

# ERASMUS DESIDERIUS

IN PRAISE OF  
FOLLY

Desiderius Erasmus  
**In Praise of Folly**

«Public Domain»

**Erasmus D.**

In Praise of Folly / D. Erasmus — «Public Domain»,

## Содержание

THE LIFE OF ERASMUS	5
ERASMUS's	8
On the Argument and Design of the following Oration	10
ERASMUS's Praise of FOLLY	12
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	21

# Desiderius Erasmus In Praise of Folly Illustrated with Many Curious Cuts

## THE LIFE OF ERASMUS

ERASMUS, so deservedly famous for his admirable writings, the vast extent of his learning, his great candour and moderation, and for being one of the chief restorers of the Latin tongue on this side the Alps, was born at Rotterdam, on the 28th of October, in the year 1467. The anonymous author of his life commonly printed with his Colloquies (of the London edition) is pleased to tell us that *de anno quo natus est apud Batavos, non constat*. And if he himself wrote the life which we find before the Elzevir edition, said to be *Erasmio autore*, he does not particularly mention the year in which he was born, but places it *circa annum 67 supra millesimum quadringentesimum*. Another Latin life, which is prefixed to the above-mentioned London edition, fixes it in the year 1465; as does his epitaph at Basil. But as the inscription on his statue at Rotterdam, the place of his nativity, may reasonably be supposed the most authentic, we have followed that. His mother was the daughter of a physician at Sevenbergen in Holland, with whom his father contracted an acquaintance, and had correspondence with her on promise of marriage, and was actually contracted to her. His father's name was Gerard; he was the youngest of ten brothers, without one sister coming between; for which reason his parents (according to the superstition of the times) designed to consecrate him to the church. His brothers liked the notion, because, as the church then governed all, they hoped, if he rose in his profession, to have a sure friend to advance their interest; but no importunities could prevail on Gerard to turn ecclesiastic. Finding himself continually pressed upon so disagreeable a subject, and not able longer to bear it, he was forced to fly from his native country, leaving a letter for his friends, in which he acquainted them with the reason of his departure, and that he should never trouble them any more. Thus he left her who was to be his wife big with child, and made the best of his way to Rome. Being an admirable master of the pen, he made a very genteel livelihood by transcribing most authors of note (for printing was not in use). He for some time lived at large, but afterwards applied close to study, made great progress in the Greek and Latin languages, and in the civil law; for Rome at that time was full of learned men. When his friends knew he was at Rome, they sent him word that the young gentlewoman whom he had courted for a wife was dead; upon which, in a melancholy fit, he took orders, and turned his thoughts wholly to the study of divinity. He returned to his own country, and found to his grief that he had been imposed upon; but it was too late to think of marriage, so he dropped all farther pretensions to his mistress; nor would she after this unlucky adventure be induced to marry.

The son took the name of Gerard after his father, which in German signifies *amiable*, and (after the fashion of the learned men of that age, who affected to give their names a Greek or Latin turn) his was turned into Erasmus, which in Greek has the same signification. He was chorister of the cathedral church of Utrecht till he was nine years old; after which he was sent to Deventer to be instructed by the famous Alexander Hegius, a Westphalian. Under so able a master he proved an extraordinary proficient; and it is remarkable that he had such a strength of memory as to be able to say all Terence and Horace by heart. He was now arrived to the thirteenth year of his age, and had been continually under the watchful eye of his mother, who died of the plague then raging at Deventer. The contagion daily increasing, and having swept away the family where he boarded, he was obliged to return home. His father Gerard was so concerned at her death that he grew melancholy, and died soon after: neither of his parents being much above forty when they died.

Erasmus had three guardians assigned him, the chief of whom was Peter Winkel, schoolmaster of Goude; and the fortune left him was amply sufficient for his support, if his executors had faithfully discharged their trust. Although he was fit for the university, his guardians were averse to sending him there, as they designed him for a monastic life, and therefore removed him to Bois-le-duc, where, he says, he lost near three years, living in a Franciscan convent. The professor of humanity in this convent, admiring his rising genius, daily importuned him to take the habit, and be of their order. Erasmus had no great inclination for the cloister; not that he had the least dislike to the severities of a pious life, but he could not reconcile himself to the monastic profession; he therefore urged his rawness of age, and desired farther to consider better of the matter. The plague spreading in those parts, and he having struggled a long time with a quartan ague, obliged him to return home.

His guardians employed those about him to use all manner of arguments to prevail on him to enter the order of monk; sometimes threatening, and at other times making use of flattery and fair speeches. When Winkel, his guardian, found him not to be moved from his resolution, he told him that he threw up his guardianship from that moment. Young Erasmus replied, that he took him at his word, since he was old enough now to look out for himself. When Winkel found that threats did not avail, he employed his brother, who was the other guardian, to see what he could effect by fair means. Thus he was surrounded by them and their agents on all sides. By mere accident, Erasmus went to visit a religious house belonging to the same order, in Emaus or Steyn, near Goude, where he met with one Cornelius, who had been his companion at Deventer; and though he had not himself taken the habit, he was perpetually preaching up the advantages of a religious life, as the convenience of noble libraries, the helps of learned conversation, retirement from the noise and folly of the world, and the like. Thus at last he was induced to pitch upon this convent. Upon his admission they fed him with great promises, to engage him to take the holy cloth; and though he found almost everything fall short of his expectation, yet his necessities, and the usage he was threatened with if he abandoned their order, prevailed with him, after his year of probation, to profess himself a member of their fraternity. Not long after this, he had the honour to be known to Henry a Bergis, bishop of Cambray, who having some hopes of obtaining a cardinal's hat, wanted one perfectly master of Latin to solicit this affair for him; for this purpose Erasmus was taken into the bishop's family, where he wore the habit of his order. The bishop not succeeding in his expectation at Rome, proved fickle and wavering in his affection; therefore Erasmus prevailed with him to send him to Paris, to prosecute his studies in that famous university, with the promise of an annual allowance, which was never paid him. He was admitted into Montague College, but indisposition obliged him to return to the bishop, by whom he was honourably entertained. Finding his health restored, he made a journey to Holland, intending to settle there, but was persuaded to go a second time to Paris; where, having no patron to support him, himself says, he rather made a shift to live, than could be said to study. He next visited England, where he was received with great respect; and as appears by several of his letters, he honoured it next to the place of his nativity. In a letter to Andrelinus, inviting him to England, he speaks highly of the beauty of the English ladies, and thus describes their innocent freedom: "When you come into a gentleman's house you are allowed the favour to salute them, and the same when you take leave." He was particularly acquainted with Sir Thomas More, Colet, dean of Saint Paul's, Grocinius, Linacer, Latimer, and many others of the most eminent of that time; and passed some years at Gam-bridge. In his way for France he had the misfortune to be stripped of everything; but he did not revenge this injury by any unjust reflection on the country. Not meeting with the preferment he expected, he made a voyage to Italy, at that time little inferior to the Augustan age for learning. He took his doctor of divinity degree in the university of Turin; stayed about a year in Bologna; afterward went to Venice, and there published his book of Adages from the press of the famous Aldus. He removed to Padua, and last to Rome, where his fame had arrived long before him. Here he gained the friendship of all the considerable persons of the city, nor could have failed to have made his fortune, had he not been prevailed upon by the great promises of his friends in England to return thither on Henry VIIIth

