

## More's Letter to Erasmus, 1533

Chelsea  
1533

The heretic Tyndale, my fellow-countryman, who is in exile nowhere and everywhere, has written to England lately that Melanchthon is now with the king of France; that he himself has spoken with one who saw him received at Paris with a retinue of 150 horse. Tyndale added that he was afraid that should France receive the word of God from Melanchthon, it would be confirmed in his belief concerning the Eucharist in opposition to Wycliffe's sect. See how carefully these fellows treat this matter, as if God had committed to them the instruction and nurture of the world in the rudiments of faith.

As to what you wrote, that you had hesitated about publishing my letter, though there were reasons that made you wish to publish it, you need not hesitate at all. Some gossips here have been spreading it about that I had to resign against my will, though I pretend it was not so. So when I set up my tomb, I determined to state the matter as it is in my epitaph, that any one might refute it who could. As soon as they had taken note of it, as they could not show it to be false, they found fault with it as boastful. I preferred this to allowing the other rumour to gain ground, not indeed for my own sake, for I do not care very much what men say of me, provided that God approves of me; but since I had written in our own tongue some little books against some of our defenders of contentious doctrines, I considered that I ought to defend the integrity of my name; and that you may know how boastfully I have written you shall receive my epitaph, by which you will see that in my security of conscience I by no means flatter them, to prevent them from saying about me whatever they please. I have waited now till the meeting of parliament, since I exercised and resigned my office, but as yet no one has come forward to attack me. Either I have been so innocent or else so cautious, that my opponents must let me boast of one or other of these qualities.

But as regards this business, the king has spoken many times privately, and twice in public. For in words which I am ashamed to repeat, when my successor (a most illustrious man) was installed, the king, by the mouth of the Duke of Norfolk, the Lord High Treasurer of England, ordered an honourable testimony to be given that with difficulty he had yielded to my request to retire. And not contented with this, the king, out of his singular goodness to me, had the same thing repeated by my successor in his own presence, at the solemn assembly of the peers and commons, in the speech which is made at the opening of parliament.

If then you think it expedient you need not hesitate to publish my letter. As to what I profess in my letter that I gave trouble to heretics, I took pride in writing this. For I so entirely detest that race of men, that there is none to which I would be more hostile, unless they amend. For every day more and more, I find them to be of such a sort, that I greatly fear for what they are bringing on the world.

*Epitaph* (Rastell translation):

Thomas More, a Londoner born, of no noble family, but of an honest stock, somewhat brought up in learning; after that in his young days he had been a pleader in the laws of this hall certain years, being one of the under-sheriffs of London, was of noble King Henry the Eight (which alone of all kings worthily deserved both with sword and pen to be called the Defender of the Faith, a glory afore not heard of) called into the court, and chose one of the Council and made knight; then made first under-treasurer of England, after that chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and last of all, with great favour of his prince, lord chancellor of England. But in the mean season, he was chosen speaker of the parliament, and besides was divers times in divers places the king's ambassador, and last of all at Cambray, joined fellow and companion with Cuthbert Tunstal, chief of that embassy, then Bishop of London, and within a while after Bishop of Durham, who so excelleth in learning, wit and virtue, that the whole world scant hath at this day any more learned, wiser or better; where he both joyfully saw and was present ambassador when the leagues between the chief princes of Christendom were renewed again, and peace so long looked for restored to Christendom, which peace Our Lord stablish and make perpetual.

When he had thus gone through this course of offices or honours, that neither that gracious prince could disallow his doings, nor he was odious to the nobility nor unpleasant to the people, but yet to thieves, murderers and heretics grievous, at last John More, his father, knight, and chosen of the prince to be one of the justices of the King's Bench, a civil man, pleasant, harmless, gentle, pitiful, just and uncorrupted, in years old, but in body more than for his years lusty, after that he perceived his life so long lengthened, that he saw his son lord chancellor of England, thinking himself now to have lived long enough, gladly departed to God. His son then, his father being dead, to whom as long as he lived being compared was wont both to be called young and himself so thought too, missing now his father departed, and seeing four children of his own, and of their offspring eleven, began in his own conceit to wax old; and this affection of his was increased by a certain sickly disposition of his breast, even by and by following, as a sign or token of age creeping upon him. He, therefore, irked and weary of worldly business, giving up his promotions, obtained at last by the incomparable benefit of his most gentle prince, if it please God to favour his enterprise, the thing which from a child in a manner always he wished and desired: that he might have some years of his life free, in which he little and little withdrawing himself from the business of this life, might continually remember the immortality of the life to come. And he hath caused this tomb to be made for himself, his first wife's bones hither too, that might every day put him in memory of death that never ceases to creep on him. And that this tomb made for him in his lifetime be not in vain, nor that he fear death coming upon him, but that he may willingly, for the desire of Christ, die and find death not utterly death to him, but the gate of a wealthier life, help him, I beseech you, good reader, now with your prayers while he liveth, and when he is dead also.

Within this tomb Jane, wife of More, reclines;  
This More for Alice and himself designs.  
The first, dear object of my youthful vow,  
Gave me three daughters and a son to know;  
The next—ah! virtue in a stepdame rare!—  
Nursed my sweet infants with a mother's care.  
With both my years so happily have past,  
Which most my love, I know not—first or last.

Oh! had religion destiny allowed,  
How smoothly mixed had our three fortunes flowed!  
But, be we in the tomb, in heaven allied,  
So kinder death shall grant what life denied.

From *Life and Writings of Sir Thomas More* by T. E. Bridgett. London: Burns & Oats, Ltd, 1891,  
pp. 248-252.