Sir Thomas More

*Utopia*

Book Two

“Of Their Military Discipline”

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They detest war as a very brutal thing; and which, to the reproach of human nature, is more practised by men than by any sort of beasts. They, in opposition to the sentiments of almost all other nations, think that there is nothing more inglorious than that glory that is gained by war. And therefore though they accustom themselves daily to military exercises and the discipline of war—in which not only their men but their women likewise are trained up, that in cases of necessity they may not be quite useless—yet they do not rashly engage in war, unless it be either to defend themselves, or their friends, from any unjust aggressors; or out of good-nature or in compassion assist an oppressed nation in shaking off the yoke of tyranny. They indeed help their friends, not only in defensive, but also in offensive wars; but they never do that unless they had been consulted before the breach was made, and being satisfied with the grounds on which they went, they had found that all demands of reparation were rejected so that a war was unavoidable. This they think to be not only just, when one neighbor makes an inroad on another, by public order, and carry away the spoils; but when the merchants of one country are oppressed in another, either under pretence of some unjust laws, or by the perverse wresting of good ones. This they count a juster cause of war than the other, because those injuries are done under some color of laws.

This was the only ground of that war in which they engaged with the Nephelogetes against the AleopolitaneS, a little before our time; for the merchants of the former having, as they thought, met with great injustice among the latter, which, whether it was in itself right or wrong, drew on a terrible war, in which many of their neighbors were engaged; and their keenness in carrying it on being supported by their strength in maintaining it, it not only shook some very flourishing States, and very much afflicted others, but after a series of much mischief ended in the entire conquest and slavery of the AleopolitaneS, who though before the war they were in all respects much superior to the Nephelogetes, were yet subdued; but though the Utopians had assisted them in the war, yet they pretended to no share of the spoil.

But though they so vigorously assist their friends in obtaining reparation for the injuries they have received in affairs of this nature, yet if any such frauds were committed against themselves, provided no violence was done to their persons, they would only on their being refused satisfaction forbear trading with such a people. This is not because they consider their neighbors more than their own citizens; but since their neighbors trade everyone upon his own stock, fraud is a more sensible injury to them than it is to the Utopians, among whom the public in such a case only suffers. As they expect nothing in return for the merchandise they export but that in which they so much abound, and is of little use to them, the loss does not much affect them; they think therefore it would be too severe to revenge a loss attended with so little inconvenience, either to their lives or their subsistence, with the death of many persons; but if any of their people
is either killed or wounded wrongfully, whether it be done by public authority or only
by private men, as soon as they hear of it they send ambassadors, and demand that the
guilty persons may be delivered up to them; and if that is denied, they declare war; but
if it be complied with, the offenders are condemned either to death or slavery.

They would be both troubled and ashamed of a bloody victory over their enemies, and
think it would be as foolish a purchase as to buy the most valuable goods at too high a
rate. And in no victory do they glory so much as in that which is gained by dexterity and
good conduct, without bloodshed. In such cases they appoint public triumphs, and erect
trophies to the honor of those who have succeeded; for then do they reckon that a man
acts suitably to his nature when he conquers his enemy in such a way as that no other
creature but a man could be capable of, and that is by the strength of his understanding.
Bears, lions, boars, wolves, and dogs, and all other animals employ their bodily force
one against another, in which as many of them are superior to men, both in strength and
fierceness, so they are all subdued by his reason and understanding.

The only design of the Utopians in war is to obtain that by force, which if it had been
granted them in time would have prevented the war; or if that cannot be done, to take so
severe a revenge on those that have injured them that they may be terrified from doing
the like for the time to come. By these ends they measure all their designs, and manage
them so that it is visible that the appetite of fame or vainglory does not work so much
on them as a just care of their own security.

As soon as they declare war, they take care to have a great many schedules, that are
sealed with their common seal, affixed in the most conspicuous places of their en-
emies’ country. This is carried secretly, and done in many places all at once. In these
they promise great rewards to such as shall kill the prince, and lesser in proportion to
such as shall kill any other persons, who are those on whom, next to the prince himself,
they cast the chief balance of the war. And they double the sum to him that, instead of
killing the person so marked out, shall take him alive and put him in their hands. They
offer not only indemnity, but rewards, to such of the persons themselves that are so
marked, if they will act against their countrymen; by this means those that are named
in their schedules become not only distrustful of their fellow-citizens but are jealous of
one another, and are much distracted by fear and danger; for it has often fallen out that
many of them, and even the Prince himself, have been betrayed by those in whom they
have trusted most; for the rewards that the Utopians offer are so unmeasurably great,
that there is no sort of crime to which men cannot be drawn by them. They consider the
risk that those run who undertake such services, and offer a recompense proportioned
to the danger; not only a vast deal of gold, but great revenues in lands, that lie among
other nations that are their friends, where they may go and enjoy them very securely;
and they observe the promises they make of this kind most religiously.

