

TMReader Manners Part 1

66. "What makes a Man black or white?"

[From *A Dialogue concerning Heresies* ; Works, pp. 125a-126a]

"If there were a man of India that never came out of his country nor never had seen any white man or woman in his life, and sith he seeth innumerable people black, he might ween that it were against the nature of man to be white. Now if he shall, because nature seemeth to shew him so, believe therefore that all the world lied if they would say the contrary, who were in the wrong—he that believeth his reason and nature, or they that against his persuasion of reason and nature shall tell him as it is of truth? Your friend answered that reason and nature told not the man of India that all men should be black, but he believed so against reason and against nature, for he had nothing to lead him to it, but because himself saw no white—which was no reason. And he might by nature perceive if he had learning that the heat maketh his country[men] black. And that of like reason the cold of other countries must make the people white."

"Well," quoth I, "and yet he cometh to his persuasion by a syllogism and reasoning almost as formal as is the argument by which ye prove the kind of man reasonable; whereof what other collection have you that brought you first to perceive it then that this man is reasonable; and this man, and this man, and this man, and so forth, all whom ye see? By example whereof by them whom ye know, presuming thereby no man to be otherwise, ye conclude that every man is reasonable. And he thinketh himself surer in his argument then he thinketh you in yours. For he saw never other but black people where ye see many men fools. As for that he heareth of others that there be white men elsewhere, this serveth nothing for your purpose if ye believe no witness against the thing that you[r] reason and experience sheweth you. And whereas ye say, if the man of India had learning he should perceive that it is not against nature but rather consonant with nature that some other men should in other countries be white, though all his countrymen be black, so peradventure those whose part ye do sustain, if they had some learning (that they lack), should well perceive that of reason they should give credence to credible persons, reporting them things that seem far against reason, because they be far above reason; whereof we may peradventure have more perceiving in our communication hereafter or ever we finish that we have in hand.

"But in the meanwhile to shew you further what necessity there is to believe other men in things not only unknown but also seeming impossible, the man of India that we speak of can by no learning know the course of the sun whereby he should perceive the cause of his blackness but if it be by astronomy, which cunning¹ who can learn that nothing will believe that seemeth to himself impossible? Or who would not ween it impossible but if experience had proved it that the whole earth hangeth in the air, and men walk foot against foot, and ships sail bottom against bottom—a thing so strange and seeming so far against nature and reason that Lactantius, a man right wise and well-learned in his work (which he writeth *de divinis institutionibus*)² reckoneth it for impossible and letteth³ not to laugh at the philosophers for affirming of that point, which is yet now found true by experience of them that have in less than two years sailed the world round

about."

NOTES

(1) **man of India** : I.e., an Ethiopian, or any black man, the normal usage in More's time. See Marc'hadour's "A Name for All Seasons, in *Essential Articles* [edd. Sylvester and Marc'hadour, pp. 539-62, especially pp. 548-49 "(CW 6, p. 618).

(2) In this essay, More alludes undoubtedly to Ferdinand Magellan's attempt to circumnavigate the world. Magellan, with five ships, left Seville on September 20, 1519 and sailed via the southern tip of South America to the Philippines, where he died. One ship only, aptly named the *Victoria*, returned to Spain, arriving September 8, 1522. The odyssey took just under three years (not two, as More says). The first printed account of the voyage, *De Moluccis Insulis*, was published in Rome in 1523, the second in Cologne the following year (J.H. Parry, p. 175f). By 1528, when More began to write the *Dialogue concerning Heresies*, the incredible feat of the first circumnavigation of the world was known generally throughout Europe.

67. "The Rich Man and the Beggars"

[From *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* ; Works, pp. 1200b-1201a]

[Anthony] "There shall never lack desperately disposed wretches enough besides upon whom, for example, justice may proceed. Let him think in his own heart every poor beggar his fellow."

[Vincent] "That will be very hard, Uncle, for an honorable man to do when he beholdeth himself richly apparelled and the beggar rigged in his rags."

[Anthony] "If here were, Cousin, two men that were beggars both, and afterwards a great rich man would take the one unto him and tell him that for a little time he would have him in his house, and thereupon arrayed him in silk and gave him a great bag by his side, filled even full of gold, but giving him this knot therewith that within a little while out he should [go] in his old rags again and bear never a penny with him. If this beggar meet his fellow now while his gay gown were on might he not for all his gay gear take him for his fellow, still? And were he not a very fool if, for a wealth of a few weeks, he would ween himself far his better?"

[Vincent] "Yes, Uncle, if the difference of their state were none other."

