

The Anatomy of Melancholy

By Robert Burton, first published in 1621

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Extract

We have good laws, I deny not, to rectify such enormities, and so in all other countries, but it seems not always to good purpose. We had need of some general visitor in our age, that should reform what is amiss; a just army of Rosy-cross men, for they will amend all matters (they say) religion, policy, manners, with arts, sciences, &c. Another Attila, Tamerlane, Hercules, to strive with Achelous, Augeae stabulum purgare, to subdue tyrants, as [596]he did Diomedes and Busiris: to expel thieves, as he did Cacus and Lacinius: to vindicate poor captives, as he did Hesione: to pass the torrid zone, the deserts of Libya, and purge the world of monsters and Centaurs: or another Theban Crates to reform our manners, to compose quarrels and controversies, as in his time he did, and was therefore adored for a god in Athens. "As Hercules [597]purged the world of monsters, and subdued them, so did he fight against envy, lust, anger, avarice, &c. and all those feral vices and monsters of the mind." It were to be wished we had some such visitor, or if wishing would serve, one had such a ring or rings, as Timolaus desired in [598]Lucian, by virtue of which he should be as strong as 10,000 men, or an army of giants, go invisible, open gates and castle doors, have what treasure he would, transport himself in an instant to what place he desired, alter affections, cure all manner of diseases, that he might range over the world, and reform all distressed states and persons, as he would himself. He might reduce those wandering Tartars in order, that infest China on the one side, Muscovy, Poland, on the other; and tame the vagabond Arabians that rob and spoil those eastern countries, that they should never use more caravans, or janissaries to conduct them. He might root out barbarism out of America, and fully discover Terra Australis Incognita, find out the north-east and north-west passages, drain those mighty Maeotian fens, cut down those vast Hircinian woods, irrigate those barren Arabian deserts, &c. cure us of our epidemical diseases, scorbutum, plica, morbus Neapolitanus, &c. end all our idle controversies, cut off our tumultuous desires, inordinate lusts, root out atheism, impiety, heresy, schism and superstition, which now so crucify the world, catechise gross ignorance, purge Italy of luxury and riot, Spain of superstition and jealousy, Germany of drunkenness, all our northern country of gluttony and intemperance, castigate our hard-hearted parents, masters, tutors; lash disobedient children, negligent servants, correct these spendthrifts and prodigal sons, enforce idle persons to work, drive drunkards off the alehouse, repress thieves, visit corrupt and tyrannizing magistrates, &c. But as L. Licinius taxed Timolaus, you may us. These are vain, absurd and ridiculous wishes not to be hoped: all must be as it is, [599]Bocchalinus may cite commonwealths to come before Apollo, and seek to reform the world itself by commissioners, but there is no remedy, it may not be redressed, desinent homines tum demum stultescere quando esse desinent, so long as they can wag their beards, they will play the knaves and fools.

Because, therefore, it is a thing so difficult, impossible, and far beyond Hercules labours to be performed; let them be rude, stupid, ignorant, incult, lapis super lapidem sedeat, and as

