poorly – and even then they’re poor at giving them away, though they can’t hang on to them much longer. But I distributed my goods to friends and relations when I was healthy and vigorous and still quite young. In my view they ought to be satisfied with the generosity I’ve shown; they shouldn’t ask or expect me to go farther and make myself subservient to kings for their sake.”

“You’re right about that,” replied Pieter. “But my view is that you shouldn’t be *subservient* to kings, you should be *of service* to them.”

“Being ‘of service’ to kings sounds almost the same as being ‘subservient’ to them,” commented Rafael.

“But in my opinion,” Pieter replied, “whatever expression you use, it’s the best path to being of benefit to others, both privately and publicly, and to improving life for yourself too.”

“Would I improve life for myself by following a path I inwardly recoil from?” said Rafael. “As it is, I live as I please, which I strongly suspect is true of very few of those purple-clad courtiers. In any case, those in power have enough folk jostling for their friendship; you surely don’t suppose they’d suffer any hardship in doing without me and a few like me.”

Then I spoke: “It’s obvious, Rafael, that you don’t wish for wealth or influence. I certainly respect and honour people of your mind at least as much as I do those who hold the greatest power. But if you were to brace yourself, even at some personal inconvenience, to apply your talents and efforts to public affairs, then you’ll surely be seen as undertaking something worthy of yourself, worthy of your great ideals and indeed of your philosophy. You’ll never be able to do that more effectively than if you become adviser to a great monarch and urge him to follow sound and honourable policies (as I’m sure you would). It’s the monarch that’s the source of everything, good and bad, that floods over an entire nation, as from a never-failing spring. And you have such comprehensive learning (even without your great experience) and such practical expertise (even without your learning) that you’ll make an outstanding member of any privy council.”

“You’re wrong twice over, friend More,” he said, “first about me, and secondly on the question at issue.

I don't actually have the qualities you credit me with; and even if I did have them in plenty and devoted all my time to the task, I'd not achieve any improvement in the way we're governed. For one thing, nearly all rulers, far from pursuing wholesome peacetime activities, prefer to engage in the science of war – a field in which I've no expertise, nor do I wish for any. Rulers are much keener to gain new territories, by fair means or foul, than to administer well the ones they already have.

“Besides, there are two kinds of privy councillor: either they're really so clever they don't need to consider someone else's opinion, or they're so convinced of their cleverness that they don't wish to – except that all of them give their approval and self-serving praise to any proposition, however ridiculous, voiced by the ruler's special favourites whose support they're keen to earn. Of course it's natural that we all find our own ideas attractive: a raven's fond of its own chick; and a baboon's pleased with its own baby. But suppose you're at one of those meetings of people who resent others' ideas and prefer their own: if you contribute something from your reading of history or from your experience of the wider world, then your listeners behave as though their whole reputation for sagacity is at stake; they believe they'll soon be taken for fools, unless they can point to some flaw in what you've suggested. If all else fails, they take refuge in remarks like this: ‘The present arrangements,’ they say, ‘were good enough for our predecessors; if only we were as wise as they!’; and with that they take their seats as if they've just delivered a speech of the utmost profundity – you'd think that for anyone to be caught out being wiser than those gone before was a real threat. The fact is that we're perfectly happy to say goodbye to the best measures put in place by our predecessors; but if proposals for something more sensible come up, then we dig our teeth into the argument about our predecessors’

superior wisdom and won't let go. I've come across these arrogant, ridiculous and pedantic attitudes in all sorts of places, and even once in England."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "Have you been to our country?"

"Yes, I have," he said. "I spent several months there, not long after that tragic uprising against the King in the West Country that was quashed with such pitiful carnage among the rebels.* During that time I received more kindness than I could ever have repaid from the Most Reverend Father John Morton, Cardinal Archbishop of Canterbury, who was Chancellor of England too at that time. He was a man, Pieter (More already knows what I'm about to say), who earned respect as much for his wisdom and goodness as for his high rank. He was of moderate height, but stood erect even in old age. The expression on his face was one to put you in awe, but not in terror. Though sober and stern, he wasn't hard to get on with. When people sought his aid, his ploy was sometimes to be rather fierce in response. He didn't mean harm, but was testing them for intelligence and determination. And if they showed themselves to be as intelligent and determined as he was, without being arrogant, he was delighted and took them under his wing as promising administrators. His speaking style was polished and effective; his knowledge of the law extensive; his intellect unrivalled; and his memory astonishingly retentive. These exceptional gifts he enhanced by study and practice. When I was there, I got the impression that the government relied on his advice a great deal, the King very much so. He'd first served in the royal household as a very young man, having been sent there straight from the schoolroom, so he'd been involved all his life in affairs of the greatest importance. Buffeted constantly by changing tides of fortune and exposed to many great dangers, he'd learnt to be wise to the ways of the world – a lesson not easily forgotten.

*Rafael's
Memories
of Cardinal
Morton*