

ERASMUS DESIDERIUS

THE PRAISE OF
FOLLY

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Desiderius Erasmus

The Praise of Folly

ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM

to his friend

THOMAS MORE, health:

As I was coming awhile since out of Italy for England, that I might not waste all that time I was to sit on horseback in foolish and illiterate fables, I chose rather one while to revolve with myself something of our common studies, and other while to enjoy the remembrance of my friends, of whom I left here some no less learned than pleasant. Among these you, my More, came first in my mind, whose memory, though absent yourself, gives me such delight in my absence, as when present with you I ever found in your company; than which, let me perish if in all my life I ever met with anything more delectable. And therefore, being satisfied that something was to be done, and that that time was no wise proper for any serious matter, I resolved to

make some sport with the praise of folly. But who the devil put that in your head? you'll say. The first thing was your surname of More, which comes so near the word *Moriae* (folly) as you are far from the thing. And that you are so, all the world will clear you. In the next place, I conceived this exercise of wit would not be least approved by you; inasmuch as you are wont to be delighted with such kind of mirth, that is to say, neither unlearned, if I am not mistaken, nor altogether insipid, and in the whole course of your life have played the part of a Democritus. And though such is the excellence of your judgment that it was ever contrary to that of the people's, yet such is your incredible affability and sweetness of temper that you both can and delight to carry yourself to all men a man of all hours. Wherefore you will not only with good will accept this small declamation, but take upon you the defense of it, for as much as being dedicated to you, it is now no longer mine but yours. But perhaps there will not be wanting some wranglers that may cavil and charge me, partly that these toys are lighter than may become a divine, and partly more biting than may beseem the modesty of a Christian, and consequently exclaim that I resemble the ancient comedy, or another Lucian, and snarl at everything. But I would have them whom the lightness or foolery of the argument may offend to consider that mine is not the first of this kind, but the same thing that has been often practiced even by great authors: when Homer, so many ages since, did the like with the battle of frogs and mice; Virgil, with the gnat and puddings; Ovid, with the

nut; when Polycrates and his corrector Isocrates extolled tyranny; Glauco, injustice; Favorinus, deformity and the quartan ague; Synescius, baldness; Lucian, the fly and flattery; when Seneca made such sport with Claudius' canonizations; Plutarch, with his dialogue between Ulysses and Gryllus; Lucian and Apuleius, with the ass; and some other, I know not who, with the hog that made his last will and testament, of which also even St. Jerome makes mention. And therefore if they please, let them suppose I played at tables for my diversion, or if they had rather have it so, that I rode on a hobbyhorse. For what injustice is it that when we allow every course of life its recreation, that study only should have none? Especially when such toys are not without their serious matter, and foolery is so handled that the reader that is not altogether thick-skulled may reap more benefit from it than from some men's crabbish and specious arguments. As when one, with long study and great pains, patches many pieces together on the praise of rhetoric or philosophy; another makes a panegyric to a prince; another encourages him to a war against the Turks; another tells you what will become of the world after himself is dead; and another finds out some new device for the better ordering of goat's wool: for as nothing is more trifling than to treat of serious matters triflingly, so nothing carries a better grace than so to discourse of trifles as a man may seem to have intended them least. For my own part, let other men judge of what I have written; though yet, unless an overweening opinion of myself may have made me blind in my own cause, I have praised

folly, but not altogether foolishly. And now to say somewhat to that other cavil, of biting. This liberty was ever permitted to all men's wits, to make their smart, witty reflections on the common errors of mankind, and that too without offense, as long as this liberty does not run into licentiousness; which makes me the more admire the tender ears of the men of this age, that can away with solemn titles. No, you'll meet with some so preposterously religious that they will sooner endure the broadest scoffs even against Christ himself than hear the Pope or a prince be touched in the least, especially if it be anything that concerns their profit; whereas he that so taxes the lives of men, without naming anyone in particular, whither, I pray, may he be said to bite, or rather to teach and admonish? Or otherwise, I beseech you, under how many notions do I tax myself? Besides, he that spares no sort of men cannot be said to be angry with anyone in particular, but the vices of all. And therefore, if there shall happen to be anyone that shall say he is hit, he will but discover either his guilt or fear. Saint Jerome sported in this kind with more freedom and greater sharpness, not sparing sometimes men's very name. But I, besides that I have wholly avoided it, I have so moderated my style that the understanding reader will easily perceive my endeavors herein were rather to make mirth than bite. Nor have I, after the example of Juvenal, raked up that forgotten sink of filth and ribaldry, but laid before you things rather ridiculous than dishonest. And now, if there be anyone that is yet dissatisfied, let him at least remember that it is no dishonor to be discommended

by Folly; and having brought her in speaking, it was but fit that I kept up the character of the person. But why do I run over these things to you, a person so excellent an advocate that no man better defends his client, though the cause many times be none of the best? Farewell, my best disputant More, and stoutly defend your *Moriae*.

