

SIR THOMAS MORE AS A SOCIAL REFORMER

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## INTRODUCTION

It shall be my principal purpose in the writing of this paper to present in coherent form the ideas of social reform of Sir Thomas More as they are expressed in his masterpiece, Utopia. I shall attempt also to show the relationship between these ideas and More's life and background and to show to what extent his ideas have been put into practice since his time. Utopia, with its great social ideals, is like a brilliant light against the darkness of mediaeval customs and superstitions.

## SIR THOMAS MORE AS A SOCIAL REFORMER

## CHAPTER I

## THE LIFE AND BACKGROUND OF SIR THOMAS MORE

Inasmuch as this discussion concerns the content of Sir Thomas More's Utopia rather than the man himself, we shall refer briefly to only those conditions of his life that affected the ideas presented in his story of an ideal commonwealth.

Sir Thomas More, the son of the successful lawyer, John More, was born in Cheapside in 1480. He was an unusually intelligent child with a keen wit and a charming personality. His father was strict in his surveillance of the boy's education and surroundings and did not permit anything to deter him from his preparation for legal work. At fifteen Thomas More became a page in the household of Cardinal Morton, later Archbishop and Lord Chancellor, a man of much influence in political and religious affairs. More absorbed the wisdom about him, obtained a rich historical knowledge, and learned of the world and its people until his wit became extraordinarily sharp.<sup>1</sup>

Through the suggestion and influence of Cardinal Morton, who realized that More's was no ordinary mind, Thomas More entered Oxford. He continued his study of Latin in preparation for the study of law but soon came under the influence

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1 Frederick Seebohm, Oxford Reformers, p. 23.

of Linaere and Grocyn. These Oxford scholars had recently returned from Italy imbued with great enthusiasm for Greek literature that spread rapidly among the younger scholars at the University. Another great scholar, John Colet, later Dean of St. Paul's, left Oxford for Italy shortly after More's enrollment there but not before he had associated with the boy long enough to recognize his great ability. More became so enthusiastic over the study of Greek language and literature that his father deemed it wise to remove him from Oxford lest he should be led to forget the career planned for him. More, however, did not cease his study of Plato, Aristotle, Homer, and other Greek writers (he mentions the work of several in Utopia) while he pursued the study of law.<sup>2</sup> Neither did he discontinue his association with Grocyn, Linaere, and Colet, who, with the brilliant Dutch scholar, Erasmus, formed the nucleus of the famous group called the Oxford Reformers.

It is to the associations with these great scholars, along with the influence of Cardinal Morton's household, and More's own brilliant mind, that we may attribute his great love for a life that was beneficial to both mind and body. He enjoyed games and plays that were instructive. But he enjoyed brilliant conversation and reading more than any other recreation because in these he found the freedom of thought that he loved. Then, too, he could lose himself in these pastimes and forget for a time the conditions that existed about him.

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<sup>2</sup> Utopia, Ideal Empires and Republics, pp. 196-197.



To More the social conditions of England were deplorable. He found no justice in the pitiful state of the poor compared with the life of luxury enjoyed by the rich. In 1438 certain laws had been revised, which had been established to sharpen the distinctions among the various degrees and estates of English society and to afford economic protection to native craftsmen. These laws limited the cost and designated the materials of the wearing apparel of each social class in England. Had such laws been enforced the difference in classes would have been more pronounced, thus making the lives of the very poor more wretched than ever.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, this class of people was already wretched enough. More abhorred the injustice of such a government that would permit intolerable suffering among those who performed the labor most beneficial to the commonwealth.<sup>4</sup> More despised the distinct differences in the social life of England but he despised more any kind of radical reform. If an unfavorable condition could not be made completely good then it was his belief that through tact and reason it could be altered until it was at least better.<sup>5</sup>

More was no less tolerant toward religious disruption than toward social revolution. He did, however, recognize and privately criticize severely the corrupt practices of the powerful church organization that existed at that time. We have only to refer to the Prologue of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales

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3 Dunham and Pargellis, Complaint and Reform, pp. 31-50.

4 Utopia, op. cit., p. 229.

5 Ibid., pp. 155-156.

to secure an excellent understanding of the conditions that prevailed in the Church for almost three centuries. In 1528 Simon Fish, lawyer and Oxford graduate, published the Supplication of Beggars, a severe criticism of the lecherous Church officials and their unfair methods of securing money from the poor.<sup>6</sup> Fish blamed the wretched condition of the poor on the parasitic officers of the Church. He believed that the Churchmen suppressed the English version of the New Testament because they feared that the people would learn that the remission of sins is given by Christ rather than by the Pope. Very soon after the publication of Supplication of Beggars More published his scathing reply in Supplication of Souls, in which the souls in Purgatory mocked Fish. Although More realized the truth of the accusations of Fish, he would have subjected that gentleman to severe punishment had not the King intervened (at the insistence of Mrs. Fish) in his behalf. More was forced to obey his sovereign but immediately demanded the atonement of Mrs. Fish for her refusal to permit mass to be said in Latin in her home. He also forbade the reading of the New Testament and certain other religious books. Thus, we see that More was decidedly intolerant toward radical religious reform and reformers.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps More's attitude toward radical reform resulted from his fear that anything which would tend to improve the miserable existence of the poor might cause a disruption of

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6 Dunham and Pargellis, op. cit., pp. 86-95.

7 Ibid., pp. 96-100.

the whole system. He realized that social and religious reform must follow an industrial and economic reform. Men can not reason well when their bodies starve. Continual wars on the continent had caused the prices of wool and hides to be exceedingly high. This situation brought about the turning of much farm land into enclosures and pastures, thus destroying the means of livelihood of many people. Hundreds of people became little more than beggars and lived in the filth and poverty into which the industrial conditions had forced them. More remembers well these deplorable conditions in his first book of Utopia but reminds us that there is no room for philosophy among princes. Although More was one of Henry VIII's most trusted advisers he was shrewd enough to realize that his sovereign's wit dulled as his love of pleasure and power grew greater. Advice contrary to the king's will would have been futilely given. Therefore, More fought radical reform and attempted to guide the affairs of state as tactfully as the grasping church organization and selfish king would permit.

