

TMReader Manners Part 2

72. "Sloth and Lechery"

[From *Remember the Last Things* ; Works, cols. 96-97]

And yet is gluttony to the soul not so pernicious and pestilent for the hurt it doth itself as for the harm and destruction that is done by such other vices as commonly come thereon. For no man doubteth but sloth and lechery be the very daughters of gluttony. And then needs must it be a deadly enemy to the soul that bringeth forth two such daughters, of which either one killeth the soul eternally. I mean not the substance of the soul, but the wealth and felicity of the soul, without which it were better never to have been born. What good can the great glutton do with his belly standing astrut ¹ like a tabor, ² and his noll totty ³ with drink, but balk up his brews ⁴ in the midst of his matters, or lie down and sleep like a swine. And who doubteth but that the body delicately fed maketh, as the rumor saith, an unchaste bed. Men are wont to write a short riddle on the wall that "D.C. hath no P." Read ⁵ ye this riddle. I cannot. But I have heard say that it toucheth the readiness that woman hath to fleshly filth, if she fall in drunkenness. And if ye can find one that can declare it, though it be no great authority, yet have I heard say that it is very true.

NOTES

(1) **Riddles** involving single letters were popular in the English renaissance. *The Booke of Merry Riddles* (1629) includes two simple ones. No. 16 reads: "M and I made great mone — When C upon C was left alone," i.e., "Mary and John moan Christ on the Cross." The most familiar, if obscene, riddle of this kind appears in *Twelfth Night*, II, v, 95-97: "By my life, this is my lady's hand. These be her very C's, her U's, and her T's: and thus makes she her great P's," which indecent riddle is in a direct line from More's "D.C. hath no P," i.e., "A Drunken Cunt hath no Porter." (For other earlier examples, see F. Ferrara).

73. "Lechery"

[From *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* ; Works, p. 1149b]

Now seeth God sometimes that worldly wealth is with one (that is yet good) coming upon him so fast that foreseeing how much weight of worldly wealth the man may bear and how much will over-charge him and enhance ⁶ his heart up so high that grace should fall from him low. God of his goodness I say preventeth his fall, and sendeth him tribulation betime, while he is yet good to gar him ken ⁷ His Maker, and by less liking the false flattering world, set a cross upon the ship of this heart, and bear a low sail thereon, that the boistrous blast of pride blow him not under the water:—

Some young lovely lady, lo, that is yet good enough, God seeth a storm come toward her that

would, if her health and her fat feeding should a little longer last, strike her into some lecherous love, and, instead of her old acquainted knight, lay her abed with a new acquainted knave. But God, loving her more tenderly than to suffer her fall into such shameful beastly sin, sendeth her in season a goodly fair fervent fever that maketh her bones to rattle and wasteth away her wanton flesh and beautifieth her fair fell with the color of a kite's claw and maketh her look so "lovely" that her lover have little lust to look upon her and make her also so lusty that if her lover lay in her lap she should so sore long to break unto him the very bottom of her stomach that she should not be able to refrain it from him, but suddenly lay it all in his neck.

NOTES

(1) **break...stomach** : a double entendre: "vomit" and "divulge her secrets." Cf. John Heywood, *A Dialogue of Proverbs* [1546], ed. R. Habenicht, II. 562-565: "And when the mealy mouth hath won the bottom — Of your stomach, then will the pickthank [i.e., tell-tale] it tell — To your most enemies, you to buy and sell [i.e., deceive]."

74. "Deception"

[From *A Dialogue concerning Heresies*, pp. 152b-153a; *The Answer to the First Part of the Poisoned Book*; Works, p. 1094]

"And yet, as I say, reason can believe the thing well enough and be not angry therewith nor strive against it. And yet all the rules that ever she learned tell her still that it may not be." "Ye," quoth he, "but a man's own eyes tell him that it may be. And that must needs content him." "May a man then better trust his eyes," quoth I, "than his wit?" "Yea, marry," quoth he, "what may he better trust than his eyes?" "His eyes may," quoth I, "be deceived and ween they see that they see not, if reason give over his hold, except ye think the juggler blow his balls through the goblet's bottom or cut your girdle afore your face in twenty pieces and make it whole again, and put a knife into his eye and see never the worse. And turn a plum into a dog's turd in a boy's mouth!"