*From the country,
the 5th of the Ides of June.*

THE PRAISE OF FOLLY

An oration, of feigned matter,

spoken by Folly in her own person

At what rate soever the world talks of me (for I am not ignorant what an ill report Folly has got, even among the most foolish), yet that I am that she, that only she, whose deity recreates both gods and men, even this is a sufficient argument, that I no sooner stepped up to speak to this full assembly than all your faces put on a kind of new and unwonted pleasantness. So suddenly have you cleared your brows, and with so frolic and hearty a laughter given me your applause, that in truth as many of you as I behold on every side of me seem to me no less than Homer's gods drunk with nectar and nepenthe; whereas before, you sat as lumpish and pensive as if you had come from consulting an oracle. And as it usually happens when the sun begins to show his beams, or when after a sharp winter the spring breathes afresh on the earth, all things immediately get a new face, new color, and recover as it were a certain kind of youth again: in like manner, by but beholding me you have in an instant

gotten another kind of countenance; and so what the otherwise great rhetoricians with their tedious and long-studied orations can hardly effect, to wit, to remove the trouble of the mind, I have done it at once with my single look.

But if you ask me why I appear before you in this strange dress, be pleased to lend me your ears, and I'll tell you; not those ears, I mean, you carry to church, but abroad with you, such as you are wont to prick up to jugglers, fools, and buffoons, and such as our friend Midas once gave to Pan. For I am disposed awhile to play the sophist with you; not of their sort who nowadays boozle young men's heads with certain empty notions and curious trifles, yet teach them nothing but a more than womanish obstinacy of scolding: but I'll imitate those ancients who, that they might the better avoid that infamous appellation of *sophi* or *wise*, chose rather to be called sophists. Their business was to celebrate the praises of the gods and valiant men. And the like encomium shall you hear from me, but neither of Hercules nor Solon, but my own dear self, that is to say, Folly. Nor do I esteem a rush that call it a foolish and insolent thing to praise one's self. Be it as foolish as they would make it, so they confess it proper: and what can be more than that Folly be her own trumpet? For who can set me out better than myself, unless perhaps I could be better known to another than to myself? Though yet I think it somewhat more modest than the general practice of our nobles and wise men who, throwing away all shame, hire some flattering orator or lying poet from whose mouth they may hear their praises, that is

to say, mere lies; and yet, composing themselves with a seeming modesty, spread out their peacock's plumes and erect their crests, while this impudent flatterer equals a man of nothing to the gods and proposes him as an absolute pattern of all virtue that's wholly a stranger to it, sets out a pitiful jay in other's feathers, washes the blackamoor white, and lastly swells a gnat to an elephant. In short, I will follow that old proverb that says, "He may lawfully praise himself that lives far from neighbors." Though, by the way, I cannot but wonder at the ingratitude, shall I say, or negligence of men who, notwithstanding they honor me in the first place and are willing enough to confess my bounty, yet not one of them for these so many ages has there been who in some thankful oration has set out the praises of Folly; when yet there has not wanted them whose elaborate endeavors have extolled tyrants, agues, flies, baldness, and such other pests of nature, to their own loss of both time and sleep. And now you shall hear from me a plain extemporary speech, but so much the truer. Nor would I have you think it like the rest of orators, made for the ostentation of wit; for these, as you know, when they have been beating their heads some thirty years about an oration and at last perhaps produce somewhat that was never their own, shall yet swear they composed it in three days, and that too for diversion: whereas I ever liked it best to speak whatever came first out.

But let none of you expect from me that after the manner of rhetoricians I should go about to define what I am, much less use any division; for I hold it equally unlucky to circumscribe

her whose deity is universal, or make the least division in that worship about which everything is so generally agreed. Or to what purpose, think you, should I describe myself when I am here present before you, and you behold me speaking? For I am, as you see, that true and only giver of wealth whom the Greeks call *Moria*, the Latins *Stultitia*, and our plain English *Folly*. Or what need was there to have said so much, as if my very looks were not sufficient to inform you who I am? Or as if any man, mistaking me for wisdom, could not at first sight convince himself by my face the true index of my mind? I am no counterfeit, nor do I carry one thing in my looks and another in my breast. No, I am in every respect so like myself that neither can they dissemble me who arrogate to themselves the appearance and title of wise men and walk like asses in scarlet hoods, though after all their hypocrisy Midas' ears will discover their master. A most ungrateful generation of men that, when they are wholly given up to my party, are yet publicly ashamed of the name, as taking it for a reproach; for which cause, since in truth they are *morotatoi*, fools, and yet would appear to the world to be wise men and Thales, we'll even call them *morosophous*, wise fools.

Nor will it be amiss also to imitate the rhetoricians of our times, who think themselves in a manner gods if like horse leeches they can but appear to be double-tongued, and believe they have done a mighty act if in their Latin orations they can but shuffle in some ends of Greek like mosaic work, though altogether by head and shoulders and less to the purpose.