The economic situation of England could have been greatly remedied by political reform. The strife between Church and State for supremacy, however, made such reform impossible during More's lifetime. Wolsey, who preceded More as Chancellor, for a time ruled both king and kingdom. He lived richly but was just in his treatment of others. He attended to foreign affairs most, domestic less, and religious affairs hardly at all.<sup>8</sup> Inasmuch as More was aware of

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<sup>8</sup> W.E. Campbell, "More and His Time", Catholic World, XCVII (April, 1913), p. 65.

existing conditions, he was no doubt clever enough to express his opinion of public matters tactfully or not at all.

More's tact and diplomacy in political matters can probably be attributed to the result of his first venture into Parliament. He was elected to Parliament in 1504 and immediately gained fame by opposing the granting of a large sum of money to Henry VII, whose hostility caused More's retirement. Later, when Henry VIII came to the throne, More became a prominent figure in the government of England. His wit, humor, and tact made him Henry's most brilliant adviser and most trusted ambassador. It was while on a diplomatic trip to Flanders that More wrote the second book of Utopia, a description of a perfect commonwealth which existed nowhere.

More wrote his book in Latin and gave it to Erasmus, who had it published. He disarmed criticism by choosing the title, Utopia, which means Nowhere, and by putting his ideas into the mouth of Hythloday, who refuses to take part in the affairs of the world. The first book of Utopia is almost England's complete history as it was in More's time. A comparison of the two books reveals that Utopia is almost England in reverse.<sup>9</sup> While the first book grew out of prevailing conditions, the second reflects More's character and humanistic ideals, and is a record of individual thought.<sup>10</sup>

More died a martyr to the freedom of thought. When Henry VIII demanded his soul, he gave his head.<sup>11</sup>

9 Vida Scudder, Social Ideals in English Letters, p. 73.

10 Ibid., p. 49.

11 Ibid.

## CHAPTER II

## THE DOCTRINES OF UTOPIAN LIFE

Having thus examined the background of More's life, let us now examine specifically the contents of Utopia to ascertain how much the ideas of his masterpiece were influenced by his own experiences and background. In making this analysis of Utopia I shall follow a plan of procedure similar to that observed in the first chapter; that is, I shall discuss Utopian life according to its domestic, educational, social, religious, economic, and political doctrines.

Before beginning a discussion of the various phases of Utopian life, however, we must have some knowledge of the background of this perfect commonwealth.

According to Hythloday, the mythical traveler through whom More tells his story, the island of Utopia resembles Great Britain somewhat in size and shape and in its distance from the continent. On the island are fifty-four large cities, or shire towns, agreeing altogether in language, manners, institutions, and laws. The population of each city remains constant, neither increasing above nor decreasing below six thousand. The surplus of over-populated cities is distributed among those cities which are deficient in population. But if there is a surplus throughout the island, certain persons are chosen from each city to build a new city upon unoccupied land in another country. This unused land becomes the property of the Utopians through whatever means they feel

necessary to employ, and they live in peace and harmony with their neighbors. If, however, the number of inhabitants in the island cities does not meet the requirement of the nation, citizens are moved from the foreign Utopian communities to make up the deficit. Thus, we see that the background of Utopian life is stable and unchanging. It is this stability of Utopia's population that makes possible the various phases of Utopian life.

### Family Life

Although the size of the Utopian family is regulated by law, the socialistic form of government does not otherwise interfere with this phase of Utopian life. When compared with the usual conception of a family, the Utopian household is exceptionally large, containing not less than forty persons, of whom there are no less than ten and no more than sixteen who are near the age of fourteen. The entire household, including the bondsmen, is under the authority of the oldest father of the family, provided he is a discreet and wise person. If, however, the eldest member of the household dotes from age, he is succeeded in rulership by the person nearest him in age. (It is well to note here that the aged and infirm receive kind attention and the best of care). The wives are ministers to their husbands, the children to their parents, and the younger to their elders.

This plan of the Utopian family is very similar to that of More, who was the patriarch of a family of children, in-laws, grandchildren, and servants, who all lived with him.

He was the dominating force under whom the busy life of the family was so regulated that all idleness, extravagance, and waste were eliminated. The idea of a collective household, both real and Utopian, probably came to More as a result of his early life in the household of Cardinal Morton. It has been previously noted (Chapter I) that More spent three years in the household of this learned and brilliant man. He was here associated with other boys near his own age who were, like More, placed under the care of Morton in order that they might gain the knowledge and inspiration that must necessarily come from an association with such learned men as the Cardinal and his associates.

Again More remembers the Morton household when he requires a certain number of adolescents in each Utopian family. He and his companions were near this specified age of fourteen when they began their life together. The inspiration that More received from his life in the collective household probably caused him to believe that those who have reached the adolescent stage of their lives need not only the guidance and counsel of their elders but also a happy association with people of their own age. Thus, we find the adolescents limited in the household to a number that is not too large for careful supervision or too small to permit inspiring companionship.

