

TMReader Manners Part 3

78. "Sickness and God (Our Chief Jailor)"

[From *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* ; Works, pp. 1245b-1246b]

[Anthony] "And thus while God our King and Our Chief Jailor too suffereth us and letteth us alone we ween ourselves at liberty and we abhor the state of those whom we call prisoners, taking ourselves for no prisoners at all.

In which false persuasion of wealth and forgetfulness of our own wretched state which is but a wandering about for a while in this prison of this world till we be brought unto the execution of death, while we forget with our folly both ourselves and our jail and our under-jailors, angels and devils both, and Our Chief Jailor, God, too; God that forgetteth not us but seeth us all the while well enough and being sore discontent to see so shrewd rule kept in the jail (besides that he sendeth the hangman, Death, to put to execution here and there sometimes by the thousands at once). He handleth many of the remnant whose execution he forbearth yet unto a further time, even as hardily and punisheth them as sore in this common prison of the world as there are any handled in those special prisons which for the hard handling used (you say) therein, your heart hath in such horror and so sore abhorreth."

[Vincent] "The remnant will I not gainsay: for (methinketh) I see it so indeed. But that God Our Chief Jailor in this world useth any such prisonly fashion of punishment, that point must I needs deny. For I neither see him lay any man in the stocks or strike fetters on his legs or so much as shut him up in a chamber either."

[Anthony] "Is he no minstrel, Cousin, that playeth not on an harp? Maketh no man melody but he that playeth on a lute? He may be a minstrel and make melody, you wot well, with some other instrument, some strange-fashioned, peradventure that never was seen before.

"God, our Chief Jailor, as Himself is invisible, so useth he in his punishments invisible instruments and therefore not of like fashion as the other jailors do but yet of like effect and as painful in feeling as those. For He layeth on of his prisoners with an hot fever as evil as his ease in a warm bed as the other jailor layeth his on the cold ground. He wringeth them by the brows with a migraine; He collareth them by the neck with a quinsy; He bolteth them by the arms with a palsy, that they cannot lift their hands to their heads; He manacleth their hands with the gout in their fingers; He wringeth them by the legs with the cramp in their shins; He bindeth them to the bed-board with the crick in the back, and layeth one there along, and as unable to rise, as though he lay fast by the feet in the stocks.

"Some prisoner of another jail singeth, danceth in his two fetters and feareth not his feet for stumbling at a stone, while God's prisoner that hath his one foot fettered with the gout lieth groaning on a couch and quaketh and crieth out, if he fear there would fall on his foot no more but a cushion.

"And therefore, Cousin, as I said, if we consider it well we shall find this general prison of this whole earth a place in which the prisoners be as sore-handled as they be in the other. And even in the other some make as merry, too, as there do some in this that are very merry at large out of that."

NOTES

(1) **Some other instrument, some strange-fashioned** : It is difficult to conjecture what instruments More may have been thinking of. The early Tudor musical scene was replete with a variety of curious instruments such as the loud ones—trumpets, clarions, sackbuts, drums, bells, etc; and the softer ones—citterns, rebecs, lutes, portable organs, etc. John Stevens (p. 237) records a musical event "When Prince Arthur married Katherine of Aragon in 1501, a water-pageant included 'the most goodly and pleasaunt mirthe of trumpetts, clarions, shalmewes, tabers, recorders and other dyvyrs instruments [which] noyse uppon the water hath not been hard the like'".

(2) **The gout** , which causes inflammation of the joints, especially of the great toe, laid low many a man in More's time (as in our time!); among its victims were Henry VII, who postponed his marriage on account of a severe attack of gout; the Papal legate, Campeggio, who arrived in London to establish a court to try Henry VIII's divorce "sore vexed with the gout"; as well as Charles V; his son, Philip II, Martin Luther, and John Calvin (W.S.C. Copeman, pp. 55-59). Even Mehmed the Conqueror of Constantinople, who died in 1481, suffered acute attack of gout, especially painful while riding horseback to battle. *The Praise of the Gout, or, the Gout's Apologie* (1617) sums up common attitudes towards the painful and embarrassing disease: "I [i.e., "Dame Gout"] also teach them the art of Rhetoric for I am not ignorant thereof, as far as is requisite for us Females to know: for as soon as a man is taken with the Gout, I presently furnish him with the matter of excuse out of the very bowels of Rhetoric, for they are ashamed to confess my disease: one saith, that he wrung his foot with a strait boot; another that he hurt his toe against a stone; another saith, with a slide he hath wrested his ankle; another, that he took a fall..."(p. 19). As Falstaff well knew, the gout played the rogue with many a great toe.