And if they want hard words, they run over some worm-eaten manuscript and pick out half a dozen of the most old and obsolete to confound their reader, believing, no doubt, that they that understand their meaning will like it the better, and they that do not will admire it the more by how much the less they understand it. Nor is this way of ours of admiring what seems most foreign without its particular grace; for if there happen to be any more ambitious than others, they may give their applause with a smile, and, like the ass, shake their ears, that they may be thought to understand more than the rest of their neighbors.

But to come to the purpose: I have given you my name, but what epithet shall I add? What but that of the most foolish? For by what more proper name can so great a goddess as Folly be known to her disciples? And because it is not alike known to all from what stock I am sprung, with the Muses' good leave I'll do my endeavor to satisfy you. But yet neither the first Chaos, Orcus, Saturn, or Japhet, nor any of those threadbare, musty gods were my father, but Plutus, Riches; that only he, that is, in spite of Hesiod, Homer, nay and Jupiter himself, *divum pater atque hominum rex*, the father of gods and men, at whose single beck, as heretofore, so at present, all things sacred and profane are turned topsy-turvy. According to whose pleasure war, peace, empire, counsels, judgments, assemblies, wedlocks, bargains, leagues, laws, arts, all things light or serious—I want breath—in short, all the public and private business of mankind is governed; without whose help all that herd of gods of the poets' making,

and those few of the better sort of the rest, either would not be at all, or if they were, they would be but such as live at home and keep a poor house to themselves. And to whomsoever he's an enemy, 'tis not Pallas herself that can befriend him; as on the contrary he whom he favors may lead Jupiter and his thunder in a string. This is my father and in him I glory. Nor did he produce me from his brain, as Jupiter that sour and ill-looking Pallas; but of that lovely nymph called Youth, the most beautiful and galliard of all the rest. Nor was I, like that limping blacksmith, begot in the sad and irksome bonds of matrimony. Yet, mistake me not, 'twas not that blind and decrepit Plutus in Aristophanes that got me, but such as he was in his full strength and pride of youth; and not that only, but at such a time when he had been well heated with nectar, of which he had, at one of the banquets of the gods, taken a dose extraordinary.

And as to the place of my birth, forasmuch as nowadays that is looked upon as a main point of nobility, it was neither, like Apollo's, in the floating Delos, nor Venus-like on the rolling sea, nor in any of blind Homer's as blind caves: but in the Fortunate Islands, where all things grew without plowing or sowing; where neither labor, nor old age, nor disease was ever heard of; and in whose fields neither daffodil, mallows, onions, beans, and such contemptible things would ever grow, but, on the contrary, rue, angelica, bugloss, marjoram, trefoils, roses, violets, lilies, and all the gardens of Adonis invite both your sight and your smelling. And being thus born, I did not begin the world, as

other children are wont, with crying; but straight perched up and smiled on my mother. Nor do I envy to the great Jupiter the goat, his nurse, forasmuch as I was suckled by two jolly nymphs, to wit, Drunkenness, the daughter of Bacchus, and Ignorance, of Pan. And as for such my companions and followers as you perceive about me, if you have a mind to know who they are, you are not like to be the wiser for me, unless it be in Greek: this here, which you observe with that proud cast of her eye, is *Philautia*, Self-love; she with the smiling countenance, that is ever and anon clapping her hands, is *Kolakia*, Flattery; she that looks as if she were half asleep is *Lethe*, Oblivion; she that sits leaning on both elbows with her hands clutched together is *Misoponia*, Laziness; she with the garland on her head, and that smells so strong of perfumes, is *Hedone*, Pleasure; she with those staring eyes, moving here and there, is *Anoia*, Madness; she with the smooth skin and full pampered body is *Tryphe*, Wantonness; and, as to the two gods that you see with them, the one is *Komos*, Intemperance, the other *Negretos hypnos*, Dead Sleep. These, I say, are my household servants, and by their faithful counsels I have subjected all things to my dominion and erected an empire over emperors themselves. Thus have you had my lineage, education, and companions.

And now, lest I may seem to have taken upon me the name of goddess without cause, you shall in the next place understand how far my deity extends, and what advantage by it I have brought both to gods and men. For, if it was not unwisely said

by somebody, that this only is to be a god, to help men; and if they are deservedly enrolled among the gods that first brought in corn and wine and such other things as are for the common good of mankind, why am not I of right the *alpha*, or first, of all the gods? who being but one, yet bestow all things on all men. For first, what is more sweet or more precious than life? And yet from whom can it more properly be said to come than from me? For neither the crab-favoured Pallas' spear nor the cloud-gathering Jupiter's shield either beget or propagate mankind; but even he himself, the father of gods and king of men at whose very beck the heavens shake, must lay by his forked thunder and those looks wherewith he conquered the giants and with which at pleasure he frightens the rest of the gods, and like a common stage player put on a disguise as often as he goes about that, which now and then he does, that is to say the getting of children: And the Stoics too, that conceive themselves next to the gods, yet show me one of them, nay the veriest bigot of the sect, and if he do not put off his beard, the badge of wisdom, though yet it be no more than what is common with him and goats; yet at least he must lay by his supercilious gravity, smooth his forehead, shake off his rigid principles, and for some time commit an act of folly and dotage. In fine, that wise man whoever he be, if he intends to have children, must have recourse to me. But tell me, I beseech you, what man is that would submit his neck to the noose of wedlock, if, as wise men should, he did but first truly weigh the inconvenience of the thing? Or what woman is there