At meal time the Utopian families residing in cities become still larger units. Each city is provided with large halls, one for each ward or siphogranty (each city is divided into wards of thirty families each), wherein dwell the

syphogrants. To these halls at set times for meals comes every member of the ward who is not ill or otherwise indisposed. No Utopian would, of his own choice, dine at home when he may partake of fine fare and good fellowship in the hall of his ward. Here the thirty families become as one, with the syphogrant, his wife, and the eldest of each of the families as the central figures of the unit. The mothers with young babies care for the children under the age of five years; those between the age of five and the marriageable age (twenty-two for men and eighteen for girls) serve at the tables; and the other members are so intermingled at the tables that age sits with youth, thus making necessary conversation that is pleasing and beneficial to all. The dinners are short inasmuch as they are followed by labor, but the suppers are longer and are like banquets with entertainment and music. Such associations of families are not possible in the country, but each Utopian benefits from them during his lifetime if he chooses to follow the customs of his country, as we shall see in the study of other phases of Utopian life.

### Education in Utopia

Closely allied to the family life of Utopia is the education of its people. The Utopian system of education may be termed humanistic since it shapes itself to the individual rather than acting as an inflexible mold in which the individual must necessarily lose much of his initiative. More's Utopia is a land where one may seek freedom of thought un-



hampered by too much preoccupation with material things. This lack of interest among the Utopians in those material signs of wealth which bring pleasure in other nations comes partly as a result of simple customs and laws and partly through good literature and learning.<sup>12.</sup>

The education of the Utopian begins very early in the utter simplicity of country life. In such surroundings the young Utopian gains an understanding of life and the true meaning of pleasure. He very early learns that a simple existence gives him time to pursue that most which gives him greatest pleasure. The Utopian conception of pleasure excludes everything that is not beneficial either to the body or the soul (mind). Thus, there are two kinds of pleasure, that of the soul and that of the body. From earliest babyhood the Utopian learns that health and perfection of body bring pleasure. He soon realizes that mistreatment of his body is very, very foolish, and that it causes much grief and a need for readjustment. Thus we see that the Utopian's education begins with the principles of clean living and pleasures that bring happiness instead of a sorrowful reckoning.

After the first ten years of his life have been spent in simple country life the Utopian child is ready to think of choosing his occupation. For the most part the child follows in the craft of his father inasmuch as he is there-  
to most commonly naturally inclined. If, however, he

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12 Utopia, op. cit., p. 184.

chooses another craft, he is by adoption put into a family of that occupation which he wishes to follow.<sup>13.</sup> He may, if he so chooses, learn more than one craft in the trade schools which are provided by every city, and follow whichever he may like best, unless there is a shortage of certain other kinds of laborers in the city. The men learn the more labor-some trades and leave those of a less burdensome nature to the women, who are educated and trained to engage in the lighter crafts when they are not engaged in their household tasks.

It is by such methods that the Utopian directs his talents toward that work which pleases him most. There are a few individuals in each city in whom even from their earliest childhood one may perceive unusual mental ability and capacity for learning. These highly intelligent people are excused from other labor that they may devote all their time to study and research. It is from this learned group that the Utopian leaders, who must be of the very highest type, are selected. It is not, however, this group alone that seeks the realms of higher learning. The better part of the people, both men and women, give their spare time to learning.<sup>14.</sup> In some unknown manner the Utopians have learned the theories of music, logic, arithmetic, and geometry taught by the ancient philosophers. Yet they had never heard of even so much as the fame of one of these philosophers until

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13 Ibid., p. 169.

14 Ibid., p. 184.

Hythloday brought his copies of the works of Plato, Aristotle, and many of the other ancient Greeks.<sup>15.</sup> The most scholarly of the Utopians were anxious to learn the Greek language and soon read and thoroughly enjoyed the teachings of those ancient people from whom, according to history, the Utopians took their beginning,<sup>16.</sup>

The Utopians are no less adept in copying the inventions that make life more enjoyable than in acquiring knowledge. They immediately note the difference between their own books of bark and skins and Hythloday's books, which were printed on paper. After much experimenting the Utopians have discovered how to make paper and how to print books. They have no newly written books but the acquisition of paper and printing has enabled them to produce thousands of copies of the Greek masterpieces. Utopian education is in its own tongue but many men and women choose to continue their education throughout their life time and are thus delighted with the Greek of the classics. They welcome every traveler of intelligence and seek from him the knowledge of other countries. Thus we see that the Utopians are intelligent and as a whole seek pleasure through mental accomplishments. Their days are so divided as to give six hours to labor, eight hours to sleep, and the rest of the twenty-four hours to the development of the body and the mind.

In dividing their time, the Utopians adhere to the old

15 Utopia, op. cit., p. 196.

16 Ibid.

adage that early retiring and early rising bring the best that life may have to offer. They retire at eight o'clock and rise eight hours later. As their labor does not begin until eight in the morning, they usually spend the intervening time in study or reading, in listening to lectures or music, or in other simple but instructive pleasures. If, however, a man chooses to spend the early hours in the improvement of his craftsmanship, he is commended for his industry. The Utopian chooses to spend the best time of the day in self-improvement. The mind and body are rested and strong after a night's sleep and are thus ready for the simple but happy life of a Utopian day, a day in which labor is secondary to thought.

### Social Life in Utopia

It is evident that the simplicity of family life in Utopia and the flexibility of its educational system have brought about certain unusual social conditions. There are no social extremes; nor is there social equality, a state impossible to achieve. Utopia is a state of equal social opportunity, the only approach to equality that reason can entertain. In this nation, where communism is the supreme law of the land and no man may profit materially, all individuals begin life in exactly the same manner and surroundings but they do not all end it alike. The ranks that men may attain are determined, not by material inheritance, but by gifts of intellect, physical superiority and person-

ality. In Utopia one's success depends entirely upon his own ability and initiative.

