

17th June 2026

Inhumanity

“Man’s inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn.”

Robert Burns, *Man Was Made to Mourn*

The play, *Sir Thomas More*, was possibly contributed to by Shakespeare. As Sheriff of London, More is suppressing a riot against the influx of refugee labour. “Let the strangers be removed”, the crowd cries. In response, More offers “The Strangers’ Case”. This is 400 years ago. And now?

Grant them removed, and grant that this your noise
Hath chid down all the majesty of England;
Imagine that you see the wretched strangers,
Their babies at their backs and their poor luggage,
Plodding to the ports and coasts for transportation,
And that you sit as kings in your desires,
Authority quite silent by your brawl,
And you in ruff of your opinions clothed;
What had you got? I’ll tell you: you had taught
How insolence and strong hand should prevail,
How order should be quelled; and by this pattern
Not one of you should live an aged man,
For other ruffians, as their fancies wrought,
With self-same hand, self-reasons, and self-right,
Would shark on you, and men like ravenous fishes
Would feed on one another.

Say now the king, as he is clement if th’offender mourn,
Should so much come too short of your great trespass
As but to banish you, whither would you go?
What country, by the nature of your error,
Should give you harbour? Go you to France or Flanders,
To any German province, to Spain or Portugal,
Nay, anywhere that not adheres to England,
Why, you must needs be strangers: would you be pleased
To find a nation of such barbarous temper,
That, breaking out in hideous violence,
Would not afford you an abode on earth,
Whet their detested knives against your throats,
Spurn you like dogs, and like as if that God
Owed not nor made not you, nor that the elements
Were not all appropriate to your comforts,
But chartered unto them, what would you think
To be thus used? This is the strangers’ case;
And this your mountainish inhumanity.

A prayer for today

There is no prayer of mine with which to conclude today.

Find Sir Ian McKellen offering this speech on YouTube, and that’ll be prayer enough.

An original reflection © Tom Gordon

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