would ever go to it did she seriously consider either the peril of child-bearing or the trouble of bringing them up? So then, if you owe your beings to wedlock, you owe that wedlock to this my follower, Madness; and what you owe to me I have already told you. Again, she that has but once tried what it is, would she, do you think, make a second venture if it were not for my other companion, Oblivion? Nay, even Venus herself, notwithstanding whatever Lucretius has said, would not deny but that all her virtue were lame and fruitless without the help of my deity. For out of that little, odd, ridiculous May-game came the supercilious philosophers, in whose room have succeeded a kind of people the world calls monks, cardinals, priests, and the most holy popes. And lastly, all that rabble of the poets' gods, with which heaven is so thwacked and thronged, that though it be of so vast an extent, they are hardly able to crowd one by another.

But I think it is a small matter that you thus owe your beginning of life to me, unless I also show you that whatever benefit you receive in the progress of it is of my gift likewise. For what other is this? Can that be called life where you take away pleasure? Oh! Do you like what I say? I knew none of you could have so little wit, or so much folly, or wisdom rather, as to be of any other opinion. For even the Stoics themselves that so severely cried down pleasure did but handsomely dissemble, and railed against it to the common people to no other end but that having discouraged them from it, they might the more plentifully enjoy it themselves. But tell me, by Jupiter, what part of man's life is that

that is not sad, crabbed, unpleasant, insipid, troublesome, unless it be seasoned with pleasure, that is to say, folly? For the proof of which the never sufficiently praised Sophocles in that his happy elegy of us, "To know nothing is the only happiness," might be authority enough, but that I intend to take every particular by itself.

And first, who knows not but a man's infancy is the merriest part of life to himself, and most acceptable to others? For what is that in them which we kiss, embrace, cherish, nay enemies succor, but this witchcraft of folly, which wise Nature did of purpose give them into the world with them that they might the more pleasantly pass over the toil of education, and as it were flatter the care and diligence of their nurses? And then for youth, which is in such reputation everywhere, how do all men favor it, study to advance it, and lend it their helping hand? And whence, I pray, all this grace? Whence but from me? by whose kindness, as it understands as little as may be, it is also for that reason the higher privileged from exceptions; and I am mistaken if, when it is grown up and by experience and discipline brought to savor something like man, if in the same instant that beauty does not fade, its liveliness decay, its pleasantness grow flat, and its briskness fail. And by how much the further it runs from me, by so much the less it lives, till it comes to the burden of old age, not only hateful to others, but to itself also. Which also were altogether insupportable did not I pity its condition, in being present with it, and, as the poets' gods were wont to assist

such as were dying with some pleasant metamorphosis, help their decrepitness as much as in me lies by bringing them back to a second childhood, from whence they are not improperly called twice children. Which, if you ask me how I do it, I shall not be shy in the point. I bring them to our River Lethe (for its springhead rises in the Fortunate Islands, and that other of hell is but a brook in comparison), from which, as soon as they have drunk down a long forgetfulness, they wash away by degrees the perplexity of their minds, and so wax young again.

But perhaps you'll say they are foolish and doting. Admit it; 'tis the very essence of childhood; as if to be such were not to be a fool, or that that condition had anything pleasant in it, but that it understood nothing. For who would not look upon that child as a prodigy that should have as much wisdom as a man?—according to that common proverb, "I do not like a child that is a man too soon." Or who would endure a converse or friendship with that old man who to so large an experience of things had joined an equal strength of mind and sharpness of judgment? And therefore for this reason it is that old age dotes; and that it does so, it is beholding to me. Yet, notwithstanding, is this dotard exempt from all those cares that distract a wise man; he is not the less pot companion, nor is he sensible of that burden of life which the more manly age finds enough to do to stand upright under it. And sometimes too, like Plautus' old man, he returns to his three letters, A.M.O., the most unhappy of all things living, if he rightly understood what he did in it. And yet, so much do

I befriend him that I make him well received of his friends and no unpleasant companion; for as much as, according to Homer, Nestor's discourse was pleasanter than honey, whereas Achilles' was both bitter and malicious; and that of old men, as he has it in another place, florid. In which respect also they have this advantage of children, in that they want the only pleasure of the others' life, we'll suppose it prattling. Add to this that old men are more eagerly delighted with children, and they, again, with old men. "Like to like," quoted the Devil to the collier. For what difference between them, but that the one has more wrinkles and years upon his head than the other? Otherwise, the brightness of their hair, toothless mouth, weakness of body, love of mild, broken speech, chatting, toying, forgetfulness, inadvertency, and briefly, all other their actions agree in everything. And by how much the nearer they approach to this old age, by so much they grow backward into the likeness of children, until like them they pass from life to death, without any weariness of the one, or sense of the other.