The freedom given the Utopian in the choice of an preparation for his vocation is only a part of the socialistic plan of Utopian life. The Utopians cultivate a taste for uniform plainness of living and therefore suffer from neither the stifling luxury of self-indulgence nor the retarding influence of want and toil. Unhampered by the average man's struggle for the necessities of life, the Utopians have time to pursue that which contents them most. The monotony of duplicated houses is unnoticed in the decorative glory of beautiful gardens. The lack of color in dress does not create a background of dull grayness for the Utopians. They care nothing for physical adornment. By dressing all of his people alike in skins for work, or in very clean wool or white linen for other purposes, More eliminates to a great extent one of the predominant evidences of social inequality, vanity in personal appearance. He believes that pride measures its happiness by the misery of another rather than by its own convenience and should thus be eliminated. As we have previously noted certain English laws made clothing a means of distinction in social classes.

Thus we see that by eliminating social classes based upon material wealth and by encouraging study and research among men of intelligence Utopia has become a world of as yet unrealized reforms. Her treatment of matters pertaining to public health are likewise very modern. Every house is

fire-proof and is fitted with windows of glass or oiled linen. Cleanliness, light, and fresh air are essential to sanitation as is the possession of a well by each family. This attitude toward sanitation extends also to the hospitals, dining halls, slaughter houses, and public markets of the Utopian cities.

Each Utopian city is provided with four hospitals built a little without the city walls. Each hospital is so large as to be almost like a small town. Each is so built in order that there will always be ample room to care for any number of patients with ease and comfort. Patients suffering from contagious diseases are kept in special wards that their infection may not spread to others. These hospitals are so well provided with everything necessary to health that every citizen prefers to lie in them rather than at home. Meat and other foods prescribed by skilled physicians are carefully selected from the best sources by special stewards. So great is the concern of the Utopian for those unfortunate enough to be ill that he leaves nothing undone that may bring comfort and happiness to them.<sup>17.</sup>

The large and well equipped hospitals of Utopia do not indicate that the Utopians believe that illness is a necessary evil. They use every known means to keep themselves well and strong. As we have previously noted, the Utopians eat their meals in large halls. These must necessarily be exceedingly large to provide for the comfort of so large a

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17 Utopia, op. cit., p. 199.

family. For family it is, eating, talking, and playing together in the most pleasant surroundings to be secured. The Utopians are aware, however, that when so many people are in such close association the utmost care must be taken to protect their health. The halls, therefore, are kept spotlessly clean; the meals are properly planned for good health; and the meat and other foods are carefully selected and well cooked. Under such circumstances one readily sees why the Utopians seldom eat in the privacy of their homes.

The food which the Utopians consume is secured at the great market places, one of which is built in each of the four quarters of the city. The produce of each district is stored in large warehouses near the market places. From these the Utopians may without pay obtain provisions as they are needed.

Fish, fowl, and the flesh of animals are also taken to the market. First, however, the animals are killed and thoroughly cleaned at the slaughterhouses outside the city. Nothing filthy or loathsome is permitted inside the city lest pestilent diseases should result. The work of killing and cleaning the beasts is done by the bondsmen. Free citizens are not permitted to kill beasts, as the Utopians believe that one of nature's gentlest affections, clemency,  
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is destroyed in such occupation.

The Utopians are even more modern in their individual relationships with each other than they are in matters of

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public welfare. In regard to public health, they are, of course, lacking in modern sanitary appliances. Personal relationships, however, are more subject to custom and law than to mechanical devices. We may take for example the Utopian attitude toward marriage and divorce. A woman is not permitted to marry before she is eighteen and a man must be at least twenty-two. It is believed that at these respective ages the two sexes have reached a stage of physical and mental stability. The Utopians are very strict in regard to the relationships of the two sexes. If it is proved that a couple has not been chaste, the offenders are punished and both are forbidden to marry unless after true repentance their offense is forgiven and omitted from the records by the Prince.<sup>19.</sup>

Furthermore in choosing husbands and wives the Utopians observe a custom more advanced than any so far introduced among the nations of the world. Under the surveillance of a worthy matron the naked body of the bride to be is looked upon by the wooer. Likewise a discreet man exhibits the naked wooer to the woman.<sup>20.</sup> By this means the Utopians prevent a disruption of the state of wedlock because of some deformity or blemish of the body that is not perceptible to the eye when the person is clothed. If the blemish occurs after marriage there is no remedy except patience, but the Utopians attempt to eliminate every possible excuse for the breaking

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19 Utopia, op. cit., p. 199.

20 Ibid., p. 200.



of the marriage bond before the vows are taken, thus preventing much friction among their people.

The Utopians believe that such precaution is advisable since man may have but one wife at a time and the bonds of matrimony are never broken except by death, adultery, or the intolerable manners of either party. In the latter case the divorce is granted only after much deliberation by the authority of the council. Those who break the vows of wedlock are severely punished. The wronged parties are divorced from the adulterers, if they desire to be, and are permitted to remarry whomever they desire. The adulterers are condemned into bondage, from which there is no reprieve except in rare instances.<sup>21.</sup>

Bondage is the customary method of punishing offenders in Utopia. The severity of the bondage depends upon the heinousness of the crime. In some instances, especially when the person committing the crime has committed previous offenses, the penalty of death is believed to be just punishment. But most commonly offenses are punished with bondage, for the labor of the bondsmen is more profitable to the commonwealth than their death would be. Those in bondage do the heavy and disagreeable work of the commonwealth and in such manner become useful to the free citizens. If a bondsman bears his punishment with patience and is sorrier for his offense than for his punishment, his period of bondage may be shortened, or he may even be completely released and forgiven. The

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

bondsmen are always rewarded for any effort they may make to become better individuals. Every possible incentive is provided for offenders to raise themselves to higher levels of bondage and eventually to absolute freedom. The Utopian customs not only drive the people from evil by fear of punishment but also allure them to virtue with awards of honor and praise.

In such manner do the Utopians handle their matters of public welfare, work out their problems of individual relationships, and direct their citizens into channels of right living. Thus do they live together simply but happily and harmoniously.

