

And going back for a moment to that point about a Utopia, I want one from Chesterton. Purely unhelpful criticism isn't enough from a man of his size. It isn't justifiable for him to go about sitting on other people's Utopias. I appeal to his sense of fair play. I have done my best to reconcile the conception of a free and generous style of personal living with a social organisation that will save the world from the harsh predominance of dull, persistent, energetic, unscrupulous grabbers tempered only by the vulgar extravagance of their wives and sons. It isn't an adequate reply to say that nobody stood treat there, and that the simple, generous people like to beat their own wives and children on occasion in a loving and intimate manner, and that they won't endure the spirit of Mr. Sidney Webb.

ABOUT SIR THOMAS MORE

There are some writers who are chiefly interesting in themselves, and some whom chance and the agreement of men have picked out as symbols and convenient indications of some particular group or temperament of opinions. To the latter it is that Sir Thomas More belongs. An age and a type of mind have found in him and his Utopia a figurehead and a token; and pleasant and honourable as his personality and household present themselves to the modern reader, it is doubtful if they would by this

time have retained any peculiar distinction among the many other contemporaries of whom we have chance glimpses in letters and suchlike documents, were it not that he happened to be the first man of affairs in England to imitate the "Republic" of Plato. By that chance it fell to him to give the world a noun and an adjective of abuse, "Utopian," and to record how under the stimulus of Plato's releasing influence the opening problems of our modern world presented themselves to the English mind of his time. For the most part the problems that exercised him are the problems that exercise us to-day, some of them, it may be, have grown up and intermarried, new ones have joined their company, but few, if any, have disappeared, and it is alike in his resemblances to and differences from the modern speculative mind that his essential interest lies.

The portrait presented by contemporary mention and his own intentional and unintentional admissions, is of an active-minded and agreeable-mannered man, a hard worker, very markedly prone to quips and whimsical sayings and plays upon words, and aware of a double reputation as a man of erudition and a wit. This latter quality it was that won him advancement at court, and it may have been his too clearly confessed reluctance to play the part of an informal table jester to his king that laid the grounds of that deepening royal resentment that ended only with his execution. But he was also valued by the king for more solid merits, he was needed by the king, and it was more than a table scorned or a clash of opinion upon the validity of divorce; it was a more general estrangement and avoidance of service that caused that fit of regal

petulance by which he died.

It would seem that he began and ended his career in the orthodox religion and a general acquiescence in the ideas and customs of his time, and he played an honourable and acceptable part in that time; but his permanent interest lies not in his general conformity but in his incidental scepticism, in the fact that underlying the observances and recognised rules and limitations that give the texture of his life were the profoundest doubts, and that, stirred and disturbed by Plato, he saw fit to write them down. One may question if such scepticism is in itself unusual, whether any large proportion of great statesmen, great ecclesiastics and administrators have escaped phases of destructive self-criticism or destructive criticism of the principles upon which their general careers were framed. But few have made so public an admission as Sir Thomas More. A good Catholic undoubtedly he was, and yet we find him capable of conceiving a non-Christian community excelling all Christendom in wisdom and virtue; in practice his sense of conformity and orthodoxy was manifest enough, but in his "Utopia" he ventures to contemplate, and that not merely wistfully, but with some confidence, the possibility of an absolute religious toleration.

The "Utopia" is none the less interesting because it is one of the most inconsistent of books. Never were the forms of Socialism and Communism animated by so entirely an Individualist soul. The hands are the hands of Plato, the wide-thinking Greek, but the voice is the voice of a humane, public-spirited, but limited and very practical English

gentleman who takes the inferiority of his inferiors for granted, dislikes friars and tramps and loafers and all undisciplined and unproductive people, and is ruler in his own household. He abounds in sound practical ideas, for the migration of harvesters, for the universality of gardens and the artificial incubation of eggs, and he sweeps aside all Plato's suggestion of the citizen woman as though it had never entered his mind. He had indeed the Whig temperament, and it manifested itself down even to the practice of reading aloud in company, which still prevails among the more representative survivors of the Whig tradition. He argues ably against private property, but no thought of any such radicalism as the admission of those poor peons of his, with head half-shaved and glaring uniform against escape, to participation in ownership appears in his proposals. His communism is all for the convenience of his Syphogrants and Tranibores, those gentlemen of gravity and experience, lest one should swell up above the others. So too is the essential Whiggery of the limitation of the Prince's revenues. It is the very spirit of eighteenth century Constitutionalism. And his Whiggery bears Utilitarianism instead of the vanity of a flower. Among his cities, all of a size, so that "he that knoweth one knoweth all," the Benthamite would have revised his sceptical theology and admitted the possibility of heaven.

Like any Whig, More exalted reason above the imagination at every point, and so he fails to understand the magic prestige of gold, making that beautiful metal into vessels of dishonour to urge his case against it, nor had he any perception of the charm of extravagance, for example, or

the desirability of various clothing. The Utopians went all in coarse linen and undyed wool--why should the world be coloured?--and all the economy of labour and shortening of the working day was to no other end than to prolong the years of study and the joys of reading aloud, the simple satisfactions of the good boy at his lessons, to the very end of life. "In the institution of that weal publique this end is only and chiefly pretended and minded, that what time may possibly be spared from the necessary occupations and affairs of the commonwealth, all that the citizens should withdraw from the bodily service to the free liberty of the mind and garnishing of the same. For herein they suppose the felicity of this life to consist."

Indeed, it is no paradox to say that "Utopia," which has by a conspiracy of accidents become a proverb for undisciplined fancifulness in social and political matters, is in reality a very unimaginative work. In that, next to the accident of its priority, lies the secret of its continuing interest. In some respects it is like one of those precious and delightful scrapbooks people disinter in old country houses; its very poverty of synthetic power leaves its ingredients, the cuttings from and imitations of Plato, the recipe for the hatching of eggs, the stern resolutions against scoundrels and rough fellows, all the sharper and brighter. There will always be found people to read in it, over and above the countless multitudes who will continue ignorantly to use its name for everything most alien to More's essential quality.