[Anthony] "Surely, Cousin, methinketh that in this world, between the richest and the most poor, the difference is scant so much. For let the highest look on the most base and consider how poor they came both into this world, and then consider further therewith how rich so ever he be now, he shall yet within a while (peradventure less than one week) walk out again as poor as that beggar shall; and then, by my troth, methinketh this rich man much more than mad if, for the wealth of a little while, happily less than one week, he reckon himself in earnest any better than the beggar's fellow. And less than thus can no man think that hath any natural wit and well useth it."

68. "The Rich and the Poor"

[From *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* ; Works, pp. 1207b-1208a]

[Anthony] "But, Cousin, men of substance must there be, for else shall you have more beggars, pardie, than there be, and no man left able to relieve another. For this I think in my mind a very sure conclusion, that if all the money that is in this country were tomorrow next brought together out of every man's hand and laid all upon one heap, and then divided out unto every man alike, it would be on the morrow after worse than it was the day before. For I suppose when it were all equally thus divided among all, the best should be left little better than almost a beggar is now. And yet he that was a beggar before all that, he shall be the richer for [all] that he should thereby receive shall not make him much above a beggar still. But many one of the rich men, if their riches stood but in moveable substance, shall be safe enough from riches happily for all their lives after.

"Men cannot, you wot well, live here in this world but if that some one man provide a means of living for some other many. Every man cannot have a ship of his own nor every man be a merchant without a stock (and these things, you wot well, needs must be had) nor every man cannot have a plough by himself. And who might live by the tailor's craft, if no man were able to put a gown to make? Who by the masonry, or who could live a carpenter if no man were able to build neither church nor house? Who should be the makers of any manner [of] cloth if there lacked men of substance to set sundry sorts a-work? Some men that hath not two ducats in his house were better forbear them both and leave himself not a farthing, but utterly lose all his own, then that some rich man by whom he is weekly set a-work should of his money lose the one half. For then were himself like to lack work. For surely the rich man's substance is the wellspring of the poor man's living. And therefore here would it fare by the poor man as it fared by the woman in one of Aesop's fables, which had an hen that laid her every day a golden egg, till on a day she thought she would have a great many eggs at once, and therefore she killed her hen and found but one or twain in her belly, so that for a few she lost many."

NOTES

Anthony's theory that if all the wealth were divided equally everyone would be poor contrasts with the more sympathetic theory which More perhaps ironically proposed in his *Utopia* : "Everyone gets a fair share, so there are never any poor men or beggars. Nobody owns anything, but everyone is rich...." (trans., P. Turner, p. 128).

Pierre Gringore, a contemporary of More, expresses such a medieval commonplace attitude towards workers and their necessary subservience to the rich: The worker should serve God, love his neighbour, avoid mortal sin, and work hard to please his master, even submit to his correction, because a rich man is ruled by reason (*The Castell of Laboure* , 1506, *passim*).

(3) The more familiar variant of the goose that laid the golden eggs appears as a fable of Avian ("The Goose and her Lord") in the 1484 William Caxton edition of Aesop.

The theory that "The rich man's substance is the wellspring of the poor man's living," suggests More anticipated late 20th century "trickle down" economic theory.

69. "Covetousness"

[From *Remember the Last Things* ; Works, cols. 93-94 (Sig. G6)]

The lecherous, after his foul pleasure past, may suffer to hear of continence, and abhorreth almost the other by himself. But the covetous man because he never ceaseth to dote upon his good and is ever alike greedy thereupon, who so giveth him advice to be liberal, seemeth to preach to a glutton for fasting, when his belly is empty and gapeth for good meat; or to a lusty lecher, when his leman is lately light in his lap. Scantly can death cure them when he cometh.

I remember me of a thief once cast at Newgate that cut a purse at the bar when he should be hanged on the morrow. And when he was asked why he did so, knowing that he should die so shortly, the desperate wretch said that it did his heart good to be lord of that purse one night yet. And in good faith methinketh as much as we wonder at him yet see we many that do much like of whom we nothing wonder at all. I let pass old priests that sue for vowsons of younger priests' benefices. I let pass old men that hove and gape to be executors to some that be younger than themselves: whose goods, if they would fall, they reckon would do them good to have in their keeping yet one year ere they die.

But look if ye see not some wretch that scant can creep for age, his head hanging in his bosom and his body crooked, walk pit-pat upon a pair of pattens with the staff in the one hand and the Pater Noster in the other hand, the one foot almost in the grave already, and yet never the more haste to part with anything nor to restore that he hath evil gotten, but as greedy to get a groat by the beguiling of his neighbor as if he had of certainty seven score years to live.