#### Religious Doctrines and Practices

The attitude of the Utopians toward religion is no less advanced than their manner of dealing with social and educational problems. Such an attitude is to be expected of people who are governed by philosophy and certain principles of religion. The Utopians reason that the principal part of a man's felicity rests in pleasure rather than in adherence to strict rules of virtuous conduct. They do not think, however, that felicity rests in all pleasure, but only in that of a good and honest kind. Their defense of this opinion is taken from the basic principles of their religion which are:

That the soul of man is immortal, and that God of his goodness has designed that it should be happy; and that he has therefore appointed rewards for good and virtuous actions, and punishments for vice to be distributed after this life. 22.

✓ The Utopians believe that reason itself teaches a man  
to acknowledge and believe these religious principles. <sup>23.</sup>

They see no reason for man to live all of his life without pleasure if there is nothing to be expected after death. Yet it is their belief that God did not intend that man should spend his life in unhappiness but rather that he should live according to the dictates of nature. Such a life would be a virtuous one. According to the Utopian idea a man is following the rules of nature when he is able to control his desires according to the dictates of reason. Furthermore they believe that reason kindles in men a love for the divine majesty and creates within them the desire to live a joyful life and to help others to obtain and enjoy the same. <sup>24.</sup>

Thus, according to the prevalent religious belief of the Utopians, all of man's actions are referred to pleasure as their end. Pleasure is to them every motion and state of the body or mind in which man naturally finds delight. Any condition or substance that brings pleasure to man without wrong or injury is naturally pleasant. If, however, pain or injury is the final result of a pleasure, it is not naturally pleasant and should be excluded. Pleasures which the Utopians list as naturally pleasant are divided into two groups, those of the soul and those of the body. To the former they give intelligence and understanding. To the body they attribute good health, moderate eating and drinking, sufficient exer-

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23 Utopia, op. cit., p. 186.

24 Ibid., p. 187.

cise, and participation in work and play.<sup>25.</sup>

The Utopians gain much pleasure from physical satisfaction that has no ill effects, but their greatest pleasure is derived from contemplation of the truth and from learning. To this source of pleasure we may attribute their attitude toward their fellowman and God. They believe that love of one's fellowman is a natural condition. Accordingly, they think leagues are detrimental to the friendly relationship that should exist between the peoples of two nations. They reason that if men are not knit together by benevolence and love, then there could be little fellowship in mere words. They work together in harmony and seek happiness for all men with whom they come in contact.<sup>26.</sup>

This attitude of fellowship extends itself into the Utopian belief in religious toleration. Few laws govern the personal religious belief of the people but they are strict in their adherence to these regulations. They keep holy the first and last day of every month and year. On the last day of each month and year the people go to the church in the evening and give thanks to God that they have successfully passed over the month or year which is on that day coming to a close. They return to the church early the next morning and pray that they may have happiness and success during the month or year they are then beginning. No person goes to the church on last days, however, until all offenses

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25 Utopia, op. cit., pp. 191-196.

26 Ibid., p. 205.

have been confessed and forgiven at home, the wives kneeling before their husbands and the children before their parents. Thus do the Utopians enter their great, beautifully adorned temples with clear consciences. Upon entering the church the men sit on the right side and the women on the left under the strict surveillance of the goodman and goodwife of each household. The younger are intermingled with the elder lest the children, being joined together, should disturb the solemnity of the religious service.

The Utopian service is of the utmost simplicity in order that no sect (many exist in Utopia) may be offended. There is nothing seen or heard in the church that does not agree indifferently with all beliefs. They all pay homage to divine nature, and differ only in their means of seeking immortality. Only common sacrifices are permitted in the church. That every man may be free to retain his own conception of God, there are no images of any kind in the church. Every available means is used to promote a feeling of devotion and spiritual uplifting when the Utopians attend services. The church is dimly lighted by tapers and candles, dimly because the Utopians believe that men can more earnestly devote themselves to religion if they are not distracted by influences outside their souls. Music and sweet smelling incense add to the pleasantness of their surroundings. The people always wear white in the church but the priests are clothed in garments of many colors, beautifully adorned with feathers, which are said to contain divine mysteries.

The Utopian priests are respected by the laymen for the position they hold but they gain no more in material wealth than other people. (As we noted in Chapter I, this condition is indeed different from that existing in the English Church of More's time.) The orders of priesthood may be assumed by any person, regardless of sex, if he or she be worthy. In Utopia the priests are divided into two groups, those who marry (Protestant ideal) and those who followed the Catholic ideal. The former were considered by the Utopians to be wiser; the latter more holy. There seems to be no tendency on the part of More to differentiate between the good work of the two groups. Giving each group equal praise he gives no indication that he is a devout Catholic. This is indeed strange when we consider that religious toleration did not exist in the world of More's time.

More brings something very new to civilization with his idea of religious toleration.<sup>27</sup> He places only one restriction upon his people and that pertains to office holders. All who assume a governmental position in Utopia must believe in God and immortality. That such an attitude toward religion should have come from the same brain that conceived the ideas presented in Supplication of Souls (Chapter I) is almost inconceivable. As we have previously noted, English religious organizations were so corrupt at the time of the publication of Utopia that the ideals of religion were secondary to the Church organization. More was a severe critic

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27 Scudder, Social Ideals in English Letters, p. 72.

of the Church but the bitter resentment he bore these corrupt practices did not make him at all tolerant toward religious reformers.<sup>28.</sup> He believed that religious toleration had no place in ordinary work-day life and conflicted with divine laws.<sup>29.</sup> Then, we may ask, where do More's "brain children" get their advanced theories of religion?