coming to the crown. He was taken into favour by Warham, archbishop of Canterbury, who gave him the living of Aldington, in Kent; but whether Erasmus was wanting in making his court to Wolsey, or whether the cardinal viewed him with a jealous eye, because he was a favourite of Warham, between whom and Wolsey there was perpetual clashing, we know not; however, being disappointed, Erasmus went to Flanders, and by the interest of Chancellor Sylvagius, was made counsellor to Charles of Austria, afterward Charles V., emperor of Germany. He resided several years at Basil; but on the mass being abolished in that city by the Reformation, he retired to Friberg in Alsace, where he lived seven years. Having been for a long time afflicted with the gout, he left Friberg, and returned to Basil. Here the gout soon left him, but he was seized by a dysentery, and after labouring a whole month under that disorder, died on the 22nd of July, 1536, in the house of Jerome Frobenius, son of John, the famous printer. He was honourably interred, and the city of Basil still pays the highest respect to the memory of so great a man.

Erasmus was the most facetious man, and the greatest critic of his age. He carried on a reformation in learning at the same time he advanced that of religion; and promoted a purity of style as well as simplicity of worship. This drew on him the hatred of the ecclesiastics, who were no less bigotted to their barbarisms in language and philosophy, than they were to their superstitious and gaudy ceremonies in religion; they murdered him in their dull treatises, libelled him in their wretched sermons, and in their last and most effectual efforts of malice, they joined some of their own execrable stuff to his compositions: of which he himself complains in a letter addressed to the divines of Louvain. He exposed with great freedom the vices and corruptions of his own church, yet never would be persuaded to leave her communion. The papal policy would never have suffered Erasmus to have taken so unbridled a range in the reproof and censure of her extravagancies, but under such circumstances, when the public attack of Luther imposed on her a prudential necessity of not disobliging her friends, that she might with more united strength oppose the common enemy; and patiently bore what at any other time she would have resented. Perhaps no man has obliged the public with a greater number of useful volumes than our author; though several have been attributed to him which he never wrote. His book of Colloquies has passed through more editions than any of his others: Moreri tells us a bookseller in Paris sold twenty thousand at one impression.

## ERASMUS's EPISTLE TO Sir THOMAS MORE

IN my late travels from Italy into England, that I might not trifle away my time in the rehearsal of old wives' fables, I thought it more pertinent to employ my thoughts in reflecting upon some past studies, or calling to remembrance several of those highly learned, as well as smartly ingenious, friends I had here left behind, among whom you (dear Sir) were represented as the chief; whose memory, while absent at this distance, I respect with no less a complacency than I was wont while present to enjoy your more intimate conversation, which last afforded me the greatest satisfaction I could possibly hope for. Having therefore resolved to be a doing, and deeming that time improper for any serious concerns, I thought good to divert myself with drawing up a panegyrick upon Folly. How! what maggot (say you) put this in your head? Why, the first hint, Sir, was your own surname of More, which comes as near the literal sound of the word,<sup>1</sup> as you yourself are distant from the signification of it, and that in all men's judgments is vastly wide.

In the next place, I supposed that this kind of sporting wit would be by you more especially accepted of, by you, Sir, that are wont with this sort of jocose raillery (such as, if I mistake not, is neither dull nor impertinent) to be mightily pleased, and in your ordinary converse to approve yourself a Democritus junior: for truly, as you do from a singular vein of wit very much dissent from the common herd of mankind; so, by an incredible affability and pliability of temper, you have the art of suiting your humour with all sorts of companies. I hope therefore you will not only readily accept of this rude essay as a token from your friend, but take it under your more immediate protection, as being dedicated to you, and by that tide adopted for yours, rather than to be fathered as my own. And it is a chance if there be wanting some quarrelsome persons that will shew their teeth, and pretend these fooleries are either too buffoon-like for a grave divine, or too satirical for a meek christian, and so will exclaim against me as if I were vamping up some old farce, or acted anew the Lucian again with a peevish snarling at all things. But those who are offended at the lightness and pedantry of this subject, I would have them consider that I do not set myself for the first example of this kind, but that the same has been oft done by many considerable authors. For thus several ages since, Homer wrote of no more weighty a subject than of a war between the frogs and mice, Virgil of a gnat and a pudding-cake, and Ovid of a nut Polycrates commended the cruelty of Busiris; and Isocrates, that corrects him for this, did as much for the injustice of Glaucus. Favorinus extolled Thersites, and wrote in praise of a quartan ague. Synesius pleaded in behalf of baldness; and Lucian defended a sipping fly. Seneca drollingly related the deifying of Claudius; Plutarch the dialogue betwixt Gryllus and Ulysses; Lucian and Apuleius the story of an ass; and somebody else records the last will of a hog, of which St. Hierom makes mention. So that if they please, let themselves think the worst of me, and fancy to themselves that I was all this while a playing at push-pin, or riding astride on a hobby-horse. For how unjust is it, if when we allow different recreations to each particular course of life, we afford no diversion to studies; especially when trifles may be a whet to more serious thoughts, and comical matters may be so treated of, as that a reader of ordinary sense may possibly thence reap more advantage than from some more big and stately argument: as while one in a long-winded oration descants in commendation of rhetoric or philosophy, another in a fulsome harangue sets forth the praise of his nation, a third makes a zealous invitation to a holy war with the Turks, another confidently sets up for a fortune-