NOTES

(1) In this treatise, *Remember the Last Things* (ca. 1522), More provides brief essays and poignant vignettes of five of the seven Deadly Sins allegorized: Pride, Envy, Wrath, Covetousness, and Gluttony. He did not develop either Sloth or Lechery, although he gave highly dramatic interpretations of the latter vice elsewhere in his *Works*. The treatise was not finished, according to More's publisher. The handling of the seven deadly sins was common in medieval literature and is perhaps best known through William Langland's dramatic description of them in his poetic allegory *Piers Plowman*.

(2) The **Pater Noster** here, according to Rev. Germain Marc'hadour, alludes to the rosary. The more familiar reference to the pater noster is to the prayer beginning "Our Father who art in heaven...", recited at intervals with a "Hail Mary" as part of a prayer. Together with the Creed and The Ten Commandments, in More's day it was still taught to children in petty schools from primers, such as the popular and ubiquitous *Prymer of Salysbery Use/both in Englyshe and in Laten* (1536). More's daughter, Margaret, at the age of nineteen translated Erasmus's *Precatio*

dominica in septem portiones distributa (1523) and published it in 1525 with the title, *A Devout Treatise upon the Pater Noster, tourned in to Englishshe by a yong Gentywoman*.

70. "Gluttony"

[From *Remember the Last Things* ; Works, col. 99 (Sig. G6^v)]

The pleasure that the glutton hath in his viand can be no longer any very "pleasure than while it is joined with hunger, that is to say, with pain. For the very pleasure of eating is but the minishing of his pain in hungering. Now all that ever is eaten after in which gluttony beginneth, is in effect, pain altogether. And then the head acheth, and the stomach gnaweth, and the next meal is eaten without appetite, with gorge upon gorge, and grief upon grief, till the gorbelly "be compelled to cast up all again, and then fall to a "rare" supper.

If God would never punish gluttony yet bringeth it punishment enough with itself, [for] it disfigureth the face, discoloreth the skin and disfashioneth "the body. It maketh the skin tawny, the body fat and fobby, "the face drowsy, the nose dropping, the mouth spitting, the eyes bleared, the teeth rotten, the breath stinking, the hands trembling, the head hanging and the feet tottering; and finally no part left in right course and frame. And besides the daily dullness and grief that the unwieldy feeleth by the stuffing of his paunch so full, it bringeth in by leisure the dropsy, "the colic, the stone, the strangury, "the gout, the cramp, the palsy, the pox, "the pestilence, "and the apoplexy—diseases and sickness of such kind that either shortly destroy us or else, the worse is, keep us in such pain and torment that the longer we live the more wretched we be.

NOTES

(1) The *pox* (pocks) or syphilis was known by various terms, most of which blamed the countries whose names were used for its supposed origin: e.g., French pox or *Morbus gallicus*, Spanish Pocks or Spanish Sickness, etc. The term " *syphilis*" was coined by Girolamo Frascatoro in his medical poem about a Greek shepherd, *Syphilis, sive morbus gallicus* (1530), which was translated into English by the Austin friar and compiler, Thomas Paynell. A terrifying epidemic of this venereal disease throughout Europe during the sixteenth century promoted almost as much writing as the recurrent attacks of bubonic plague, with which it was associated in many men's minds, both being the result "of God's indignation." Peter Lowe in 1596 summarized contemporary theories as to the origin of syphilis. Some believe, he said, that it was "engendered of a fornicator with a leper in the West Indies, Anno. Dom. 1490" and that most probably the disease was brought by Christopher Columbus "from the Newfound Isles Occidentals" in December, 1493, to Italy, where Charles VIII of France was besieging Naples (*An easie certaine and perfect Method to cure Spanish Sickness* , 1596, sig. B1^v). Sailors returning from the West Indies infected Italian women who in turn cohabitated with French soldiers at the siege of Naples, it was generally believed. More himself refers elsewhere to syphilis as "the French pocks" (*Supplication of Souls* , Works, p. 292). Dr. William Clowes describes how the disease "corrupts the blood, and poisons the whole humours of the body, and breeds in the parts thereof pains and aches, virulent and malignant ulcers, nodes, or knobby hardness, foul scabs, festers,