Perhaps we can find the answer to this question in More's attitude toward reformation. He believed that all reform should come through reasoning and tact. In his opinion revolution and radical changes disrupt the entire system so that the remedy is more destructive than the disease. Then, too, he realized that unless all men are good, not all things concerning them can be well.<sup>30.</sup> More believed that the principles of right living must come from within and until every man can be reared under circumstances promoting the growth of these ideals, there can be little tolerance in the governance of the majority of people. Lacking reason and intelligence, men as a whole do not willingly accept the principles of brotherly love, reverence toward God, and a reasonable understanding of oneself. More was intolerant toward religious laxity among men whose intelligence was subordinate to their emotions and instinct. But those products of his own clever wit can be trusted with any amount of freedom because they are personifications of those ideals

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28 Dunham and Pargellis, Complaint and Reform, pp. 85-100.

29 "Sir Thomas More", Dictionary of National Biography.

30 Ibid.

of Utopia, freedom of thought and contemplation of the truth.

### Economic Doctrines and Practices

The uniform plainness of living and the harmonious manner of associating together are maintained in Utopia by strict adherence to certain economic practices. The origin of these practices may be found in More's resentment toward the deplorable conditions resulting from the economic state of England. In the first book of Utopia More traces the cause of much of the crime in his country to the economic conditions then existing in England. He does not believe that any nation can be governed justly or happily while there is property and while money is the standard by which the value of all other things is measured; not justly because the best of everything is taken by the unscrupulous, and not happily because everything is divided among a few and the rest are left to live miserably.<sup>31.</sup> With such concentration of property by a few, such usurpation of wealth by the Church, and such dire poverty among the majority as More saw in England, there could be little happiness in any country.

More realizes that punishment, however severe it may be, has little effect on the evils that result from poverty. Only wise and fundamental economic provision can remedy such a situation. He, therefore, eliminates from Utopia the two

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31 Utopia, op. cit., p. 157.



outstanding causes of economic evil, money and property. Money is unnecessary in Utopia except in dealing with other countries. Each district feeds, clothes, and otherwise provides for its people, thus removing any need for money. The gold and silver which are used for making money in other countries are kept in Utopia principally to use in the payment of hired soldiers during war and to lend to other countries. Otherwise, these metals are used in the basest manner. To the Utopian way of thinking, iron is far more valuable than gold because it is more beneficial to humanity.

The elimination of money and property simplifies the economic problem of supply and demand. In actual life economic problems are complicated by the variability of the demand for goods. More simplifies this by assuming perfect and unchanging simplicity in the consumer's taste. Strict regulations prevent the acquisition of a taste for soft living and luxuries. (More does not forget that even Utopians have instinctive desires.) Thus, with all necessities held in common, there can be no cause for lack of anything. Inasmuch as all possessions are common property and all men are partners therein, there can be no man in need in Utopia.

As we have noted before, every able person in Utopia must apply himself to his chosen craft six hours each day. Not only does this compulsory labor law eliminate the evil effects of idleness, but it also, along with the suppression of luxuries and elimination of waste, makes possible the production of adequate supplies. The diligent application of such methods causes even the accumulation of a

surplus. A statistical report is sent each year to the capital city from each district so that the surplus may be evenly distributed. When a supply of products sufficient for two years is stored in the warehouses of each district, the surplus is taken to other countries. The Utopians give a seventh of this surplus to the poor of other lands. The residue they sell or trade for such things as they lack at home.<sup>32.</sup>

Since no man owns anything and yet has access to all things so long as he is worthy, he needs to carry nothing except a license with him if he chooses to visit another district. The license permits departure from his own district and designates the date of his return. If, however, he remains in a place longer than one day, he must work at his own occupation. Thus the Utopians eliminate loitering. No able man eats until he has finished some specified work. In as much as there are no places in Utopia where one may indulge in pastimes of an evil nature, the Utopian has only one alternative. When he is not earning his keep, he may enjoy clean, honest forms of recreation.

In solving the economic problems of Utopia, More did not have to contend with the complications of the machine age. His people quell their acquisitiveness with philosophy and simple living. He seeks to eliminate as much as possible the necessity of labor in Utopia so that the best part of his people may devote their time to study and research.

The divisions of labor in Utopia are so arranged that

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<sup>32</sup> Utopia, op. cit., p. 179.

no man is forced to labor long at any work disagreeable to him. Each year twenty members of each rural family leave the farm after two years of service and take up some occupation in the city. A like number go from the city to take their places in the farm families. Thus the skilled laborers may teach the unskilled so that there may be no deficiency in production. The work of the farms is simplified by many devices. Eggs are hatched by artificial heat and the chicks, of which there are many, are cared for by people. Cattle are more numerous than horses because they can be used in many more ways. The land is so well cared for that it produces abundantly. When harvest time comes many male laborers are dispatched from the city and the work of gathering the crops usually requires no more than one day.

Thus, we see how More's great desire to create an ideal social state led him to provide every possible factor necessary to the formation of such a world. His people subordinate natural instincts and emotions to intelligent reasoning and are thus brought to accept the practices necessary to the maintenance of economic stability in Utopia. More does not allow for the effect of evolutionary development upon the world. His ideal commonwealth is a beautiful dream from which much good can be taken and put into practical use; as a whole economic Utopia has no place in an ordinary world.

## Political Philosophy and Practices

More's England was no less corrupt politically than economically and he attributes both evils to the same source, money and property. In discussing a government which uses money and property as its standards, More permits Hythloday to condemn the injustice of a country in which men who perform labor no commonwealth could exist without lead an existence more miserable than that of a beast. He says:

I can see or have no other notion of all the other governments that I see or know, than that they are a conspiracy of the rich, who on pretense of managing the public only pursue their own private ends... ..that they may, without danger, preserve all that they have so ill acquired, and then they may engage the poor to toil and labor for them at as low rates as possible, and oppress them as much as they please. And if they can but prevail to get these contrivances established by the show of public authority..... they are accounted laws. 33.