(3) While writing in the Tower of London, More himself suffered stoically several of the ailments he mentions in this passage. Margaret Roper talked with her father "first of his diseases both in his breast of old, and his reins [kidneys] now, by reason of gravel and stone, and of the cramp also that divers nights gripeth him in his legs...sometimes very sore, and sometimes little grief...." (*Works* , p. 1435).

79. "God, Our Great Physician"

[From *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* ; Works, p. 1142b]

And therefore, as I say, for the lack of these things, + all their comfortable counsels are very far insufficient. Howbeit, though they be far unable to cure our diseases of themselves and therefore are not sufficient to be taken for our physicians, some good drugs have they yet in their shops for

which they may be suffered to dwell among our pothecaries (if their medicines be made not of their own brains but after the bills made by the Great Physician, God, prescribing the medicines Himself and correcting the faults of their erroneous receipts), for without that way taken with them they shall not fail to do as many blind pothecaries do, which either for lucre or of a foolish pride, give sick folk medicines of their own devising, and therewith kill up in corners many such simple folk as they find so foolish to put their lives in such lewd and unlearned blind bayards' hands.

NOTES

(1) In More's day pharmacy was divorced from medicine, and the number of quack druggists was large. Even Henry VIII, having studied alchemy as a young man, was fond of dabbling in the apothecary's art, and he took delight in the invention of plasters, one of which was called appropriately "the King's Majesty's own Plaster." It contained not only pearls but guaicum, the miracle ingredient recommended for syphilis and gout, imported from Brazil.

80. "Suicide"

[From *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*; Works, pp. 1188b-1189a]

But least you might reject both these examples, weening they were but feigned tales, I shall put you in remembrance of one which I reckon yourself have read in the *Collations* of Cassianus; and if you have not, there you may soon find it. For myself have half forgotten the thing, it is so long since I read it. But thus much I remember that he telleth there of one that was many days a very special holy man in his living, and, among the other virtuous monks and ankerers that lived there in wilderness, was marvelously much esteemed, saving that some were not all out of fear of him, lest his revelations whereof he told many by himself would prove illusions of the devil.

And so proved it after indeed. For the man was by the devil's subtle suggestions brought into such an high spiritual pride that in conclusion the devil brought him to that horrible point, that he made him go kill himself. And as far as my mind giveth me now without new sight of the book—he brought him to it by this persuasion, that he made him believe that it was God's will he should so do, and that thereby should he go straight to heaven. And then if it were by that persuasion (with which he took very great comfort in his own mind himself), then was it, as I said, out of our case, and needed not comfort but counsel against giving credence to the devil's persuasion.

"But, marry, if he made him first perceive how he had been deluded and then tempted him to his own death by shame and by despair, then was it within our matter, lo, for then was his temptation fallen down from pride to pusillanimity and was waxen that kind of the night's fear that I spake of, wherein a good part of the counsel that were to be given him should have need to stand in good comforting; for then was he brought into right sore tribulation.

"But (as I was about to tell you) strength of heart and courage is there none therein, not only for that very strength (as it hath the name of virtue in a reasonable creature) can never be without

prudence, but also for that (as I said) even in them that seem men of most hardiness it shall well appear, to them that well weigh the matter, that the mind (whereby they be led to destroy themselves) groweth of pusillanimity and very foolish fear. Take for the example Cato Uticensis, which in Africa killed himself after the great victory that Julius Caesar had. Saint Austin well declareth in his work *De civitate dei* that there was no strength nor magnanimity therein, but plain pusillanimity and impotency of stomach, whereby he was forced to the destruction of himself because his heart was too feeble for to bear the beholding of another man's glory or the suffering of other worldly calamities, that he feared should fall on himself."

NOTES

(1) **These examples** : Anthony refers to two tales already told: the Carpenter's wife that would be killed, and the rich widow that would be a martyr (see above, nos. 2 and 3).

(2) **John Cassian** (d. 435), one of the founders of monasticism in the west, wrote a series of dialogues involving pious hermitic fathers of Egypt. More alludes to Cassian's "Death of the old man Heron" (*Collationes* , Part II ["Of Discretion"], chapter 5). Heron was the victim of diabolical illusions, an angel of Satan being received as if he were an angel of light.

