

More's Letter to Antonio Bonvisi, 1535

Sir Thomas More a little before he was arraigned and condemned (in the year of our Lord 1535, and in the twenty-seventh year of the reign of King Henry the Eighth), being shut up so close in prison in the Tower that he had no pen nor ink, wrote with a coal a pistle in Latin to Master Anthony Bonvisi (merchant of Luke and then dwelling in London), his old and dear friend, and sent it unto him, the copy whereof here followeth.

Good Master Bonvisi Of All Friends Most Friendliest, and to Me Worthily Dearliest Beloved, I Heartily Greet You.

Sith my mind doth give me (and yet may chance falsely but yet so it doth) that I shall not have long liberty to write unto you, I determined therefore while I may to declare unto you by this little epistle of mine how much I am comforted with the sweetness of your friendship, in this decay of my fortune.

For afore—right Worshipful Sir—although I always delighted marvelously in this your love towards me, yet when I consider in my mind that I have been now almost this forty years not a guest, but a continual nursling in Master Bonvisi's house, and in the mean season have not showed myself in requiting you again, a friend, but a barren lover only, my shamefastness verily made that that sincere sweetness, which otherwise I received of the revolving of your friendship, somewhat waxed sourish, by reason of a certain rustical shame as neglecting of my duty toward you. But now I comfort myself with this, that I never had the occasion to do you pleasure. For such was always your great wealth that there was nothing left in which I might be unto you beneficial. I therefore (knowing that I have not been unthankful to you by omitting my duty toward you but for lack of occasion and opportunity, and seeing moreover all hope of recompense taken away, you so to persevere in love toward me, binding me more and more to you, yea rather so to run forward still, and as it were with a certain indefatigable course to go forth, that few men so fawn upon their fortunate friends, as you favor, love, foster and honor me, now overthrown, abjected, afflicted, and condemned to prison) cleanse myself both from this bitterness (such as it is) of mine old shamefastness and also repose myself in the sweetness of this marvelous friendship of yours.

And this faithful prosperity of this amity and friendship of yours towards me (I wot not how) seemeth in a manner to counterpoise this unfortunate shipwreck of mine, and saving the indignation of my Prince, of me no less loved than feared, else as concerning all other things, doth almost more than counterpoise. For all those are to be accounted amongst the mischances of fortune. But if I should reckon the possession of so constant friendship (which no storms of adversity hath taken away, but rather hath fortified and strengthened) amongst the brittle gifts of fortune, then were I mad. For the felicity of so faithful and constant friendship in the storms of fortune (which is seldom seen) is doubtless a high and a noble gift proceeding of a certain singular benignity of God. And indeed as concerning myself, I cannot otherwise take it nor reckon it, but that it was ordained by the great mercy of God, that you, good Master Bonvisi, amongst my poor friends, such a man as you are and so great a friend, should be long afore

provided that should by your consolation as-suage and relieve a great part of these troubles and griefs of mine, which the hugeness of fortune hath hastily brought upon me. I therefore my dear friend and of all mortal men to me most dearest do (which now only I am able to do) earnestly pray to Almighty God, which hath provided you for me, that sith he hath given you such a debtor as shall never be able to pay you, that it may please him of his benignity to requite this bountifulness of yours, which you every day thus plenteously pour upon me. And that for his mercy sake he will bring us from this wretched and stormy world into his rest, where shall need no letters, where no wall shall dissever us, where no porter shall keep us from talking together, but that we may have the fruition of the eternal joy with God the Father, and with his only begotten Son our Redeemer Jesu Christ, with the holy spirit of them both, the Holy Ghost proceeding from them both. And in the mean season, Almighty God grant both you and me, good Master Bonvisi, and all mortal men everywhere, to set at naught all the riches of this world, with all the glory of it, and the pleasure of this life also, for the love and desire of that joy. Thus of all friends most trusty, and to me most dearly beloved, and as I was wont to call you the apple of mine eye, right heartily fare ye well. And Jesus Christ keep safe and sound and in good health, all your family, which be of like affection toward me as their master is.

Thomas More: I should in vain put to it, yours, for thereof can you not be ignorant, since you have bought it with so many benefits. Nor now I am not such a one that it forceth whose I am.