and ringworms;...pustules or moist scabs...appear red, puffed and swelled...." (*A profitable and necessarie Booke of Observations*, 1596, in facsimile reprint, 1971, p. 154). More's contemporary, Ulrich von Hutten, who served as a soldier under the Spaniard-German Charles V and contracted the disease when young, wrote a poignant account of himself as victim in *De morbo gallico* (1519) which was translated in 1533 by the indefatigable Thomas Paynell, who was obviously much interested in the disease. Hutten took simple alum and a variety of garden herbs in the vain hope of curing himself: "And when I went about to wrap up my sores, and comfort my members, I used these herbs—absinth, camomilla, hysop, pulegio, arthemisia, sage—and other such, boiled in wine and water" (f. 10). But he finally came upon a drug made from guaiac wood (*lignum vitae* or holywood) a product brought back from the Brazilian jungle (and thus medically counterbalancing theoretically the disease which was thought to have been brought back from the new found lands). For the gift of which drug, Hutten exudes, "we ought to give thanks upward unto God." This drug was also recommended by others for gout, and the Augsburg banking family of the Fuggers shrewdly maintained a monopoly of its import into Europe. Jakob Fugger II ("The Rich", 1459-1525), considerably extended the Bavarian family's banking business by, among other shrewd investments, lending money to the Papacy and helping to finance both Charles V's election as Holy Roman Emperor (1519) and Albrecht (or Albert) of Mainz's high price to the extravagant Medici Pope Leo X for the pleasure of holding (against church law) more than one See. Albrecht of Brandenburg gobbled up the posts of Margrave of Brandenburg, a Cardinal rank, Elector post, as well as Archbishoprics of Mainz and of Magdeburg. Albrecht's concomitant sale of indulgences in Germany (ostensibly to help rebuild St. Peter's Basilica) was used to recoup in part the money borrowed from Jakob Fugger. This widespread sale of absolutions from sin prompted Augustinian Friar Martin Luther to spell out his disgust of them in his 95 Theses which, in turn, helped to jump-start the rise of the Protestant Reformation.

(2) From at least the beginning of the first century A.D. until quite modern times, of all natural disasters the most feared was the **plague** or pestilence which attacked mercilessly and without discrimination. The first great attack reached England shortly after 1348 on the bodies of flea-infested rats which earlier had leapt on merchant ships at Kaffa in the Crimea and had gradually found their way along sea and river trade routes to all parts of Europe. The plague recurred frequently and its effect was horrendous. After fleas had sucked on diseased rats and had then bitten humans, inflammation of the glands (or buboes) appeared, usually in the area of the groin or under the arm pits. In most cases the tongue began to swell, the head ached furiously and the victim experienced nausea, dizziness, blood-spitting, and even convulsion and delirium, usually dying within three days. During More's life-time the plague appeared in London twenty-one times, and it was especially virulent in 1528, the year More wrote the *Dialogue concerning Heresies*. The most readable early discussion of the plague is that by Dr. William Bullein, the *Dialogue against the Fever Pestilence* (1562), composed in the form of a prose conversation mingling merry tales of quack doctors, impudent servants, greedy speculators and the like with serious medical information with which to comfort victims in their physical tribulation—as More mingled merry tales with polemics to comfort those he felt were in spiritual tribulation.

71. "Envy"

[From *Remember the Last Things* ; Works, p. 85b]

Aesop therefore, as I think ye have heard, feigneth that one of the paynim gods came down into earth and finding together in a place two men, the one envious, the other covetous, shewed himself willing to give each of them a gift but there should but one of them ask for them both, but look whatsoever that one that should ask would ask for himself. The other should have the self-same thing doubled when this condition was offered. Then began there some courtesy between the envious and the covetous, whether of them should ask. For that would not the covetous be brought unto for nothing, because himself would have his fellow's request doubled. And when the envious man saw that he would provide that his fellow should have little good of the doubling of his petition, forthwith he required for his part that he might have one of his eyes put out.

By reason of which request, the envious man lost one eye and the covetous man lost both. Lo! Such is the wretched appetite of this cursed envy, ready to run into the fire so he may draw his neighbor with him.

¹ Knowledge

² From Book III, chapter 18, of *The Divine Institutes*

³ Refrains

⁴ Dressed

⁵ Condition, stipulation

⁶ *gay gear* : smart clothes

⁷ I.e., order (to be made)

⁸ Newgate was a prison from which prisoners were taken to Tyburn for execution

⁹ Advowsons, patronages

¹⁰ *Hove and gape* : wait around, and long for

¹¹ *Pair of pattens* : wooden shoes

¹² True

¹³ One with a large belly

¹⁴ Mars, disfigures

¹⁵ Flabby, phlegmatic

¹⁶ Excessive water in body tissues

¹⁷ Disease of the urinary organs

¹⁸ Syphilis

¹⁹ Plague