

Letter to Children, 1522

Court

3 September 1522

Thomas More to his dearest children, and to Margaret Giggs, whom he numbers amongst his own,—

The Bristol merchant brought me your letters the day after he left you, with which I was extremely delighted. Nothing can come from your workshop, however rude or unfinished, that will not give me more pleasure than the most accurate thing that another can write. So much does my affection for you recommend whatever you write to me. Indeed, without any recommendation, your letters are capable of pleasing by their own merits, their wit and pure Latinity. There was not one of your letters that did not please me extremely; but, to confess ingenuously what I feel, the letter of my son John pleased me best, both because it was longer than the others, and because he seems to have given to it more labour and study. For he not only put out his matter prettily and composed in fairly polished language, but he plays with me both pleasantly and cleverly, and turns my jokes on myself wittily enough. And this he does not only merrily, but with due moderation, showing that he does not forget that he is joking with his father, and that he is cautious not to give offence at the same time that he is eager to give delight.

Now I expect from each of you a letter almost every day. I will not admit such excuses as John is wont to make, want of time, sudden departure of the letter-carrier, or, want of something to write about. No one hinders you from writing, but, on the contrary, all are urging you to do it. And that you may not keep the letter-carrier waiting, why not anticipate his coming, and have your letters written and sealed, ready for anyone to take? How can a subject be wanting when you write to me, since I am glad to hear of your studies or of your games, and you will please me most if, when there is nothing to write about, you write about that nothing at great length. Nothing can be easier for you, since you are girls, loquacious by nature, who have always a world to say about nothing at all. One thing, however, I admonish you, whether you write serious matters or the merest trifles, it is my wish that you write everything diligently and thoughtfully. It will be no harm, if you first write the whole in English, for then you will have much less trouble in turning it into Latin; not having to look for the matter, your mind will be intent only on the language. That, however, I leave to your own choice, whereas I strictly enjoin that whatever you have composed you carefully examine before writing it out clean; and in this examination, first scrutinise the whole sentence and then every part of it. Thus, if any solecisms have escaped you, you will easily detect them. Correct these, write out the whole letter again, and even then examine it once more, for sometimes, in rewriting, faults slip in again that one had expunged. By this diligence your little trifles will become serious matters; for while there is nothing so neat and witty that will not be made insipid by silly and inconsiderate loquacity, so also there is nothing in itself so insipid, that you cannot season with grace and wit if you give a little thought to it.

Farewell, my dear children.

From *Life and Writings of Sir Thomas More* by T. E. Bridgett. London: Burns & Oats, Ltd, 1891, pp. 133-134.