And now, let him that will compare the benefits they receive by me, the metamorphoses of the gods, of whom I shall not mention what they have done in their pettish humors but where they have been most favorable: turning one into a tree, another into a bird, a third into a grasshopper, serpent, or the like. As if there were any difference between perishing and being another thing! But I restore the same man to the best and happiest part of his life. And if men would but refrain from all commerce

with wisdom and give up themselves to be governed by me, they should never know what it were to be old, but solace themselves with a perpetual youth. Do but observe our grim philosophers that are perpetually beating their brains on knotty subjects, and for the most part you'll find them grown old before they are scarcely young. And whence is it, but that their continual and restless thoughts insensibly prey upon their spirits and dry up their radical moisture? Whereas, on the contrary, my fat fools are as plump and round as a Westphalian hog, and never sensible of old age, unless perhaps, as sometimes it rarely happens, they come to be infected with wisdom, so hard a thing it is for a man to be happy in all things. And to this purpose is that no small testimony of the proverb, that says, "Folly is the only thing that keeps youth at a stay and old age afar off;" as it is verified in the Brabanders, of whom there goes this common saying, "That age, which is wont to render other men wiser, makes them the greater fools." And yet there is scarce any nation of a more jocund converse, or that is less sensible of the misery of old age, than they are. And to these, as in situation, so for manner of living, come nearest my friends the Hollanders. And why should I not call them mine, since they are so diligent observers of me that they are commonly called by my name?—of which they are so far from being ashamed, they rather pride themselves in it. Let the foolish world then be packing and seek out Medeas, Circes, Venuses, Auroras, and I know not what other fountains of restoring youth. I am sure I am the only person that both can,

and have, made it good. 'Tis I alone that have that wonderful juice with which Memnon's daughter prolonged the youth of her grandfather Tithon. I am that Venus by whose favor Phaon became so young again that Sappho fell in love with him. Mine are those herbs, if yet there be any such, mine those charms, and mine that fountain that not only restores departed youth but, which is more desirable, preserves it perpetual. And if you all subscribe to this opinion, that nothing is better than youth or more execrable than age, I conceive you cannot but see how much you are indebted to me, that have retained so great a good and shut out so great an evil.

But why do I altogether spend my breath in speaking of mortals? View heaven round, and let him that will reproach me with my name if he find any one of the gods that were not stinking and contemptible were he not made acceptable by my deity. Why is it that Bacchus is always a stripling, and bushy-haired? but because he is mad, and drunk, and spends his life in drinking, dancing, revels, and May games, not having so much as the least society with Pallas. And lastly, he is so far from desiring to be accounted wise that he delights to be worshiped with sports and gambols; nor is he displeased with the proverb that gave him the surname of fool, "A greater fool than Bacchus;" which name of his was changed to Morychus, for that sitting before the gates of his temple, the wanton country people were wont to bedaub him with new wine and figs. And of scoffs, what not, have not the ancient comedies thrown on him? O foolish god, say they,

and worthy to be born as you were of your father's thigh! And yet, who had not rather be your fool and sot, always merry, ever young, and making sport for other people, than either Homer's Jupiter with his crooked counsels, terrible to everyone; or old Pan with his hubbubs; or smutty Vulcan half covered with cinders, or even Pallas herself, so dreadful with her Gorgon's head and spear and a countenance like bullbeef? Why is Cupid always portrayed like a boy, but because he is a very wag and can neither do nor so much as think of anything sober? Why Venus ever in her prime, but because of her affinity with me? Witness that color of her hair, so resembling my father, from whence she is called the golden Venus; and lastly, ever laughing, if you give any credit to the poets, or their followers the statuaries. What deity did the Romans ever more religiously adore than that of Flora, the foundress of all pleasure? Nay, if you should but diligently search the lives of the most sour and morose of the gods out of Homer and the rest of the poets, you would find them all but so many pieces of Folly. And to what purpose should I run over any of the other gods' tricks when you know enough of Jupiter's loose loves? When that chaste Diana shall so far forget her sex as to be ever hunting and ready to perish for Endymion? But I had rather they should hear these things from Momus, from whom heretofore they were wont to have their shares, till in one of their angry humors they tumbled him, together with Ate, goddess of mischief, down headlong to the earth, because his wisdom, forsooth, unseasonably disturbed their happiness. Nor since that