(3) The report of **Cato Uticensis's suicide** as told by Appian is horrendous. After Caesar's victory in 46 B.C. at the Battle of Thapsus, Cato bathed, dined, conversed with colleagues, embraced his son and then returned to rest and to read Plato's "Treatise on the Soul." On finishing the dialogue he stabbed himself under the breast, but his physicians replaced the protruding intestines and sewed him up. Once alone, Cato tore off the bandage, reopened the wound and enlarged it with his own finger nails. He then tore out his own entrails and at last [happily] expired. (*Appian, The Civil Wars* , II. xix. 97-99, trans., H. White, III,405-411).

(4) **De civitate dei** : St. Augustine in *The City of God* (Book I, chapter 23) asks "What we are to think of the example of Cato, who slew himself because he was unable to endure Caesar's victory?" and answers that Cato was ashamed that this glory should be Caesar's. Cato's suicide is one of several notable examples Augustine records in his discussion of suicide in chapters 17-27 of Book I. (As noted above (No. 46, n. 3) More lectured on *The City of God*).

81. "Merry Tales Serve for Sauce, not Meat"

[From *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* ; Works, pp. 1170b-1172a]

[Vincent] "And first, good uncle, ere we proceed further, I will be bold to move you one thing more of that we talked when I was here before. For when I revolved in my mind again the things that were concluded here by you, methought ye would in no wise that in any tribulation men should seek for comfort either in worldly things or fleshly. Which mind, Uncle, of yours, seemeth somewhat hard, for a merry tale with a friend refresheth a man much, and without any harm lighteth his mind, and amendeth his courage and his stomach, so that it seemeth but well done to take such recreation. And Solomon saith, " I trow, that men should in heaviness give the sorry man wine to make him forget his sorrow. And Saint Thomas saith that proper pleasant

talking...is a good virtue serving to refresh the mind and make it quick and lusty " to labor and study again, where continual fatigation would make it dull and deadly."

[Anthony] "Cousin, I forget not that point, but I longed not much to touch it, for neither might I well utterly forbear it, where the cause might hap to fall [so] that it should not hurt; and on the other side, if the case so should fall, methought yet it should little need to give any man counsel to it: folk are prone enough to such fantasies of their own mind, you may see this by yourselves which, coming now together to talk of as earnest sad " matter as men can devise, were fallen yet even at the first into wanton idle tales. And of truth, cousin, as you know very well, myself am of nature even half a giglot " and more. I would I could as easily mend my fault as I well know it, but scant can I refrain it as old a fool as I am. Howbeit, so partial will I not be to my fault as to praise it. But for that you require my mind in the matter whether men in tribulation may not lawfully seek recreation and comfort themselves with some honest mirth, first agreed that our chief comfort must be in God and that with Him we must begin, and with Him continue, and with Him end also.

"A man to take now and then some honest worldly mirth, I dare not be so sore as utterly to forbid it, sith good men and well learned have in some cases allowed it, specially for the diversity of divers " men's minds. For else if we were all such [good men] (as would God we were, and such as natural wisdom would we should be, and is not all clean excusable that we be not indeed), I would then put no doubt but that unto any man the most comfortable talking that could be were to hear of heaven; whereas now, God help us, our wretchedness is such that in talking a while thereof men wax almost weary; and, as though to hear of heaven were an heavy burden, they must refresh themselves after with a foolish tale.

"Our affection toward heavenly joys waxeth wonderful cold. If dread of hell were as far gone, very few would fear God, but that yet a little sticketh in our stomachs, mark me, Cousin, [when] at the sermon, and commonly towards the end somewhat, the preacher speaketh of hell and heaven. Now while he preacheth of the pains of hell still they stand and yet give him the hearing. But as soon as he cometh to the joys of heaven, they be busking them backwards " and flockmeal fall away. " It is in the soul somewhat as it is in the body.

"Some are there of nature or of evil custom come to that point that a worse thing sometimes more steadeth " them then a better. Some man if he be sick can away " with no wholesome meat nor no medicine can down with him. But if it be tempered with some such thing for his fantasy as maketh the meat or the medicine less wholesome than it should be. And yet while it will be no better, we must let him have it so.

"Cassianus, that very virtuous man, rehearseth in a certain collation of his, that a certain holy father in making of a sermon spake of heaven and heavenly things so celestially that much of his audience, with the sweet sound thereof, began to forget all the world and fall asleep. Which when the father beheld, he dissembled " their sleeping and suddenly said unto them, 'I shall tell you a merry tale.' At which word they lift up their heads and hearkened unto that. And after the sleep therewith broken, heard him tell on of heaven again.