More eliminates the possibility of such conditions in Utopia by making communism the supreme law of the land. Under such circumstances there can be little inducement for those who desire power for selfish reasons to seek office. The officers are chosen from among those whose mental ability gives them license to spend their time in scholarly research. Every thirty families choose each year an officer whom they call a syphogrant, or philarch. A tranibore, or chief philarch, is placed in charge of every ten syphogrants and their families. The two hundred philarchs ballot secretly on four men who are chosen from the four quarters of the city by popular vote, and in this manner choose the prince.

This very highly respected officer continues to be prince so long as he may live, unless he attempts to betray or enslave his people. All other officers are elected for only one year. The tranibores meet every third day, or oftener if necessary, with the prince in the council house, where matters pertaining to the commonwealth are discussed for three days before they are ratified. Two syphogrants are included in each meeting of the council, a new couple each time. Nothing concerning the government may be discussed outside the council; thus the Prince and tranibores cannot conspire to oppress the people. Matters of great importance are discussed in the great halls of the syphogrants in the presence of the respective families of each district. Sometimes matters are brought before the council of the entire island, which is composed of three learned and sage men from each city. Another custom of the Utopian council is to refrain from discussing a matter on the same day that it is introduced, thus preventing hasty and rash consideration.

Coming as they do from the most intelligent class of Utopians, the officers are of the highest type. They are excused from physical labor, but desiring to be worthy examples for those they rule, the Fathers, as they are called, are neither haughty nor indolent. They are respected by the citizens. Their apparel, however, is not different from that of the citizens. Even the Prince is unadorned and may be distinguished from other people only by a little sheaf of corn carried before him.

In law making the Utopians apply the same principles that pertain to all other matters, reason and simplicity. Few laws are necessary for people of such wisdom and demeanor. They cannot understand why other nations make so many laws that the people do not have time to read them and why they are yet insufficient to supply the need. The few laws existing in Utopia are so simple that every man is a cunning lawyer. This fact has brought about the elimination of another class of undesirable citizens, scheming lawyers. The Utopians prefer to have every man present his own case to the judge without the subtle interpretation a lawyer might place on it.

The Utopians govern themselves so honestly and admirably that many of them have been employed as magistrates by neighboring countries. Many of these countries are free as a result of Utopia's intervention when selfish rulers or other countries subjected them to tyranny. Fearing that their new freedom will be usurped these countries realize the necessity of having rulers that can be trusted. Thus, they ask Utopians to become their magistrates.

As has been previously noted the Utopians do not partake in any kind of league or treaty with other countries. Such agreements are unnecessary when there is true friendship, and they are useless when it is lacking. If possible the Utopians settle disputes with other countries peaceably. If the issue is brought to war, they are quickly prepared for it. They hire almost all of their soldiers from other countries

and thus save their own people. Many times they are able to end the trouble before the actual fighting begins by offering rewards for the murder of the leaders of the belligerent country. The Utopians believe that the real enemies of peace will then be destroyed. Thus do the Utopians seek to live happily and harmoniously with one another and their fellowmen.

There can be but one conclusion to this analysis of Utopia. More saw the need for reformation in every phase of life in the entire civilized world. He believed that it should come through sound logic and careful planning, but he realized that such reasoning must come from intelligent people, of which there are so few that they can only mitigate that which is bad rather than completely destroy it. So long as the cause of any trouble remains, the trouble cannot be eliminated. Every remedy may allay the condition but none can heal it. Eventually, the condition cannot be remedied and the result is inevitable. A revolution, the worst type of reformation and that which More despises most, disrupts the entire system.

To More Utopia was a dream, an enchanted world that had no place in everyday life. He becomes so enthusiastic in the contemplation of an unwarped social life that he writes like one convinced of the reality of his dream. Yet he ends with the wish for such perfection rather than a hope for it. <sup>34.</sup>

## CHAPTER III

## FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

More's Utopia pictures a well regulated life of the utmost simplicity. We may ask whether such a life would be pleasant. Such plainness and regulation perhaps appears monotonous. The lack of color and variety in dress creates for us an atmosphere of dull grayness. Perhaps at first sight Utopian life does seem colorless and uninteresting to the inhabitants of a modern world in which man seeks every means to drive away boredom. But in order that we may fairly consider the desirability of Utopian life we must place ourselves at the point of view of the average Utopian. He is born into a world that supplies his every need. An education is provided for him. He selects his own vocation, at which he labors six hours each day. The necessities of life are his so long as he does his part in providing for the welfare of the nation. Every possible means of recreation that will prove beneficial to his mind and body is provided. Throughout his life the Utopian lives securely and happily according to the dictates of common sense and reason.

Let us now compare such a life with that of the wage earning population of our own country. Certainly, there can be no greater monotony in Utopian life than in that suffered by our laboring class. There is very little variety in the lives of our working people except the very unpleasant fact or fear of unemployment. Tense with the



ever-present feeling of insecurity, these people seek the satisfaction and contentment that they seldom find. Labor must keep within the narrow channels of the life made for it by Capital.

When we say that More's communistic ideal has many defects we are acknowledging that it is human. Every plan of social reconstruction betrays the limitations of its author.<sup>35.</sup> The scheme of reform will provide for that which is desired most by its inventor, who may disregard everything else. More seeks to present a life in which man may have freedom of mind. He cares nothing for outward beauty or materialistic perfection. His one aim is to minimize preoccupation with material things in order that the best part of society may be free to devote itself to learning and advancement.