the [600]apologist will, resp. tussi, et graveolentia laboret, mundus vitio, let them be barbarous as they are, let them [601]tyrannise, epicurise, oppress, luxuriate, consume themselves with factions, superstitions, lawsuits, wars and contentions, live in riot, poverty, want, misery; rebel, wallow as so many swine in their own dung, with Ulysses' companions, stultos jubeo esse libenter. I will yet, to satisfy and please myself, make an Utopia of mine own, a new Atlantis, a poetical commonwealth of mine own, in which I will freely domineer, build cities, make laws, statutes, as I list myself. And why may I not? — [602]Pictoribus atque poetis, &c. You know what liberty poets ever had, and besides, my predecessor Democritus was a politician, a recorder of Abdera, a law maker as some say; and why may not I presume so much as he did? Howsoever I will adventure. For the site, if you will needs urge me to it, I am not fully resolved, it may be in Terra Australi Incognita, there is room enough (for of my knowledge neither that hungry Spaniard, [603]nor Mercurius Britannicus, have yet discovered half of it) or else one of these floating islands in Mare del Zur, which like the Cyanian isles in the Euxine sea, alter their place, and are accessible only at set times, and to some few persons; or one of the fortunate isles, for who knows yet where, or which they are? there is room enough in the inner parts of America, and northern coasts of Asia. But I will choose a site, whose latitude shall be 45 degrees (I respect not minutes) in the midst of the temperate zone, or perhaps under the equator, that [604]paradise of the world, ubi semper virens laurus, &c. where is a perpetual spring: the longitude for some reasons I will conceal. Yet “be it known to all men by these presents,” that if any honest gentleman will send in so much money, as Cardan allows an astrologer for casting a nativity, he shall be a sharer, I will acquaint him with my project, or if any worthy man will stand for any temporal or spiritual office or dignity, (for as he said of his archbishopric of Utopia, 'tis sanctus ambitus, and not amiss to be sought after,) it shall be freely given without all intercessions, bribes, letters, &c. his own worth shall be the best spokesman; and because we shall admit of no deputies or advowsons, if he be sufficiently qualified, and as able as willing to execute the place himself, he shall have present possession. It shall be divided into 12 or 13 provinces, and those by hills, rivers, roadways, or some more eminent limits exactly bounded. Each province shall have a metropolis, which shall be so placed as a centre almost in a circumference, and the rest at equal distances, some 12 Italian miles asunder, or thereabout, and in them shall be sold all things necessary for the use of man; statis horis et diebus, no market towns, markets or fairs, for they do but beggar cities (no village shall stand above 6, 7, or 8 miles from a city) except those emporiums which are by the sea side, general staples, marts, as Antwerp, Venice, Bergen of old, London, &c. cities most part shall be situated upon

navigable rivers or lakes, creeks, havens; and for their form, regular, round, square, or long square, [605]with fair, broad, and straight [606]streets, houses uniform, built of brick and stone, like Bruges, Brussels, Rhegium Lepidi, Berne in Switzerland, Milan, Mantua, Crema, Cambalu in Tartary, described by M. Polus, or that Venetian Palma. I will admit very few or no suburbs, and those of baser building, walls only to keep out man and horse, except it be in some frontier towns, or by the sea side, and those to be fortified [607] after the latest manner of fortification, and situated upon convenient havens, or opportune places. In every so built city, I will have convenient churches, and separate places to bury the dead in, not in churchyards; a citadella (in some, not all) to command it, prisons for offenders, opportune market places of all sorts, for corn, meat, cattle, fuel, fish, commodious courts of justice, public halls for all societies, bourses, meeting places, armouries, [608]in which shall be kept engines for quenching of fire, artillery gardens, public walks, theatres, and spacious fields allotted for all gymnastic sports, and honest recreations, hospitals of all kinds, for children, orphans, old folks, sick men, mad men, soldiers, pest-houses, &c. not built precario, or by gouty benefactors, who, when by fraud and rapine they have extorted all their lives,

