

Part 2--Of Pride and Envy

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Of Pride. Now since I have somewhat laid afore thy face the bodily pains of death, the troubles and vexations spiritual that come therewith by thy ghostly enemy the devil, the unrestful cumbrance of thy fleshly friends, the uncertainty of thyself, how soon this dreadful time shall come, that thou art ever sick of that incurable sickness by which, if none other come, thou shalt yet in few years undoubtedly die, and yet, moreover, that thou art already dying, and ever hast been since thou first beganst to live,—let us now make some proof of this one part of our medicine, how the remembrance of death, in this fashion considered in his kind, will work with us to the preservation of our souls from every kind of sin, beginning at the sin that is the very head and root of all sins, that is to wit, pride, the mischievous mother of all manner vice.

I have seen many vices ere this that at the first seemed far from pride, and yet well considered to the uttermost it would well appear that of that root they sprang. As for wrath and envy [they] be the known children of pride, as rising of an high estimation of ourselves. But what should seem farther from pride than drunken gluttony? And yet shall ye find more that drink themselves sow drunk of pride to be called good fellows, than for lust of the drink self. So spreadeth this cursed root of pride his branches into all other kinds, besides his proper malice for his own part, not only in high mind of fortune, rule and authority, beauty, wit, strength, learning, or such other gifts of God, but also the false pride of hypocrites, that feign to have the virtues that they lack: and the perilous pride of them that for their few spotted virtues, not without the mixture of other mortal vices, take themselves for quick ¹ saints on earth, proudly judging the lives of their even ² Christians, disdain other men's virtue, envying other men's praise, bearing implacable anger where they perceive themselves not accepted and set by after the worthiness of their own estimation. Which kind of spiritual pride, and thereupon following envy and wrath, is so much the more pestilent in that it carrieth with it a blindness almost incurable, save ³ God's great mercy. For the lecher knoweth he doth naught, ⁴ and hath remorse thereof; the glutton perceiveth his own fault, and sometimes thinketh it beastly; the slothful body misliketh his dulness, and thereby is moved to mend. But this kind of pride, that in his own opinion taketh himself for holy, is farthest from all recovery. For how can he mend his fault that taketh it for none, that weeneth all is well that he doth himself, and nothing that any man doth else, that covereth his purpose with the pretext of some holy purpose that he will never begin while he liveth, taketh his envy for an holy desire to get before his neighbour in virtue, and taketh his wrath and anger for an holy zeal of justice, and thus, while he proudly liketh his vices, he is out all the way to mend them; in so far forth that I surely think there be some who had in good faith made the best merchandise that ever they made in their lives for their own souls, if they had changed those spiritual vices of pride, wrath, and envy for the beastly carnal sins of gluttony, sloth and lechery. Not that these three were good, which be undoubtedly damnable, but for that like as God said in the Apocalypse unto the Church of Laodicea: "Thou art neither hot nor cold but lukewarm, I would thou were cold that thou mightst wax warm;" ⁵ signifying that if he were in open and manifest sins, he would have more occasion to call fervently for grace and help,—so, if these

folk had these carnal sins, they could not be ignorant of their own faults. For, as Saint Paul saith, the fleshly sins be easy to perceive, ⁶ and so should they have occasion to call for grace and wax good, where now, by their pride taking themselves for good where they be naught, ⁷ they be far from all occasion of amendment, saving the knocking of our Lord, which always standeth at the door of man's heart and knocketh, Whom I pray God we may give ear unto and let Him in. And one of His good and gracious knocking is the putting us in remembrance of death, which remembrance, as I have said, let us see what stead it may stand us in against this cursed sin of pride. And surely against this last branch of pride, of such as repute themselves for holy, with the disdain of others, and an inward liking of all their spiritual vices, which they commend unto themselves under the cloak and shadow of some kind of virtue, most hard it is to take remedy by the remembrance of death, forasmuch as they reckon themselves thereby ready to go straight to heaven. But yet if they consider the labour and solicitation of our ghostly enemy, the devil, that shall at the time of their death be busy to destroy the merits and good works of all their life before, and that subtlest craft and most venomous dart and the most for them to avoid, shall be, under the colour of a faithful hope of heaven, as a thing more than due to their own holiness, to send them wretchedly to the fire of hell for their sinful and wilful blind presumption, I say, the remembrance and consideration of this perilous point and fearful jeopardy likely to fall on them at the time of their death, is a right effectual ointment long before in their life to wear away the web that covereth the eyes of their souls in such wise as they cannot with a sure sight look upon their own conscience.

As for all other kinds of pride, rising of beauty, strength, wit, or cunning, methinketh that the remembrance of death may right easily mend it, since that they be such things as shall shortly by death lose all their gloss, the owners wot ne'er how soon.