---

<sup>1</sup> Mw pia.



teller, and a fifth states questions upon mere impertinences. But as nothing is more childish than to handle a serious subject in a loose, wanton style, so is there nothing more pleasant than so to treat of trifles, as to make them seem nothing less than what their name imports. As to what relates to myself, I must be forced to submit to the judgment of others; yet, except I am too partial to be judge in my own case, I am apt to believe I have praised Folly in such a manner as not to have deserved the name of fool for my pains. To reply now to the objection of satyricallness, wits have been always allowed this privilege, that they might be smart upon any transactions of life, if so be their liberty did not extend to railing; which makes me wonder at the tender-eared humour of this age, which will admit of no address without the prefatory repetition of all formal titles; nay, you may find some so preposterously devout, that they will sooner wink at the greatest affront against our Saviour, than be content that a prince, or a pope, should be nettled with the least joke or gird, especially in what relates to their ordinary customs. But he who so blames men's irregularities as to lash at no one particular person by name, does he (I say) seem to carp so properly as to teach and instruct? And if so, how am I concerned to make any farther excuse? Beside, he who in his strictures points indifferently at all, he seems not angry at one man, but at all vices.

Therefore, if any singly complain they are particularly reflected upon, they do but betray their own guilt, at least their cowardice. Saint Hierom dealt in the same argument at a much freer and sharper rate; nay, and he did not sometimes refrain from naming the persons: whereas I have not only stifled the mentioning any one person, but have so tempered my style, as the ingenious reader will easily perceive I aimed at diversion rather than satire. Neither did I so far imitate Juvenal, as to rake into the sink of vices to procure a laughter, rather than create a hearty abhorrence. If there be any one that after all remains yet unsatisfied, let him at least consider that there may be good use made of being reprehended by Folly, which since we have feigned as speaking, we must keep up that character which is suitable to the person introduced.

But why do I trouble you, Sir, with this needless apology, you that are so peculiar a patron; as, though the cause itself be none of the best, you can at least give it the best protection. Farewell.

## On the Argument and Design of the following Oration

WHATEVER the modern satyrs o' th' stage,  
To jerk the failures of a sliding age,  
Have lavishly expos'd to public view,  
For a discharge to all from envy due,  
Here in as lively colours naked lie,  
With equal wit, and more of modesty,  
Those poets, with their free disclosing arts,  
Strip vice so near to its uncomely parts,  
Their libels prove but lessons, and they teach  
Those very crimes which they intend t' impeach:  
While here so wholesome all, tho' sharp t' th' taste,  
So briskly free, yet so resolv'dly chaste;  
The virgin naked as her god of bows,  
May read or hear when blood at highest flows;  
Nor more expense of blushes thence arise,  
Than while the lect'ring matron does advise  
To guard her virtue, and her honour prize.

Satire and panegyric, distant be,  
Yet jointly here they both in one agree.  
The whole's a sacrifice of salt and fire;  
So does the humour of the age require,  
To chafe the touch, and so foment desire.  
As doctrine-dangling preachers lull asleep  
Their unattentive pent-up fold of sheep;  
The opiated milk glues up the brain,  
And th' babes of grace are in their cradles lain;

While mounted Andrews, bawdy, bold, and loud,  
Like cocks, alarm all the drowsy crowd,  
Whose glittering ears are prick'd as bolt-upright,  
As sailing hairs are hoisted in a fright.  
So does it fare with croaking spawns o' th' press,  
The mould o' th' subject alters the success;  
What's serious, like sleep, grants writs of ease,  
Satire and ridicule can only please;  
As if no other animals could gape,  
But the biting badger, or the snick'ring ape.

Folly by irony's commended here,  
Sooth'd, that her weakness may the more appear.  
Thus fools, who trick'd, in red and yellow shine,  
Are made believe that they are wondrous fine,  
When all's a plot t' expose them by design.  
The largesses of Folly here are strown.

Like pebbles, not to pick, but trample on.  
Thus Spartans laid their soaking slaves before  
The boys, to juggle, kick, and tumble o'er:  
Not that the dry-lipp'd youngsters might combine  
To taste and know the mystery of wine,  
But wonder thus at men transform'd to swine;  
And th' power of such enchantment to escape,  
Timely renounce the devil of the grape.  
So here,  
Though Folly speaker be, and argument,  
Wit guides the tongue, wisdom's the lecture meant.  
So here, Though Folly speaker be, and argument,  
Wit guides the tongue, wisdom's the lecture meant.

## ERASMUS's Praise of FOLLY

### **An oration, of feigned matter, spoken by Folly in her own person**

HOW slightly soever I am esteemed in the common vogue of the world, (for I well know how disingenuously Folly is decried, even by those who are themselves the greatest fools,) yet it is from my influence alone that the whole universe receives her ferment of mirth and jollity: of which this may be urged as a convincing argument, in that as soon as I appeared to speak before this numerous assembly all their countenances were gilded over with a lively sparkling pleasantness: you soon welcomed me with so encouraging a look, you spurred me on with so cheerful a hum, that truly in all appearance, you seem now flushed with a good dose of reviving nectar, when as just before you sate drowsy and melancholy, as if you were lately come out of some hermit's cell. But as it is usual, that as soon as the sun peeps from her eastern bed, and draws back the curtains of the darksome night; or as when, after a hard winter, the restorative spring breathes a more enlivening air, nature forthwith changes her apparel, and all things seem to renew their age; so at the first sight of me you all unmask, and appear in more lively colours. That therefore which expert orators can scarce effect by all their little artifice of eloquence, to wit, a raising the attentions of their auditors to a composedness of thought, this a bare look from me has commanded. The reason why I appear in this odd kind of garb, you shall soon be informed of, if for so short a while you will have but the patience to lend me an ear; yet not such a one as you are wont to hearken with to your reverend preachers, but as you listen withal to mountebanks, buffoons, and merry-andrews; in short, such as formerly were fastened to Midas, as a punishment for his affront to the god Pan. For I am now in a humour to act awhile the sophist, yet not of that sort who undertake the drudgery of tyrannizing over school boys, and teach a more than womanish knack of brawling; but in imitation of those ancient ones, who to avoid the scandalous epithet of wise, preferred this title of sophists; the task of these was to celebrate the worth of gods and heroes. Prepare therefore to be entertained with a panegyrick, yet not upon Hercules, Solon, or any other grandee, but on myself, that is, upon Folly.