dares any mortal give him harbor, though I must confess there wanted little but that he had been received into the courts of princes, had not my companion Flattery reigned in chief there, with whom and the other there is no more correspondence than between lambs and wolves. From whence it is that the gods play the fool with the greater liberty and more content to themselves "doing all things carelessly," as says Father Homer, that is to say, without anyone to correct them. For what ridiculous stuff is there which that stump of the fig tree Priapus does not afford them? What tricks and legerdemains with which Mercury does not cloak his thefts? What buffoonery that Vulcan is not guilty of, while one with his polt-foot, another with his smutched muzzle, another with his impertinencies, he makes sport for the rest of the gods? As also that old Silenus with his country dances, Polyphemus footing time to his Cyclops hammers, the nymphs with their jigs, and satyrs with their antics; while Pan makes them all twitter with some coarse ballad, which yet they had rather hear than the Muses themselves, and chiefly when they are well whittled with nectar. Besides, what should I mention what these gods do when they are half drunk? Now by my troth, so foolish that I myself can hardly refrain laughter. But in these matters 'twere better we remembered Harpocrates, lest some eavesdropping god or other take us whispering that which Momus only has the privilege of speaking at length.

And therefore, according to Homer's example, I think it high time to leave the gods to themselves, and look down a

little on the earth; wherein likewise you'll find nothing frolic or fortunate that it owes not to me. So provident has that great parent of mankind, Nature, been that there should not be anything without its mixture and, as it were, seasoning of Folly. For since according to the definition of the Stoics, wisdom is nothing else than to be governed by reason, and on the contrary Folly, to be given up to the will of our passions, that the life of man might not be altogether disconsolate and hard to away with, of how much more passion than reason has Jupiter composed us? putting in, as one would say, "scarce half an ounce to a pound." Besides, he has confined reason to a narrow corner of the brain and left all the rest of the body to our passions; has also set up, against this one, two as it were, masterless tyrants—anger, that possesses the region of the heart, and consequently the very fountain of life, the heart itself; and lust, that stretches its empire everywhere. Against which double force how powerful reason is let common experience declare, inasmuch as she, which yet is all she can do, may call out to us till she be hoarse again and tell us the rules of honesty and virtue; while they give up the reins to their governor and make a hideous clamor, till at last being wearied, he suffer himself to be carried whither they please to hurry him.

But forasmuch as such as are born to the business of the world have some little sprinklings of reason more than the rest, yet that they may the better manage it, even in this as well as in other things, they call me to counsel; and I give them such as is worthy of myself, to wit, that they take to them a wife—a silly thing, God

wot, and foolish, yet wanton and pleasant, by which means the roughness of the masculine temper is seasoned and sweetened by her folly. For in that Plato seems to doubt under what genus he should put woman, to wit, that of rational creatures or brutes, he intended no other in it than to show the apparent folly of the sex. For if perhaps any of them goes about to be thought wiser than the rest, what else does she do but play the fool twice, as if a man should "teach a cow to dance," "a thing quite against the hair." For as it doubles the crime if anyone should put a disguise upon Nature, or endeavor to bring her to that she will in no wise bear, according to that proverb of the Greeks, "An ape is an ape, though clad in scarlet;" so a woman is a woman still, that is to say foolish, let her put on whatever vizard she please.

But, by the way, I hope that sex is not so foolish as to take offense at this, that I myself, being a woman, and Folly too, have attributed folly to them. For if they weigh it right, they needs must acknowledge that they owe it to folly that they are more fortunate than men. As first their beauty, which, and that not without cause, they prefer before everything, since by its means they exercise a tyranny even upon tyrants themselves; otherwise, whence proceeds that sour look, rough skin, bushy beard, and such other things as speak plain old age in a man, but from that disease of wisdom? Whereas women's cheeks are ever plump and smooth, their voice small, their skin soft, as if they imitated a certain kind of perpetual youth. Again, what greater thing do they wish in their whole lives than that they may please the man?

For to what other purpose are all those dresses, washes, baths, slops, perfumes, and those several little tricks of setting their faces, painting their eyebrows, and smoothing their skins? And now tell me, what higher letters of recommendation have they to men than this folly? For what is it they do not permit them to do? And to what other purpose than that of pleasure? Wherein yet their folly is not the least thing that pleases; which so true it is, I think no one will deny, that does but consider with himself, what foolish discourse and odd gambols pass between a man and his woman, as often as he had a mind to be gamesome? And so I have shown you whence the first and chiefest delight of man's life springs.

But there are some, you'll say, and those too none of the youngest, that have a greater kindness for the pot than the petticoat and place their chiefest pleasure in good fellowship. If there can be any great entertainment without a woman at it, let others look to it. This I am sure, there was never any pleasant which folly gave not the relish to. Insomuch that if they find no occasion of laughter, they send for "one that may make it," or hire some buffoon flatterer, whose ridiculous discourse may put by the gravity of the company. For to what purpose were it to clog our stomachs with dainties, junkets, and the like stuff, unless our eyes and ears, nay whole mind, were likewise entertained with jests, merriments, and laughter? But of these kind of second courses I am the only cook; though yet those ordinary practices of our feasts, as choosing a king, throwing dice, drinking healths,

trolling it round, dancing the cushion, and the like, were not invented by the seven wise men but myself, and that too for the common pleasure of mankind. The nature of all which things is such that the more of folly they have, the more they conduce to human life, which, if it were unpleasant, did not deserve the name of life; and other than such it could not well be, did not these kind of diversions wipe away tediousness, next cousin to the other.