"In what wise that good father rebuked then their untoward minds so dull unto the thing that all

our life we labor for and so quick and lusty toward other trifles, I neither bear in mind nor shall here need to rehearse!

"But thus much of that matter sufficeth for our purpose, that whereas you demand me whether in tribulation men may not sometimes refresh themselves with worldly mirth and recreation? I can no more say but he that cannot long endure to hold up his head and hear talking of heaven except he be now and then between (as though heaven were heaviness) refreshed with a merry foolish tale, there is none other remedy but you must let him have it: Better would I wish it, but I cannot help it.

"Howbeit, let us by mine advice at the leastwise make those kinds of recreation as short and as seldom as we can. Let them serve us but for sauce and make them not our meat. And let us pray unto God, and all our good friends for us, that we may feel such a savor in the delight of heaven that in respect of the talking of the joys thereof, all worldly recreation be but a grief to think on. And be sure, Cousin, that if we might once purchase the grace to come to that point, we never found of worldly recreation so much comfort in a year as we should find in the bethinking us of heaven in less than half an hour."

NOTES

(1) **pleasant talking:** The term in Greek is related to the Greek verb..." to be witty, ready, quick with an answer." (The folio text reading of the Greek is incomprehensible and has been corrected, following Aquinas.)

(2) **Saint Thomas**, i.e., his **Summa Theologica**, II.ii. Qt. 168, 2: "Whether there can be a virtue about games. Obj. The Philosopher [i.e., Aristotle] says there cannot be. On the contrary, Augustine says [*Music* . ii.15]:'I pray thee, spare thyself at times; for it becomes a wise man sometimes to relax the high pressure of his attention to work.... Therefore it becomes a wise and virtuous man to have recourse to such things at times.' Moreover the Philosopher [*Ethic* . ii.7, iv.8] assigns to games the virtue of ? _ which we may call pleasantness" [Aquinas, (XIII, 296) 1933].

(3) The phrase, "**giglot and more**," is probably another joke on More's name in Greek (*moros*, "fool"), "thus, More, "a merry man and yet a fool."

(4) **Cassianus:** The anecdote is told by John Cassian (see above, No. 80, n. 2) in *De Institutione Coenobiorum [Of the Monastic Institution]*, Book V (" *De Spiritu Gastrimargie* " ["On the Nature of Gluttony"]), Chapter 40: An old man tells how monks fall into a lethargy during a sermon but are awakened suddenly upon hearing a frivolous story. "On the Nature of Gluttony" is the first of eight principal vices discussed by Cassian, and is followed by fornication, sloth, avarice, anger, despair [excessive melancholy, an additional Deadly vice], envy and pride. (In Shakespeare's day Philip Stubbes in his popular if puritanical *Anatomy of the Abuses in England* similarly associates side by side fornication with gluttony: "The horryble vice of Whordome in Ailgna", a long section, is followed immediately by "Gluttonie and drunkennese").

(5) **Let them serve us but for sauce...":** Sir Thomas More was personally concerned with the

bringing up of his four children "whom he would often exhort to take virtue and learning for their meat, and play for their sauce," according to William Roper (edd. R. Sylvester and D.P. Harding, 1962, p. 199.)

¹ Tonsillitis, or simply, sore throat

² *Gout...fingers* : i.e., arthritis

³ *Crick...back* : stiffness, or ruptured disc

⁴ *These things* : i.e., the means of true spiritual comfort (More's general topic in *A*

Dialogue)

⁵ List of drugs

⁶ Prescriptions

⁷ *Kill...corners* : covertly exterminate

⁸ *Blind bayards'* : blind bay horses', i.e., in reckless apothecaries' hands

⁹ I.e., John Cassian (died 435): see note

¹⁰ Cowardliness

¹¹ *Proverbs 31:6*— "*Give strong drink to the desperate and wine to the embittered.*"

¹² Vigorous, anxious

¹³ Wise

¹⁴ A very merry man

¹⁵ *Diversity of divers* : (tautology) i.e., a variety of various kinds of men

¹⁶ *Busking them backwards* : i.e., hurrying in the opposite direction

¹⁷ *Flockmeal fall away* : i.e., in large crowds, depart

¹⁸ Profits

¹⁹ Put up

²⁰ Ignored