And here I value not their censure that pretend it is foppish and affected for any person to praise himself: yet let it be as silly as they please, if they will but allow it needful: and indeed what is more befitting than that Folly should be the trumpet of her own praise, and dance after her own pipe? for who can set me forth better than myself? or who can pretend to be so well acquainted with my condition?

And yet farther, I may safely urge, that all this is no more than the same with what is done by several seemingly great and wise men, who with a new-fashioned modesty employ some paltry orator or scribbling poet, whom they bribe to flatter them with some high-flown character, that shall consist of mere lies and shams; and yet the persons thus extolled shall bristle up, and, peacock-like, bespread their plumes, while the impudent parasite magnifies the poor wretch to the skies, and proposes him as a complete pattern of all virtues, from each of which he is yet as far distant as heaven itself from hell: what is all this in the mean while, but the tricking up a daw in stolen feathers; a labouring to change the black-a-moor's hue, and the drawing on a pigmy's frock over the shoulders of a giant.

Lastly, I verify the old observation, that allows him a right of praising himself, who has nobody else to do it for him: for really, I cannot but admire at that ingratitude, shall I term it, or blockishness of mankind, who when they all willingly pay to me their utmost devoir, and freely acknowledge their respective obligations; that notwithstanding this, there should have been none so grateful or complaisant as to have bestowed on me a commendatory oration, especially when there have not been

wanting such as at a great expense of sweat, and loss of sleep, have in elaborate speeches, given high encomiums to tyrants, agues, flies, baldness, and such like trumperies.

I shall entertain you with a hasty and unpremeditated, but so much the more natural discourse. My venting it *ex tempore*, I would not have you think proceeds from any principles of vain glory by which ordinary orators square their attempts, who (as it is easy to observe) when they are delivered of a speech that has been thirty years a conceiving, nay, perhaps at last, none of their own, yet they will swear they wrote it in a great hurry, and upon very short warning: whereas the reason of my not being provided beforehand is only because it was always my humour constantly to speak that which lies uppermost. Next, let no one be so fond as to imagine, that I should so far stint my invention to the method of other pleaders, as first to define, and then divide my subject, i.e., myself. For it is equally hazardous to attempt the crowding her within the narrow limits of a definition, whose nature is of so diffusive an extent, or to mangle and disjoin that, to the adoration whereof all nations unitedly concur. Beside, to what purpose is it to lay down a definition for a faint resemblance, and mere shadow of me, while appearing here personally, you may view me at a more certain light? And if your eye-sight fail not, you may at first blush discern me to be her whom the Greeks term *Mwpia*, the Latins *stultitia*.

But why need I have been so impertinent as to have told you this, as if my very looks did not sufficiently betray what I am; or supposing any be so credulous as to take me for some sage matron or goddess of wisdom, as if a single glance from me would not immediately correct their mistake, while my visage, the exact reflex of my soul, would supply and supersede the trouble of any other confessions: for I appear always in my natural colours, and an unartificial dress, and never let my face pretend one thing, and my heart conceal another; nay, and in all things I am so true to my principles, that I cannot be so much as counterfeited, even by those who challenge the name of wits, yet indeed are no better than jackanapes tricked up in gawdy clothes, and asses strutting in lions' skins; and how cunningly soever they carry it, their long ears appear, and betray what they are. These in troth are very rude and disingenuous, for while they apparently belong to my party, yet among the vulgar they are so ashamed of my relation, as to cast it in others' dish for a shame and reproach: wherefore since they are so eager to be accounted wise, when in truth they are extremely silly, what, if to give them their due, I dub them with the title of wise fools: and herein they copy after the example of some modern orators, who swell to that proportion of conceitedness, as to vaunt themselves for so many giants of eloquence, if with a double-tongued fluency they can plead indifferently for either side, and deem it a very doughty exploit if they can but interlard a Latin sentence with some Greek word, which for seeming garnish they crowd in at a venture; and rather than be at a stand for some cramp words, they will furnish up a long scroll of old obsolete terms out of some musty author, and foist them in, to amuse the reader with, that those who understand them may be tickled with the happiness of being acquainted with them: and those who understand them not, the less they know the more they may admire; whereas it has been always a custom to those of our side to condemn and undervalue whatever is strange and unusual, while those that are better conceited of themselves will nod and smile, and prick up their ears, that they may be thought easily to apprehend that, of which perhaps they do not understand one word. And so much for this; pardon the digression, now I return.

Of my name I have informed you, Sirs; what additional epithet to give you I know not; except you will be content with that of most foolish; for under what more proper appellation can the goddess Folly greet her devotees? But since there are few acquainted with my family and original, I will now give you some account of my extraction:

First then, my father was neither the chaos, nor hell, nor Saturn, nor Jupiter, nor any of those old, worn out, grandsire gods, but Plutus, the very same that, maugre Homer, Hesiod, nay, in spite of Jove himself, was the primary father born amongst these delights, I did not, like other infants, come crying into the world, but perked up, and laughed immediately in my mother's face. And there is no reason I should envy Jove for having a she-goat to his nurse, since I was more creditably suckled by two jolly nymphs; the name of the first drunkenness, one of Bacchus's offspring, the other ignorance,

the daughter of Pan; both which you may here behold among several others of my train and attendants, whose particular names, if you would fain know, I will give you in short This, who goes with a mincing gait, and holds up her head so high, is Self-Love. She that looks so spruce, and makes such a noise and bustle, is Flattery. That other, which sits hum-drum, as if she were half asleep, is called Forgetfulness. She that leans on her elbow, and sometimes yawningly stretches out her arms, is Laziness. This, that wears a plighted garland of flowers, and smells so perfumed, is Pleasure. The other, which appears in so smooth a skin, and pampered-up flesh, is Sensuality. She that stares so wildly, and rolls about her eyes, is Madness. As to those two gods whom you see playing among the lasses the name of the one is Intemperance, the other Sound Sleep. By the help and service of this retinue I bring all things under the verge of my power, lording it over the greatest kings and potentates.