More is probably the most logical dreamer of social reforms that the English speaking world has produced. Even though he does not realize the immobility of his ideal civilization and fails to provide for evolutionary development, his Utopia has proved to be prophetic. It is indeed interesting to note just how much of More's conception of an ideal social world has been realized. Coming at the very beginning of the great period of reform and change, Utopia spoke of a future world which was to make many changes in the social life of civilized nations. We enjoy much today that existed only in Utopia during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. And even we have not as yet realized the true

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35 Scudder, Social Ideals in English Letters, p. 61.

worth of More's suggestions. Let us consider briefly a few of the social institutions of today that resemble very much the institutions of Utopia.

The ideas of social reformers are not readily accepted by the world. Reform is a slow and tedious process which is realized only when the grip of custom has relaxed. The first suggestion of More to be followed in England was the provision for the aged and infirm and a partial employment of able-bodied poor. Such provision has only recently been made in this country and as yet has not proved entirely satisfactory. Our complicated form of government and the selfishness of many people hamper the ultimate success of such reform.

It was not until the nineteenth century that a truly representative government came into being. We cannot as yet say that our government is truly "of and by the people". Suffrage is still limited in many American states by laws and regulations. The Utopians method of keeping check on the honesty and efficiency of government officials can hardly be employed in our complicated system. We can, however, profit by their example in choosing our officials from the best.

Despite the reformations that religion has undergone, it has not yet reached the degree of toleration enjoyed in Utopia. More than three hundred years ago the Pilgrims came to America for the specific purpose of seeking religious freedom. Their idea of religious freedom, however,

consisted principally of a strict adherence to the doctrines and principles of the Puritan Church. America enjoyed very little religious toleration until the establishment of Philadelphia. The Quakers used Utopia as a model for their city, which was founded upon the principles of brotherly love and simple living. Our National Constitution provides for religious freedom but it cannot prevent the intolerance existing in society today. However, the people of this country enjoy a great deal more religious freedom than More would actually have tolerated. As we have previously noted, his Utopians are of the intellectual type, the only type that More would deem capable of appreciating the advantages of religious toleration.

As we have previously noted, Utopia provides vocational and technical training for its people. We have recently adopted this idea in our country, and although its development has been slow, its importance cannot be denied. Vocational training is being extended gradually into many fields.

Work, however, is secondary to the improving of one's mind and body in Utopia. Early morning lectures are well attended by the Utopians. This idea of adult education has been adopted by the governing bodies of our nation and much has been accomplished by the promotion of extension work. We have realized the necessity of education in America, and although we may place emphasis upon quantity rather than upon quality, our people are given an opportunity to acquire an education. The Utopians were taught in their own

tongue. Such has been the case in England since the beginning of the Tudor reign. Education of the common people has necessitated the use of the language of the people of every country of the world today.

In making further comparison of our own age with More's Utopia, we note that More is especially fond of play and permits his Utopians to spend many hours at recreative pastimes. During the past few years we have turned more and more to the building of parks, playgrounds, and recreation centers. Many social workers and crime experts have found that the establishment of clubs and other worthwhile organizations has done much to eradicate crime and wretchedness among under-privileged children. Music, too, has become one of our greatest diversions, as it was to the Utopians.

The Utopians insist upon eugenic marriages and designate the minimum marriageable age. Such regulations help to prevent the deterioration of racial standards. Our state governments have the power of control and regulate to some extent the marriages within the states. The lack of uniform laws, however, prevents strict enforcement of the prevailing regulations. Our adoption of the Utopian idea of using every possible means to prevent unsuitable marriages would, no doubt, prevent the disruption of many American homes.

The Utopians are intensely interested in good health and happiness. The possession of the former does not, however, make them less interested in the provision of excellent hospitalization for those who are ill. More is indeed prophetic

in his ideas concerning the sick. It was not until many years after More's death that hospitals actually came into existence. Much credit can be given to Florence Nightingale for the establishment of efficient care of the sick. It was not until after the Civil War, however, that contagion wards were put into use. It is true that the medical world has moved rapidly in recent years, so rapidly in fact that the results of the scientific progress of this age, no doubt, far exceed even the imaginative ideas of the versatile More. But in spite of this great progress we have not as yet realized the possibilities of More's suggestions in hospitalization. We have not yet provided for the establishment of great public clinics and hospitals where every man may secure without cost the best of treatment. Medical attention is usually so expensive that many times the average person is forced to forego much needed treatment.

One of America's most worthy reforms resembles to a great extent More's idea regarding incorrigibles. He advocates the reforming of a criminal by giving him healthful conditions of mind and body, active responsibility and an atmosphere of increasing trust as he warrants that trust. More believes that prisoners should have an opportunity to be self-reliant and trustworthy. Mr. Osborne, who was warden of Sing Sing prison a few years ago, used this idea to reform criminals placed in his care. <sup>36.</sup> More believed that many criminals can be reformed if they are provided with

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36 Mary B. Fuller, "Prophecy and Its Fulfillment",  
Survey, XV, 106 (Oct. 30, 1915).

the incentive to live worthily.

We have an instance of More's distrust of international leagues in Washington's farewell warning that the progress of the United States would be greater if she were never bound to other countries. The Monroe doctrine presents an attitude of mind similar to that maintained by the Utopians toward their neighbors. Our attitude toward war resembles in some measure that of the Utopians. We, too, have made it our policy to stay out of war except when the safety of our country has been threatened or when we have aided some other country against an encroaching power.

✓ Thus, we see that there are many similarities between More's Utopian ideas and our own methods of solving social problems. The possibilities of applying the social reforms of Utopia to the evils of this modern world are yet unexhausted. But in seeking to reform the world it is well to remember More's advice:

If you cannot cure some received vice according to your wishes, you must not abandon the commonwealth. You ought rather to cast about and to manage things with all the dexterity in your power, so that if you are not able to make them go well they may be as little ill as possible; for except all men were good everything cannot be right and that is a blessing that I do not at present hope to see. 37.

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37 Utopia, op. cit., pp. 155-156.

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