But perhaps there are some that neglect this way of pleasure and rest satisfied in the enjoyment of their friends, calling friendship the most desirable of all things, more necessary than either air, fire, or water; so delectable that he that shall take it out of the world had as good put out the sun; and, lastly, so commendable, if yet that make anything to the matter, that neither the philosophers themselves doubted to reckon it among their chiefest good. But what if I show you that I am both the beginning and end of this so great good also? Nor shall I go about to prove it by fallacies, sorites, dilemmas, or other the like subtleties of logicians, but after my blunt way point out the thing as clearly as it were with my finger.

And now tell me if to wink, slip over, be blind at, or deceived in the vices of our friends, nay, to admire and esteem them for virtues, be not at least the next degree to folly? What is it when one kisses his mistress' freckle neck, another the wart on her nose? When a father shall swear his squint-eyed child is more lovely than Venus? What is this, I say, but mere folly? And so,

perhaps you'll cry it is; and yet 'tis this only that joins friends together and continues them so joined. I speak of ordinary men, of whom none are born without their imperfections, and happy is he that is pressed with the least: for among wise princes there is either no friendship at all, or if there be, 'tis unpleasant and reserved, and that too but among a very few 'twere a crime to say none. For that the greatest part of mankind are fools, nay there is not anyone that dotes not in many things; and friendship, you know, is seldom made but among equals. And yet if it should so happen that there were a mutual good will between them, it is in no wise firm nor very long lived; that is to say, among such as are morose and more circumspect than needs, as being eagle-sighted into his friends' faults, but so blear-eyed to their own that they take not the least notice of the wallet that hangs behind their own shoulders. Since then the nature of man is such that there is scarce anyone to be found that is not subject to many errors, add to this the great diversity of minds and studies, so many slips, oversights, and chances of human life, and how is it possible there should be any true friendship between those Argus, so much as one hour, were it not for that which the Greeks excellently call *euetheian*? And you may render by folly or good nature, choose you whether. But what? Is not the author and parent of all our love, Cupid, as blind as a beetle? And as with him all colors agree, so from him is it that everyone likes his own sweeter-kin best, though never so ugly, and "that an old man dotes on his old wife, and a boy on his girl." These things are not only done

everywhere but laughed at too; yet as ridiculous as they are, they make society pleasant, and, as it were, glue it together.

And what has been said of friendship may more reasonably be presumed of matrimony, which in truth is no other than an inseparable conjunction of life. Good God! What divorces, or what not worse than that, would daily happen were not the converse between a man and his wife supported and cherished by flattery, apishness, gentleness, ignorance, dissembling, certain retainers of mine also! Whoop holiday! how few marriages should we have, if the husband should but thoroughly examine how many tricks his pretty little mop of modesty has played before she was married! And how fewer of them would hold together, did not most of the wife's actions escape the husband's knowledge through his neglect or sottishness! And for this also you are beholden to me, by whose means it is that the husband is pleasant to his wife, the wife to her husband, and the house kept in quiet. A man is laughed at, when seeing his wife weeping he licks up her tears. But how much happier is it to be thus deceived than by being troubled with jealousy not only to torment himself but set all things in a hubbub!

In fine, I am so necessary to the making of all society and manner of life both delightful and lasting, that neither would the people long endure their governors, nor the servant his master, nor the master his footman, nor the scholar his tutor, nor one friend another, nor the wife her husband, nor the usurer the borrower, nor a soldier his commander, nor one companion

another, unless all of them had their interchangeable failings, one while flattering, other while prudently conniving, and generally sweetening one another with some small relish of folly.

And now you'd think I had said all, but you shall hear yet greater things. Will he, I pray, love anyone that hates himself? Or ever agree with another who is not at peace with himself? Or beget pleasure in another that is troublesome to himself? I think no one will say it that is not more foolish than Folly. And yet, if you should exclude me, there's no man but would be so far from enduring another that he would stink in his own nostrils, be nauseated with his own actions, and himself become odious to himself; forasmuch as Nature, in too many things rather a stepdame than a parent to us, has imprinted that evil in men, especially such as have least judgment, that everyone repents him of his own condition and admires that of others. Whence it comes to pass that all her gifts, elegancy, and graces corrupt and perish. For what benefit is beauty, the greatest blessing of heaven, if it be mixed with affectation? What youth, if corrupted with the severity of old age? Lastly, what is that in the whole business of a man's life he can do with any grace to himself or others—for it is not so much a thing of art, as the very life of every action, that it be done with a good mien—unless this my friend and companion, Self-love, be present with it? Nor does she without cause supply me the place of a sister, since her whole endeavors are to act my part everywhere. For what is more foolish than for a man to study nothing else than how to please himself? To

make himself the object of his own admiration? And yet, what is there that is either delightful or taking, nay rather what not the contrary, that a man does against the hair? Take away this salt of life, and the orator may even sit still with his action, the musician with all his division will be able to please no man, the player be hissed off the stage, the poet and all his Muses ridiculous, the painter with his art contemptible, and the physician with all his slip-slops go a-begging. Lastly, you will be taken for an ugly fellow instead of youthful, and a beast instead of a wise man, a child instead of eloquent, and instead of a well-bred man, a clown. So necessary a thing it is that everyone flatter himself and commend himself to himself before he can be commended by others.