You have now heard of my descent, my education, and my attendance; that I may not be taxed as presumptuous in borrowing the title of a goddess, I come now in the next place to acquaint you what obliging favours I everywhere bestow, and how largely my jurisdiction extends: for if, as one has ingenuously noted, to be a god is no other than to be a benefactor to mankind; and if they have been thought deservedly deified who have invented the use of wine, corn, or any other convenience for the well-being of mortals, why may not I justly bear the van among the whole troop of gods, who in all, and toward all, exert an unparalleled bounty and beneficence?

For instance, in the first place, what can be more dear and precious than life itself? and yet for this are none beholden, save to me alone. For it is neither the spear of throughly-begotten Pallas, nor the buckler of cloud-gathering Jove, that multiplies and propagates mankind: but my sportive and tickling recreation that proceeded the old crabbed philosophers, and those who now supply their stead, the mortified monks and friars; as also kings, priests, and popes, nay, the whole tribe of poetic gods, who are at last grown so numerous, as in the camp of heaven (though ne'er so spacious), to jostle for elbow room. But it is not sufficient to have made it appear that I am the source and original of all life, except I likewise shew that all the benefits of life are equally at my disposal. And what are such? Why, can any one be said properly to live to whom pleasure is denied? You will give me your assent; for there is none I know among you so wise shall I say, or so silly, as to be of a contrary opinion. The Stoics indeed contemn, and pretend to banish pleasure; but this is only a dissembling trick, and a putting the vulgar out of conceit with it, that they may more quietly engross it to themselves: but I dare them now to confess what one stage of life is not melancholy, dull, tiresome, tedious, and uneasy, unless we spice it with pleasure, that hautgoust of Folly. Of the truth whereof the never enough to be commended Sophocles is sufficient authority, who gives me the highest character in that sentence of his,

To know nothing is the sweetest life.

Yet abating from this, let us examine the case more narrowly. Who knows not that the first scene of infancy is far the most pleasant and delightsome? What then is it in children that makes us so kiss, hug, and play with them, and that the bloodiest enemy can scarce have the heart to hurt them; but their ingredients of innocence and Folly, of which nature out of providence did purposely compound and blend their tender infancy, that by a frank return of pleasure they might make some sort of amends for their parents' trouble, and give in caution as it were for the discharge of a future education; the next advance from childhood is youth, and how favourably is this dealt with; how kind, courteous, and respectful are all to it? and how ready to become serviceable upon all occasions? And whence reaps it this happiness? Whence indeed, but from me only, by whose procurement it is furnished with little of wisdom, and so with the less of disquiet? And when once lads begin to grow up, and attempt to write man, their prettiness does then soon decay, their briskness flags, their humours stagnate, their jollity ceases, and their blood grows cold; and the farther they proceed in years, the more they grow backward in the enjoyment of themselves, till waspish old age comes on, a burden to itself as well as others, and that so heavy and oppressive, as none would bear the weight of,

unless out of pity to their sufferings. I again intervene, and lend a helping-hand, assisting them at a dead lift, in the same method the poets feign their gods to succour dying men, by transforming them into new creatures, which I do by bringing them back, after they have one foot in the grave, to their infancy again; so as there is a great deal of truth couched in that old proverb, *Once an old man, and twice a child*. Now if any one be curious to understand what course I take to effect this alteration, my method is this: I bring them to my well of forgetfulness, (the fountain whereof is in the Fortunate Islands, and the river Lethe in hell but a small stream of it), and when they have there filled their bellies full, and washed down care, by the virtue and operation whereof they become young again.

Ay, but (say you) they merely dote, and play the fool: why yes, this is what I mean by growing young again: for what else is it to be a child than to be a fool and an idiot? It is the being such that makes that age so acceptable: for who does not esteem it somewhat ominous to see a boy endowed with the discretion of a man, and therefore for the curbing of too forward parts we have a disparaging proverb, *Soon ripe, soon rotten*? And farther, who would keep company or have any thing to do with such an old blade, as, after the wear and harrowing of so many years should yet continue of as clear a head and sound a judgment as he had at any time been in his middle-age; and therefore it is great kindness of me that old men grow fools, since it is hereby only that they are freed from such vexations as would torment them if they were more wise: they can drink briskly, bear up stoutly, and lightly pass over such infirmities, as a far stronger constitution could scarce master. Sometime, with the old fellow in Plautus, they are brought back to their horn-book again, to learn to spell their fortune in love.

Most wretched would they needs be if they had but wit enough to be sensible of their hard condition; but by my assistance, they carry off all well, and to their respective friends approve themselves good, sociable, jolly companions. Thus Homer makes aged Nestor famed for a smooth oily-tongued orator, while the delivery of Achilles was but rough, harsh, and hesitant; and the same poet elsewhere tells us of old men that sate on the walls, and spake with a great deal of flourish and elegance. And in this point indeed they surpass and outgo children, who are pretty forward in a softly, innocent prattle, but otherwise are too much tongue-tied, and want the other's most acceptable embellishment of a perpetual talkativeness. Add to this, that old men love to be playing with children, and children delight as much in them, to verify the proverb, that *Birds of a feather flock together*. And indeed what difference can be discerned between them, but that the one is more furrowed with wrinkles, and has seen a little more of the world than the other? For otherwise their whitish hair, their want of teeth, their smallness of stature, their milk diet, their bald crowns, their prattling, their playing, their short memory, their heedlessness, and all their other endowments, exactly agree; and the more they advance in years, the nearer they come back to their cradle, till like children indeed, at last they depart the world, without any remorse at the loss of life, or sense of the pangs of death.