Now happened it madly that even with this word came one of my folks and asked whether they should make ready for dinner.

"Abide," quoth I, "let us have better meat first."

And therewith your friend and I began to laugh.

"Well, quoth I, "make none haste yet for a little while."

And so went he his way half out of countenance, weening that he had done or said somewhat like a fool, as he was one that was not very wise in deed, and wont so to do.

* * * *

Here is Master Masker fall[en] to juggling, lo, and as a juggler layeth forth his trinklets upon

the table, and biddeth men look on this and look on that, and blow in his hand, and then with certain strange words to make men muse, ¹⁴ whirleth his juggling-stick about his fingers to make men look upon that, while he playeth a false cast ¹⁵ and conveyeth ¹⁶ with the other hand something slyly into his purse or sleeve or somewhere out of sight. So fareth Master Masker here, that maketh Christ's holy words serve him for his juggling boxes, and layeth them forth upon the board afore us, and biddeth us, lo, look on this text, and then look, lo, upon this. And when he hath showed forth thus two or three texts, and bid us look upon them, he telleth us not wherefore, nor what we shall find in them.

75. "Scrupulous Conscience"

[From *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* ; Works, p. 1182b]

This pusillanimity ¹⁷ bringeth forth by the night's fear a very timorous daughter, a silly wretched girl, and ever puling, ¹⁸ that is called Scrupulosity, or a Scrupulous Conscience. This girl is a meetly good pucelle ¹⁹ in an house, never idle but ever occupied and busy. But albeit she hath a very gentle mistress that loveth her well and is well content with that she doth; or if it be not all well (as all cannot always be well), content to pardon her, as she doth other of her fellows, and so letteth her know that she will. Yet can this peevish girl never cease whining and puling for fear lest her mistress be always angry with her, and that she shall shrewdly be shent. ²⁰ Were her mistress (ween you) like to be content with this condition? Nay, surely.

I knew such one myself, whose mistress was a very wise woman and (which thing is in women very rare) very mild also, and meek, and liked very well such service as she did her in the house. But this continual discomfortable fashion of hers she so much disliked that she would sometimes say, "Aye, what aileth this girl? That elvish urchin weeneth I were a devil, I trow. Surely if she did me ten times better service than she doth, yet with this fantastical fear of hers I would be loath to have her in mine house."

76. "Pride"

[From *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* ; Works, pp. 1198b-1199a]

[Vincent] "But now I fear that, except you make here a pause till you have dined, you shall keep yourself from your dinner overlong."

[Anthony] "Nay, nay, Cousin, for both broke I my fast even as you came in and also you shall find this night and this day like a winter day and a winter night. For as the winter hath short days and long nights so shall you find that I made you not this fearful night so long but I shall make you this light courageous day as short.

"And so shall the matter require well of itself indeed. For in these words of the prophet, "*Scuto circumdabit te veritas eius, a sagitta volante in die* ": The truth of God shall compass thee round about with a pavis ²¹ from the arrow flying in the day. I understand the arrow of pride with which

the devil tempteth a man, not in the night, that is, to wit, in tribulation and adversity (for that time is too discomfortable and too fearful for pride) but in the day, that is, to wit, in prosperity. For that time is full of lightsome lust ²³ and courage. But surely this worldly prosperity (wherein a man so rejoiceth and whereof the devil maketh him so proud) is but even a very short winter day. For we begin, many full poor and cold, and up we fly like an arrow that were shot up into the air. And yet when we be suddenly shot up into the highest, ere we be well warm there, down we come unto the cold ground again and then even there stick we still. And yet for the short while that we be upward and aloft, Lord how lusty ²³ and how proud we be buzzing above busily like as a bumble bee flieth about in summer, never aware that she shall die in winter. And so fare many of us, God help us. For in that short winter day of worldly wealth and prosperity this flying arrow of the devil, this high spirit of pride, shot out of the devil's bow and piercing through our heart, beareth us up in our affection aloft into the clouds where we ween we sit on the rainbow and overlook the world under us, accounting in the regard of our own glory such other poor souls as were peradventure wont to be our fellows for silly poor pismires ²³ and ants.