They very much approve of this way of corrupting their enemies, though it appears to
others to be base and cruel; but they look on it as a wise course, to make an end of what
would be otherwise a long war, without so much as hazarding one battle to decide it.
They think it likewise an act of mercy and love to mankind to prevent the great slaugh-
ter of those that must otherwise be killed in the progress of the war, both on their own
side and on that of their enemies, by the death of a few that are most guilty; and that
in so doing they are kind even to their enemies, and pity them no less than their own
people, as knowing that the greater part of them do not engage in the, war of their own
accord, but are driven into it by the passions of their prince.

If this method does not succeed with them, then they sow seeds of contention among
their enemies, and animate the prince’s brother, or some of the nobility, to aspire to the
crown. If they cannot disunite them by domestic broils, then they engage their neigh-
bors against them, and make them set on foot some old pretensions, which are never
wanting to princes when they have occasion for them. These they plentifully supply
with money, though but very sparingly with any auxiliary troops: for they are so tender
of their own people, that they would not willingly exchange one of them, even with the
prince of their enemies’ country.

But as they keep their gold and silver only for such an occasion, so when that offers
itself they easily part with it, since it would be no inconvenience to them though they
should reserve nothing of it to themselves. For besides the wealth that they have among
them at home, they have a vast treasure abroad, many nations round about them being
deep in their debt: so that they hire soldiers from all places for carrying on their wars,
but chiefly from the Zapolets, who live 500 miles east of Utopia. They are a rude, wild,
and fierce nation, who delight in the woods and rocks, among which they were born
and bred up. They are hardened both against heat, cold, and labor, and know nothing
of the delicacies of life. They do not apply themselves to agriculture, nor do they care
either for their houses or their clothes. Cattle is all that they look after; and for the great-
est part they live either by hunting, or upon rapine; and are made, as it were, only for
war. They watch all opportunities of engaging in it, and very readily embrace such as
are offered them. Great numbers of them will frequently go out, and offer themselves
for a very low pay, to serve any that will employ them: they know none of the arts of
life, but those that lead to the taking it away; they serve those that hire them, both with
much courage and great fidelity; but will not engage to serve for any determined time,
and agree upon such terms, that the next day they may go over to the enemies of those
whom they serve, if they offer them a greater encouragement: and will perhaps return
to them the day after that, upon a higher advance of their pay.

There are few wars in which they make not a considerable part of the armies of both
sides: so it often falls out that they who are related, and were hired in the same coun-
try, and so have lived long and familiarly together, forgetting both their relations and
former friendship, kill one another upon no other consideration than that of being hired
to it for a little money, by princes of different interests; and such a regard have they for
money, that they are easily wrought on by the difference of one penny a day to change
sides. So entirely does their avarice influence them; and yet this money, which they
value so highly, is of little use to them; for what they purchase thus with their blood,
they quickly waste on luxury, which among them is but of a poor and miserable form.

This nation serves the Utopians against all people whatsoever, for they pay higher than
any other. The Utopians hold this for a maxim, that as they seek out the best sort of
men for their own use at home, so they make use of this worst sort of men for the con-
sumption of war, and therefore they hire them with the offers of vast rewards, to expose themselves to all sorts of hazards, out of which the greater part never returns to claim their promises. Yet they make them good most religiously to such as escape. This animates them to adventure again, whenever there is occasion for it; for the Utopians are not at all troubled how many of these happen to be killed, and reckon it a service done to mankind if they could be a means to deliver the world from such a lewd and vicious sort of people; that seem to have run together as to the drain of human nature. Next to these they are served in their wars with those upon whose account they undertake them, and with the auxiliary troops of their other friends, to whom they join a few of their own people, and send some men of eminent and approved virtue to command in chief. There are two sent with him, who during his command are but private men, but the first is to succeed him if he should happen to be either killed or taken; and in case of the like misfortune to him, the third comes in his place; and thus they provide against ill events, that such accidents as may befall their generals may not endanger their armies.

When they draw out troops of their own people, they take such out of every city as freely offer themselves, for none are forced to go against their wills, since they think that if any man is pressed that wants courage, he will not only act faintly, but by his cowardice dishearten others. But if an invasion is made on their country they make use of such men, if they have good bodies, though they are not brave; and either put them aboard their ships or place them on the walls of their towns, that being so posted they may find no opportunity of flying away; and thus either shame, the heat of action, or the impossibility of flying, bears down their cowardice; they often make a virtue of necessity and behave themselves well, because nothing else is left them. But as they force no man to go into any foreign war against his will, so they do not hinder those women who are willing to go along with their husbands; on the contrary, they encourage and praise them, and they stand often next their husbands in the front of the army. They also place together those who are related, parents and children, kindred, and those that are mutually allied, near one another; that those whom nature has inspired with the greatest zeal for assisting one another, may be the nearest and readiest to do it; and it is matter of great reproach if husband or wife survive one another, or if a child survives his parents, and therefore when they come to be engaged in action they continue to fight to the last man, if their enemies stand before them.