And now let any one compare the excellency of my metamorphosing power to that which Ovid attributes to the gods; their strange feats in some drunken passions we will omit for their credit sake, and instance only in such persons as they pretend great kindness for; these they transformed into trees, birds, insects, and sometimes serpents; but alas, their very change into somewhat else argues the destruction of what they were before; whereas I can restore the same numerical man to his pristine state of youth, health and strength; yea, what is more, if men would but so far consult their own interest, as to discard all thoughts of wisdom, and entirely resign themselves to my guidance and conduct, old age should be a paradox, and each man's years a perpetual spring. For look how your hard plodding students, by a close sedentary confinement to their books, grow mopish, pale, and meagre, as if, by a continual wrack of brains, and torture of invention, their veins were pumped dry, and their whole body squeezed sapless; whereas my followers are smooth, plump, and bucksome, and altogether as lusty as so many bacon-hogs, or sucking calves; never in their career of pleasure to be arrested with old age, if they could but keep themselves untainted from the contagiousness of wisdom, with the leprosy whereof, if at any time they are infected, it is only for prevention, lest they should otherwise have been too happy.

For a more ample confirmation of the truth of what foregoes, it is on all sides confessed, that Folly is the best preservative of youth, and the most effectual antidote against age. And it is a never-failing observation made of the people of Brabant, that, contrary to the proverb of *Older and wiser*, the more ancient they grow, the more fools they are; and there is not any one country, whose inhabitants enjoy themselves better, and rub through the world with more ease and quiet. To these are nearly related, as well by affinity of customs, as of neighbourhood, my friends the Hollanders: mine I may well call them, for they stick so close and lovingly to me, that they are styled fools to a proverb, and yet scorn to be ashamed of their name. Well, let fond mortals go now in a needless quest of some Medea, Circe, Venus, or some enchanted fountain, for a restorative of age, whereas the accurate performance of this feat lies only within the ability of my art and skill.

It is I only who have the receipt of making that liquor wherewith Memnon's daughter lengthened out her grandfather's declining days: it is I that am that Venus, who so far restored the languishing Phaon, as to make Sappho fall deeply in love with his beauty. Mine are those herbs, mine those charms, that not only lure back swift time, when past and gone, but what is more to be admired, clip its wings, and prevent all farther flight. So then, if you will all agree to my verdict, that nothing is more desirable than the being young, nor any thing more loathed than contemptible old age, you must needs acknowledge it as an unrequitable obligation from me, for fencing off the one, and perpetuating the other.

But why should I confine my discourse to the narrow subject of mankind only? View the whole heaven itself, and then tell me what one of that divine tribe would not be mean and despicable, if my name did not lend him some respect and authority. Why is Bacchus always painted as a young man, but only because he is freakish, drunk, and mad; and spending his time in toping, dancing, masking, and revelling, seems to have nothing in the least to do with wisdom? Nay, so far is he from the affectation of being accounted wise, that he is content, all the rights of devotion which are paid unto him should consist of apishness and drollery. Farther, what scoffs and jeers did not the old comedians throw upon him? *O swinish punch-gut god*, say they, *that smells rank of the sty he was sowed up in*, and so on. But pritheee, who in this case, always merry, youthful, soaked in wine, and drowned in pleasure, who, I say, in such a case, would change conditions, either with the lofty menace-looking Jove, the grave, yet timorous Pan, the stately Pallas, or indeed any one other of heaven's landlords? Why is Cupid feigned as a boy, but only because he is an under-witted whipster, that neither acts nor thinks any thing with discretion? Why is Venus adored for the mirror of beauty, but only because she and I claim kindred, she being of the same complexion with my father Plutus, and therefore called by Homer the Golden Goddess? Beside, she imitates me in being always a laughing, if either we believe the poets, or their near kinsmen the painters, the first mentioning, the other drawing her constantly in that posture. Add farther, to what deity did the Romans pay a more ceremonial respect than to Flora, that bawd of obscenity? And if any one search the poets for an historical account of the gods, he shall find them all famous for lewd pranks and debaucheries. It is needless to insist upon the miscarriages of others, when the lecherous intrigues of Jove himself are so notorious, and when the pretendedly chaste Diana so oft uncloaked her modesty to run a hunting after her beloved Endimion. But I will say no more, for I had rather they should be told of their faults by Momus, who was wont formerly to sting them with some close reflections, till nettled by his abusive raillery, they kicked him out of heaven for his sauciness of daring to reprove such as were beyond correction: and now in his banishment from heaven he finds but cold entertainment here on earth, nay, is denied all admittance into the court of princes, where notwithstanding my handmaid Flattery finds a most encouraging welcome: but this petulant monitor being thrust out of doors, the gods can now more freely rant and revel, and take their whole swinge of pleasure.

Now the beastly Priapus may recreate himself without contradiction in lust and filthiness; now the sly Mercury may, without discovery, go on in his thieveries, and nimble-fingered juggles; the sooty Vulcan may now renew his wonted custom of making the other gods laugh by his hopping



so limpingly, and coming off with so many dry jokes, and biting repartees. Silenus, the old doting lover, to shew his activity, may now dance a frisking jig, and the nymphs be at the same sport naked. The goatish satyrs may make up a merry ball, and Pan, the blind harper may put up his bagpipes, and sing bawdy catches, to which the gods, especially when they are almost drunk, shall give a most profound attention. But why would I any farther rip open and expose the weakness of the gods, a weakness so childish and absurd, that no man can at the same time keep his countenance, and make a relation of it? Now therefore, like Homer's wandering muse, I will take my leave of heaven, and come down again here below, where we shall find nothing happy, nay, nothing tolerable, without my presence and assistance. And in the first place consider how providently nature has took care that in all her works there should be some piquant smack and relish of Folly: for since the Stoics define wisdom to be conducted by reason, and folly nothing else but the being hurried by passion, lest our life should otherwise have been too dull and inactive, that creator, who out of clay first tempered and made us up, put into the composition of our humanity more than a pound of passions to an ounce of reason; and reason he confined within the narrow cells of the brain, whereas he left passions the whole body to range in. Farther, he set up two sturdy champions to stand perpetually on the guard, that reason might make no assault, surprise, nor in-road: anger, which keeps its station in the fortress of the heart; and Just, which like the signs Virgo and Scorpio, rules the belly and secret members. Against the forces of these two warriors how unable is reason to bear up and withstand, every day's experience does abundantly witness; while let reason be never so importunate in urging and reinforcing her admonitions to virtue, yet the passions bear all before them, and by the least offer of curb or restraint grow but more imperious, till reason itself, for quietness sake, is forced to desist from all further remonstrance.