oppressed whole provinces, societies, &c. give something to pious uses, build a satisfactory alms-house, school or bridge, &c. at their last end, or before perhaps, which is no otherwise than to steal a goose, and stick down a feather, rob a thousand to relieve ten; and those hospitals so built and maintained, not by collections, benevolences, donaries, for a set number, (as in ours,) just so many and no more at such a rate, but for all those who stand in need, be they more or less, and that ex publico aerario, and so still maintained, non nobis solum nati sumus, &c. I will have conduits of sweet and good water, aptly disposed in each town, common [609] granaries, as at Dresden in Misnia, Stetein in Pomerland, Noremberg, &c. Colleges of mathematicians, musicians, and actors, as of old at Labedum in Ionia, [610]alchemists, physicians, artists, and philosophers: that all arts and sciences may sooner be perfected and better learned; and public historiographers, as amongst those ancient [611]Persians, qui in commentarios referebant quae memoratu digna gerebantur, informed and appointed by the state to register all famous acts, and not by each insufficient scribbler, partial or parasitical pedant, as in our times. I will provide public schools of all kinds, singing, dancing, fencing, &c. especially of grammar and languages, not to be taught by those tedious precepts ordinarily used, but by use, example, conversation, [612]as travellers learn abroad, and nurses teach their children: as I will have all such places, so will I ordain [613]public governors, fit officers to each place, treasurers, aediles, quaestors, overseers of pupils, widows' goods, and all public houses, &c. and those once a year to make strict accounts of all receipts, expenses, to avoid confusion, et sic fiet ut non absumant (as Pliny to Trajan,) quad pudeat dicere. They shall be subordinate to those higher officers and governors of each city, which shall not be poor tradesmen, and mean artificers, but noblemen and gentlemen, which shall be tied to residence in those towns they dwell next, at such set times and seasons: for I see no reason (which [614]Hippolitus complains of) "that it should be more dishonourable for noblemen to govern the city than the country, or unseemly to dwell there now, than of old." [615]I will have no bogs, fens, marshes, vast woods, deserts, heaths, commons, but all enclosed; (yet not depopulated, and therefore take heed you mistake me not) for that which is common, and every man's, is no man's; the richest countries are still enclosed, as Essex, Kent, with us, &c. Spain, Italy; and where enclosures are least in quantity, they are best [616]husbanded, as about Florence in Italy, Damascus in Syria, &c. which are liker gardens than fields. I will not have a barren acre in all my territories, not so much as the tops of mountains: where nature fails, it shall be supplied by art: [617]lakes and rivers shall not be left desolate. All common highways, bridges, banks, corrivations of waters, aqueducts, channels, public works, buildings, &c. out of a [618]common stock, curiously maintained and kept

in repair; no depopulations, engrossings, alterations of wood, arable, but by the consent of some supervisors that shall be appointed for that purpose, to see what reformation ought to be had in all places, what is amiss, how to help it, et quid quaeque ferat regio, et quid quaeque recuset, what ground is aptest for wood, what for corn, what for cattle, gardens, orchards, fishponds, &c. with a charitable division in every village, (not one domineering house greedily to swallow up all, which is too common with us) what for lords, [619]what for tenants; and because they shall be better encouraged to improve such lands they hold, manure, plant trees, drain, fence, &c. they shall have long leases, a known rent, and known fine to free them from those intolerable exactions of tyrannizing landlords. These supervisors shall likewise appoint what quantity of land in each manor is fit for the lord's demesnes, [620]what for holding of tenants, how it ought to be husbanded, ut [621]magnetis equis, Minyae gens cognita remis, how to be manured, tilled, rectified, [622]hic segetes veniunt, illic felicius uvae, arborei foetus alibi, atque injussa virescunt Gramina, and what proportion is fit for all callings, because private professors are many times idiots, ill husbands,

oppressors, covetous, and know not how to improve their own, or else wholly respect their own, and not public good.

*Utopian parity is a kind of government, to be wished for, [623]rather than effected, Respub. Christianopolitana, Campanella's city of the Sun, and that **new Atlantis**, witty fictions, but mere chimeras; and Plato's community in many things is impious, absurd and ridiculous, it takes away all splendour and magnificence. I will have several orders, degrees of nobility, and those hereditary, not rejecting younger brothers in the mean time, for they shall be sufficiently provided for by pensions, or so qualified, brought up in some honest calling, they shall be able to live of themselves. I will have such a proportion of ground belonging to every barony, he that buys the land shall buy the barony, he that by riot consumes his patrimony, and ancient demesnes, shall forfeit his honours. [624]As some dignities shall be hereditary, so some again by election, or by gift (besides free officers, pensions, annuities,) like our bishoprics, prebends, the Bassa's palaces in Turkey, the [625]procurator's houses and offices in Venice, which, like the golden apple, shall be given to the worthiest, and best deserving both in war and peace, as a reward of their worth and good service, as so many goals for all to aim at, (honos alit artes) and encouragements to others. For I hate these severe, unnatural, harsh, German, French, and Venetian decrees, which exclude plebeians from honours, be they never so wise, rich, virtuous, valiant, and well qualified, they must not be patricians, but keep their own rank, this is naturae bellum inferre, odious to God and men, I abhor it. My form of government shall be monarchical.*

[626]nunquam libertas gratior extat, Quam sub Rege pio, &c.