"But this arrow of pride fly it never so high in the clouds, and be the man that it carrieth up so high never so joyful thereof, yet let him remember that be this arrow never so light it hath yet an heavy iron head and, therefore, fly it never so high, down it must needs come and on the ground must it light and falleth sometime not in a very clean place; but the pride turneth into rebuke and shame and there is then all the glory gone."

NOTES

Scuto circumdabit...volante in die *Vulgate, Psalms 90:4-7; The New English Bible, Psalms : 91:4-7.* Compare Miles Coverdale's translation of these lines in a treatise on the plague: "Thou needst not to fear for the horribleness of the night — For the arrows that fly in the day time — For the pestilence that cometh privily in the dark — For the sickness that destroyeth in the noonday" (*How and Whither a Christian man ought to fly the horrible Plague of the Pestilence*, 1537, trans. from Andreas Osiander's original German.

77. "The Physician who Cures all but Himself"

[From *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* ; Works, pp. 1185b-1186a]

Let them, I say therefore, that are in the troublous fear of their own scrupulous conscience, submit the rule of their own conscience to the counsel of some other good man which, after the variety and the nature of the scruples, may temper his advice.

Yes, although a man be very well learned himself, yet let him in this case learn the custom used among physicians. For be one of them never so cunning, ²³ yet in his own disease and sickness he never useth to trust all to himself but sendeth for such of his fellows as he knoweth meet, and putteth himself in their hands for many considerations whereof they assign the causes. And one of the causes is fear, whereof upon some tokens he may conceive in his own passion a great deal more than [he] needeth (and [more] than were good for his health) that for the time, [better] he knew no such thing at all.

I knew once in this town one of the most cunning men in the faculty and the best expert and therewith the most famous, too, and he that the greatest cures did upon other men. And yet when he was himself once very sore sick I heard his fellows that then looked unto him—of all which every one would in their own disease have used his help before any other man—wish yet that for the time of his own sickness, being so sore as it was, he had known no physic at all. He took so great heed unto every suspicious token and feared so far the worst that his fear did him sometimes much more harm than the sickness gave him cause.

NOTES

(1) "**tokens**" : symptons, signs. See the *Prognosticacion drawn out of Ipocras* [Hippocrates], ca. 1530: Prognostication of the Cotidian Fever: If we may perceive in the beginning wilful vomit and in the end of the fit, sweat, it is a very good token" (sig. A⁴).

(2) "**one of the most cunning men in the faculty...**" : More most probably here alludes to his friend, Thomas Linacre, the notable scholar, humanist and physician whose patients included Prince Arthur, Cardinal Wolsey, Erasmus, and Henry VIII. From King Henry he early obtained letters patent for the establishment of a corpus of acknowledged medical men, a medical body which became the Royal College of Physicians of London in 1518. He was the Faculty's first president. Earlier, in 1505, Linacre lectured in London on Aristotle's *Meteorologica* and found Thomas More among his listeners. He also taught Greek at Oxford when More was a student there and he may have taught More. More read Greek philosophy under his direction, and More refers to Linacre in a letter to John Colet as "the master of my studies." Before his death Linacre transferred to four trustees estates producing about thirty pounds a year to the two Universities for the foundation of Readerships in medicine. One of the trustees commissioned was Sir Thomas More. Ironically one of the early Readerships was given to More's polemical enemy, Dr. Robert Barnes [J.F. Payne, pp. 30-32.]

¹ Puffed out

² Drum

³ *Noll totty* : i.e., head tipsy

⁴ *Balk...brews* : i.e., try to quit drinking

⁵ Make out, guess

⁶ Raise

⁷ *Gar him ken* : cause him to acknowledge

⁸ *Fat feeding* : over-plentiful fare

⁹ Skin

¹⁰ Hawk's

¹¹ Pleasure, desire

¹² *Out of countenance* : i.e., disconcerted, abashed

¹³ Paraphenalia

¹⁴ Marvel

¹⁵ Trick

¹⁶ Make away with

¹⁷ Timidity

¹⁸ Whining

¹⁹ Maid

²⁰ *Shrewdly be shent*: be severely punished

²¹ Large shield

²² *Lightsome lust* : light-hearted vigor

²³ Active, vigorous

²⁴ Ants (piss-ants)

²⁵ Skillful, learned