But because it seemed expedient that man, who was born for the transaction of business, should have so much wisdom as should fit and capacitate him for the discharge of his duty herein, and yet lest such a measure as is requisite for this purpose might prove too dangerous and fatal, I was advised with for an antidote, who prescribed this infallible receipt of taking a wife, a creature so harmless and silly, and yet so useful and convenient, as might mollify and make pliable the stiffness and morose humour of man. Now that which made Plato doubt under what genus to rank woman, whether among brutes or rational creatures, was only meant to denote the extreme stupidity and Folly of that sex, a sex so unalterably simple, that for any of them to thrust forward, and reach at the name of wise, is but to make themselves the more remarkable fools, such an endeavour, being but a swimming against the stream, nay, the turning the course of nature, the bare attempting whereof is as extravagant as the effecting of it is impossible: for as it is a trite proverb, *That an ape will be an ape, though clad in purple*; so a woman will be a woman, a fool, whatever disguise she takes up. And yet there is no reason women should take it amiss to be thus charged; for if they do but rightly consider they will find it is to Folly they are beholden for those endowments, wherein they so far surpass and excel man; as first, for their unparalleled beauty, by the charm whereof they tyrannize over the greatest tyrants; for what is it but too great a smatch of wisdom that makes men so tawny and thick-skinned, so rough and prickly-bearded, like an emblem of winter or old age, while women have such dainty smooth cheeks, such a low gende voice, and so pure a complexion, as if nature had drawn them for a standing pattern of all symmetry and comeliness? Beside, what live, but to be wound up as it were in a winding-sheet before we are dead, and so to be shuffled quick into a grave, and buried alive.

But there are yet others perhaps that have no gust in this sort of pleasure, but place their greatest content in the enjoyment of friends, telling us that true friendship is to be preferred before all other acquirements; that it is a thing so useful and necessary, as the very elements could not long subsist without a natural combination; so pleasant that it affords as warm an influence as the sun itself; so honest, (if honesty in this case deserve any consideration), that the very philosophers have not stuck to place this as one among the rest of their different sentiments of the chiefest good. But what if I make it appear that I also am the main spring and original of this endearment? Yes, I can easily demonstrate

it, and that not by crabbed syllogisms, or a crooked and unintelligible way of arguing, but can make it (as the proverb goes) *As plain as the nose on your face*. Well then, to scratch and curry one another, to wink at a friend's faults; nay, to cry up some failings for virtuous and commendable, is not this the next door to the being a fool? When one looking stedfastly in his mistress's face, admires a mole as much as a beauty spot; when another swears his lady's stinking breath is a most redolent perfume; and at another time the fond parent hugs the squint-eyed child, and pretends it is rather a becoming glance and winning aspect than any blemish of the eye-sight, what is all this but the very height of Folly?

Folly (I say) that both makes friends and keeps them so. I speak of mortal men only, among whom there are none but have some small faults; he is most happy that has fewest. If we pass to the gods, we shall find that they have so much of wisdom, as they have very little of friendship; nay, nothing of that which is true and hearty. The reason why men make a greater improvement in this virtue, is only because they are more credulous and easy natured; for friends must be of the same humour and inclinations too, or else the league of amity, though made with never so many protestations, will be soon broke. Thus grave and morose men seldom prove fast friends; they are too captious and censorious, and will not bear with one another's infirmities; they are as eagle sighted as may be in the espial of others' faults, while they wink upon themselves, and never mind the beam in their own eyes. In short, man being by nature so prone to frailties, so humoursome and cross-grained, and guilty of so many slips and miscarriages, there could be no firm friendship contracted, except there be such an allowance made for each other's defaults, which the Greeks term *'Eunoieia*, and we may construe good nature, which is but another word for Folly. And what? Is not Cupid, that first father of all relation, is not he stark blind, that as he cannot himself distinguish of colours, so he would make us as mope-eyed in judging falsely of all love concerns, and wheedle us into a thinking that we are always in the right? Thus every Jack sticks to his own Jill; every tinker esteems his own trull; and the hob-nailed suiter prefers Joan the milk-maid before any of my lady's daughters. These things are true, and are ordinarily laughed at, and yet, however ridiculous they seem, it is hence only that all societies receive their cement and consolidation.

The same which has been said of friendship is much more applicable to a state of marriage, which is but the highest advance and improvement of friendship in the closest bond of union. Good God! What frequent divorces, or worse mischief, would oft sadly happen, except man and wife, were so discreet as to pass over light occasions of quarrel with laughing, jesting, dissembling, and such like playing the fool? Nay, how few matches would go forward, if the hasty lover did but first know how many little tricks of lust and wantonness (and perhaps more gross failings) his coy and seemingly bashful mistress had oft before been guilty of? And how fewer marriages, when consummated, would continue happy, if the husband were not either sottishly insensible of, or did not purposely wink at and pass over the lightness and forwardness of his good-natured wife? This peace and quietness is owing to my management, for there would otherwise be continual jars, and broils, and mad doings, if want of wit only did not at the same time make a contented cuckold and a still house; if the cuckoo sing at the back door, the unthinking cornute takes no notice of the unlucky omen of others' eggs being laid in his own nest, but laughs it over, kisses his dear spouse, and all is well. And indeed it is much better patiently to be such a hen-pecked frigot, than always to be wracked and tortured with the grating surmises of suspicion and jealousy. In fine, there is no one society, no one relation men stand in, would be comfortable, or indeed tolerable, without my assistance; there could be no right understanding betwixt prince and people, lord and servant, tutor and pupil, friend and friend, man and wife, buyer and seller, or any persons however otherwise related, if they did not cowardly put up small abuses, sneakingly cringe and submit, or after all fawningly scratch and flatter each other. This you will say is much, but you shall yet hear what is more; tell me then, can any one love another that first hates himself? Is it likely any one should agree with a friend that is first fallen out with his own judgment? Or is it probable he should be any way pleasing to another, who is a perpetual plague and trouble to himself? This is such a paradox that none can be so mad as to maintain. Well, but if