And as they use all prudent methods to avoid the endangering their own men, and if it is possible let all the action and danger fall upon the troops that they hire, so if it becomes necessary for themselves to engage, they then charge with as much courage as they avoided it before with prudence: nor is it a fierce charge at first, but it increases by degrees; and as they continue in action, they grow more obstinate and press harder upon the enemy, inasmuch that they will much sooner die than give ground; for the certainty that their children will be well looked after when they are dead, frees them from all that anxiety concerning them which often masters men of great courage; and thus they are animated by a noble and invincible resolution. Their skill in military affairs increases their courage; and the wise sentiments which, according to the laws of their country, are instilled into them in their education, give additional vigor to their minds: for as they do not undervalue life so as prodigally to throw it away, they are not so indecently fond
of it as to preserve it by base and unbecoming methods. In the greatest heat of action, the bravest of their youth, who have devoted themselves to that service, single out the general of their enemies, set on him either openly or by ambuscade, pursue him everywhere, and when spent and wearied out, are relieved by others, who never give over the pursuit; either attacking him with close weapons when they can get near him, or with those which wound at a distance, when others get in between them; so that unless he secures himself by flight, they seldom fail at last to kill or to take him prisoner.

When they have obtained a victory, they kill as few as possible, and are much more bent on taking many prisoners than on killing those that fly before them; nor do they ever let their men so loose in the pursuit of their enemies, as not to retain an entire body still in order; so that if they have been forced to engage the last of their battalions before they could gain the day, they will rather let their enemies all escape than pursue them, when their own army is in disorder; remembering well what has often fallen out to themselves, that when the main body of their army has been quite defeated and broken, when their enemies imagining the victory obtained, have let themselves loose into an irregular pursuit, a few of them that lay for a reserve, waiting a fit opportunity, have fallen on them in their chase, and when straggling in disorder and apprehensive of no danger, but counting the day their own, have turned the whole action, and wresting out of their hands a victory that seemed certain and undoubted, while the vanquished have suddenly become victorious.

It is hard to tell whether they are more dexterous in laying or avoiding ambushes. They sometimes seem to fly when it is far from their thoughts; and when they intend to give ground, they do it so that it is very hard to find out their design. If they see they are ill posted, or are like to be overpowered by numbers, they then either march off in the night with great silence, or by some stratagem delude their enemies: if they retire in the daytime, they do it in such order, that it is no less dangerous to fall upon them in a retreat than in a march. They fortify their camps with a deep and large trench, and throw up the earth that is dug out of it for a wall; nor do they employ only their slaves in this, but the whole army works at it, except those that are then upon the guard; so that when so many hands are at work, a great line and a strong fortification are finished in so short a time that it is scarce credible. Their armor is very strong for defence, and yet is not so heavy as to make them uneasy in their marches; they can even swim with it. All that are trained up to war practice swimming. Both horse and foot make great use of arrows, and are very expert. They have no swords, but fight with a pole-axe that is both sharp and heavy, by which they thrust or strike down an enemy. They are very good at finding out warlike machines, and disguise them so well, that the enemy does not perceive them till he feels the use of them; so that he cannot prepare such a defence as would render them useless; the chief consideration had in the making them is that they may be easily carried and managed.

If they agree to a truce, they observe it so religiously that no provocations will make them break it. They never lay their enemies’ country waste nor burn their corn, and even in their marches they take all possible care that neither horse nor foot may tread it down, for they do not know but that they may have use for it-themselves. They hurt no
man whom they find disarmed, unless he is a spy. When a town is surrendered to them, they take it into their protection; and when they carry a place by storm, they never plunder it, but put those only to the sword that opposed the rendering of it up, and make the rest of the garrison slaves, but for the other inhabitants, they do them no hurt; and if any of them had advised a surrender, they give them good rewards out of the estates of those that they condemn, and distribute the rest among their auxiliary troops, but they themselves take no share of the spoil.

When a war is ended, they do not oblige their friends to reimburse their expenses; but they obtain them of the conquered, either in money, which they keep for the next occasion, or in lands, out of which a constant revenue is to be paid them; by many increases, the revenue which they draw out from several countries on such occasions, is now risen to above 700,000 ducats a year. They send some of their own people to receive these revenues, who have orders to live magnificently, and like princes, by which means they consume much of it upon the place; and either bring over the rest to Utopia, or lend it to that nation in which it lies. This they most commonly do, unless some great occasion, which falls out but very seldom, should oblige them to call for it all. It is out of these lands that they assign rewards to such as they encourage to adventure on desperate attempts. If any prince that engages in war with them is making preparations for invading their country, they prevent him, and make his country the seat of the war; for they do not willingly suffer any war to break in upon their island; and if that should happen, they would only defend themselves by their own people, but would not call for auxiliary troops to their assistance.