Lastly, since it is the chief point of happiness "that a man is willing to be what he is," you have further abridged in this my Self-love, that no man is ashamed of his own face, no man of his own wit, no man of his own parentage, no man of his own house, no man of his manner of living, nor any man of his own country; so that a Highlander has no desire to change with an Italian, a Thracian with an Athenian, nor a Scythian for the Fortunate Islands. O the singular care of Nature, that in so great a variety of things has made all equal! Where she has been sometimes sparing of her gifts she has recompensed it with the more of self-love; though here, I must confess, I speak foolishly, it being the greatest of all other her gifts: to say nothing that no great action was ever attempted without my motion, or art brought to

perfection without my help.

Is not war the very root and matter of all famed enterprises? And yet what more foolish than to undertake it for I know what trifles, especially when both parties are sure to lose more than they get by the bargain? For of those that are slain, not a word of them; and for the rest, when both sides are close engaged "and the trumpets make an ugly noise," what use of those wise men, I pray, that are so exhausted with study that their thin, cold blood has scarce any spirits left? No, it must be those blunt, fat fellows, that by how much the more they exceed in courage, fall short in understanding. Unless perhaps one had rather choose Demosthenes for a soldier, who, following the example of Archilochius, threw away his arms and betook him to his heels e'er he had scarce seen his enemy; as ill a soldier, as happy an orator.

But counsel, you'll say, is not of least concern in matters of war. In a general I grant it; but this thing of warring is not part of philosophy, but managed by parasites, panders, thieves, cut-throats, plowmen, sots, spendthrifts, and such other dregs of mankind, not philosophers; who how unapt they are even for common converse, let Socrates, whom the oracle of Apollo, though not so wisely, judged "the wisest of all men living," be witness; who stepping up to speak somewhat, I know not what, in public was forced to come down again well laughed at for his pains. Though yet in this he was not altogether a fool, that he refused the appellation of wise, and returning it back to the

oracle, delivered his opinion that a wise man should abstain from meddling with public business; unless perhaps he should have rather admonished us to beware of wisdom if we intended to be reckoned among the number of men, there being nothing but his wisdom that first accused and afterwards sentenced him to the drinking of his poisoned cup. For while, as you find him in Aristophanes, philosophizing about clouds and ideas, measuring how far a flea could leap, and admiring that so small a creature as a fly should make so great a buzz, he meddled not with anything that concerned common life. But his master being in danger of his head, his scholar Plato is at hand, to wit that famous patron, that being disturbed with the noise of the people, could not go through half his first sentence. What should I speak of Theophrastus, who being about to make an oration, became as dumb as if he had met a wolf in his way, which yet would have put courage in a man of war? Or Isocrates, that was so cowhearted that he dared never attempt it? Or Tully, that great founder of the Roman eloquence, that could never begin to speak without an odd kind of trembling, like a boy that had got the hiccough; which Fabius interprets as an argument of a wise orator and one that was sensible of what he was doing; and while he says it, does he not plainly confess that wisdom is a great obstacle to the true management of business? What would become of them, think you, were they to fight it out at blows that are so dead through fear when the contest is only with empty words?

And next to these is cried up, forsooth, that goodly sentence

of Plato's, "Happy is that commonwealth where a philosopher is prince, or whose prince is addicted to philosophy." When yet if you consult historians, you'll find no princes more pestilent to the commonwealth than where the empire has fallen to some smatterer in philosophy or one given to letters. To the truth of which I think the Catoes give sufficient credit; of whom the one was ever disturbing the peace of the commonwealth with his hair-brained accusations; the other, while he too wisely vindicated its liberty, quite overthrew it. Add to this the Bruti, Casii, nay Cicero himself, that was no less pernicious to the commonwealth of Rome than was Demosthenes to that of Athens. Besides M. Antoninus (that I may give you one instance that there was once one good emperor; for with much ado I can make it out) was become burdensome and hated of his subjects upon no other score but that he was so great a philosopher. But admitting him good, he did the commonwealth more hurt in leaving behind him such a son as he did than ever he did it good by his own government. For these kind of men that are so given up to the study of wisdom are generally most unfortunate, but chiefly in their children; Nature, it seems, so providently ordering it, lest this mischief of wisdom should spread further among mankind. For which reason it is manifest why Cicero's son was so degenerate, and that wise Socrates' children, as one has well observed, were more like their mother than their father, that is to say, fools.

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