I am excluded and barred out, every man would be so far from being able to bear with others, that he would be burthensome to himself, and consequently incapable of any ease or satisfaction. Nature, that toward some of her products plays the step-mother rather than the indulgent parent, has endowed some men with that unhappy peevishness of disposition, as to nauseate and dislike whatever is their own, and much admire what belongs to other persons, so as they cannot in any wise enjoy what their birth or fortunes have bestowed upon them: for what grace is there in the greatest beauty, if it be always clouded with frowns and sulliness? Or what vigour in youth, if it be harassed with a pettish, dogged, waspish, ill humour? None, sure. Nor indeed can there be any creditable acquirement of ourselves in any one station of life, but we should sink without rescue into misery and despair, if we were not buoyed up and supported by self-love, which is but the elder sister (as it were) of Folly, and her own constant friend and assistant For what is or can be more silly than to be lovers and admirers of ourselves? And yet if it were not so there will be no relish to any of our words or actions. Take away this one property of a fool, and the orator shall become as dumb and silent as the pulpit he stands in; the musician shall hang up his untouched instruments on the wall; the completest actors shall be hissed off the stage; the poet shall be burlesqued with his own doggrel rhymes; the painter shall himself vanish into an imaginary landscape; and the physician shall want food more than his patients do physic. In short, without self-love, instead of beautiful, you shall think yourself an old beldam of fourscore; instead of youthful, you shall seem just dropping into the grave; instead of eloquent, a mere stammerer; and in lieu of gende and complaisant, you shall appear like a downright country clown; it being so necessary that every one should think well of himself before he can expect the good opinion of others. Finally, when it is the main and essential part of happiness to desire to be no other than what we already are; this expedient is again wholly owing to self-love, which so flushes men with a good conceit of their own, that no one repents of his shape, of his wit, of his education, or of his country; so as the dirty half-drowned Hollander would not remove into the pleasant plains of Italy, the rude Thracian would not change his boggy soil for the best seat in Athens, nor the brutish Scythian quit his thorny deserts to become an inhabitant of the Fortunate Islands. And oh the incomparable contrivance of nature, who has ordered all things in so even a method that wherever she has been less bountiful in her gifts, there she makes it up with a larger dose of self-love, which supplies the former defects, and makes all even. To enlarge farther, I may well presume to aver, that there are no considerable exploits performed, no useful arts invented, but what I am the respective author and manager of: as first, what is more lofty and heroical than war? and yet, what is more foolish than for some petty, trivial affront, to take such a revenge as both sides shall be sure to be losers, and where the quarrel must be decided at the price of so many limbs and lives? And when they come to an engagement, what service can be done by such pale-faced students, as by drudging at the oars of wisdom, have spent all their strength and activity? No, the only use is of blunt sturdy fellows that have little of wit, and so the more of resolution: except you would make a soldier of such another Demosthenes as threw down his arms when he came within sight of the enemy, and lost that credit in the camp which he gained in the pulpit.

But counsel, deliberation, and advice (say you), are very necessary for the management of war: very true, but not such counsel as shall be prescribed by the strict rules of wisdom and justice; for a battle shall be more successfully fought by serving-men, porters, bailiffs, padders, rogues, gaol-birds, and such like tag-rags of mankind, than by the most accomplished philosophers; which last, how unhappy they are in the management of such concerns, Socrates (by the oracle adjudged to be the wisest of mortals) is a notable example; who when he appeared in the attempt of some public performance before the people, he faltered in the first onset, and could never recover himself, but was hooted and hissed home again: yet this philosopher was the less a fool, for refusing the appellation of wise, and not accepting the oracle's compliment; as also for advising that no philosophers should have any hand in the government of the commonwealth; he should have likewise at the same time, added, that they should be banished all human society.

And what made this great man poison himself to prevent the malice of his accusers? What made him the instrument of his own death, but only his excessiveness of wisdom? whereby, while he was searching into the nature of clouds, while he was plodding and contemplating upon ideas, while he was exercising his geometry upon the measure of a flea, and diving into the recesses of nature, for an account how little insects, when they were so small, could make so great a buzz and hum; while he was intent upon these fooleries he minded nothing of the world, or its ordinary concerns.

Next to Socrates comes his scholar Plato, a famous orator indeed, that could be so dashed out of countenance by an illiterate rabble, as to demur, and hawk, and hesitate, before he could get to the end of one short sentence. Theo-phrastus was such another coward, who beginning to make an oration, was presently struck down with fear, as if he had seen some ghost, or hobgoblin. Isocrates was so bashful and timorous, that though he taught rhetoric, yet he could never have the confidence to speak in public. Cicero, the master of Roman eloquence, was wont to begin his speeches with a low, quivering voice, just like a school-boy, afraid of not saying his lesson perfect enough to escape whipping: and yet Fabius commends this property of Tully as an argument of a considerate orator, sensible of the difficulty of acquitting himself with credit: but what hereby does he do more than plainly confess that wisdom is but a rub and impediment to the well management of any affair? How would these heroes crouch, and shrink into nothing, at the sight of drawn swords, that are thus quashed and stunned at the delivery of bare words?

Now then let Plato's fine sentence be cried up, that "happy are those commonwealths where either philosophers are elected kings, or kings turn philosophers." Alas, this is so far from being true, that if we consult all historians for an account of past ages, we shall find no princes more weak, nor any people more slavish and wretched, than where the administrations of affairs fell on the shoulders of some learned bookish governor. Of the truth whereof, the two Catos are exemplary instances: the first of which embroiled the city, and tired out the senate by his tedious harangues of defending himself, and accusing others; the younger was an unhappy occasion of the loss of the peoples' liberty, while by improper methods he pretended to maintain it To these may be added Brutus, Cassius, the two Gracchi, and Cicero himself, who was no less fatal to Rome, than his parallel Demosthenes was to Athens: as likewise Marcus Antoninus, whom we may allow to have been a good emperor, yet the less such for his being a philosopher; and certainly he did not do half that kindness to his empire by his own prudent management of affairs, as he did mischief by leaving such a degenerate successor as his son Commodus proved to be; but it is a common observation, that *A wise father has many times a foolish son*

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.