And as lightly may there, by the same consideration, be cured the pride of these foolish proud hypocrites, which are yet more fools than they that plainly follow the ways of the world and pleasure of their body. For they, though they go to the devil therefor, yet somewhat they take therefor. These mad hypocrites be so mad that where they sink in hell as deep as the others, yet in reward of all their pain taken in this world they be content to take the vain praise of the people, a blast of wind of their mouths, which yet, percase, praise them not but call them as they be. And if they do, yet themselves hear it not often. And sure they be that within short time death shall stop their ears and the clods cover all the mouths that praise them. Which, if they well and advisedly considered, they would, I ween, turn their appetites from the laud of silly ⁸ mortal men, and desire to deserve their thanks and commendation of God only, Whose praise can never die.

Now the high mind of proud fortune, rule, and authority, Lord God, how slight a thing it would seem to him that would often and deeply remember the death that shall shortly take away all this royalty, and his glory shall, as the Scripture saith, never walk with him into the grave ⁹; but he that overlooketh ¹⁰ every man, and no man may be so homely to come too near him, but thinketh that he doth much for them whom he vouchsafeth to take by the hand or beck upon, whom so many men dread and fear, so many wait upon,—he shall within a few years, and only God knoweth within how few days, when death arresteth him, have his dainty body turned into stinking carrion, be borne out of his princely palace, laid in the ground and there left alone, where every lewd lad will be bold to tread on his head. Would not, ween ye, the deep consideration of this sudden change so surely to come and so shortly to come, withdraw the wind

that puffeth us up in pride upon the solemn sight of worldly worship? " If thou shouldst perceive that one were earnestly proud of the wearing of the gay golden gown, while the lord " playeth the lord in a stage play, wouldst thou not laugh at his folly, considering that thou art very sure that when the play is done he shall go walk a knave in his old coat? Now thou thinkest thyself wise enough while thou art proud in thy player's garment, and forgettest that when thy play is done, thou shalt go forth as poor as he. Nor thou remembreth not that thy pageant may happen to be done as soon as his.

We shall leave the example of plays and players, which be too merry for this matter. I shall put thee a more earnest image of our condition, and that not a feigned similitude but a very true fashion and figure of our worshipful estate. Mark this well, for of this thing we be very sure, that old and young, man and woman, rich and poor, prince and page, all the while we live in this world we be but prisoners, and be within a sure prison, out of which there can no man escape. And in worse case be we than those that be taken and imprisoned for theft. For they, albeit their heart heavily harkeneth after the sessions, yet have they some hope either to break prison the while, or to escape there by favour, or after condemnation some hope of pardon. But we stand all in other plight: we be very sure that we be already condemned to death, some one, some other, none of us can tell what death we be doomed to, but surely can we all tell that die we shall. And clearly know we that of this death we get no manner pardon. For the King by Whose high sentence we be condemned to die, would not of this death pardon His own Son. As for escaping, no man can look for. The prison is large and many prisoners in it, but the gaoler can lose none; he is so present in every place that we can creep into no corner out of his sight. For as holy David saith to this gaoler, "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit and whither shall I flee from Thy face?" " —as who saith, nowhither. There is no remedy, therefore, but as condemned folk and remediless in this prison of the earth we drive forth awhile, " some bound to a post, some wandering abroad, some in the dungeon, some in the upper ward, some building them bowers and making palaces in the prison, some weeping, some laughing, some labouring, some playing, some singing, some chiding, some fighting, no man, almost, remembering in what case he standeth, till that suddenly, nothing less looking for, young, old, poor and rich, merry and sad, prince, page, pope and poor soul priest, now one, now other, sometimes a great rabble at once, without order, without respect of age or of estate, all stripped stark naked and shifted out in a sheet, be put to death in divers wise in some corner of the same prison, and even there thrown in an hole, and either worms eat him under ground, or crows above. Now come forth, ye proud prisoner, for I wis ye be no better, look ye never so high, when ye build in the prison a palace for your blood, is it not a great royalty if it be well considered? Ye build the Tower of Babylon in a corner of the prison, and be very proud thereof; and sometime the gaoler beateth it down again with shame. Ye leave your lodging for your own blood; and the gaoler, when ye be dead, setteth a strange prisoner in your building, and thrusteth your blood into some other cabin. Ye be proud of the arms of your ancestors set up in the prison; and all your pride is because ye forget that it is a prison. For if ye took the matter aright, the place a prison, yourself a prisoner condemned to death, from which ye cannot escape, ye would reckon this gear as worshipful as if a gentleman thief, when he should go to Tyburn, would leave for a memorial the arms of his ancestors painted on a post in Newgate. Surely, I suppose that if we took not true figure for a fantasy, but reckoned it as it is indeed, the very express fashion and manner of all our estate, men would bear themselves not much higher in their hearts for any rule or authority that they bear in this world, which they may well perceive to be indeed no better but one prisoner bearing a rule among the remnant, as the

tapster doth in the Marshalsea; or at the uttermost, one so put in trust with the gaoler that he is half an under-gaoler over his fellows, till the sheriff and the cart come for him.

Of Envy. Now let us see what help we may have of this medicine against the sickness of envy, which is undoubtedly both a sore torment and a very consumption. For surely envy is such a torment as all the tyrants of Sicily never devised a sorer. And it so drinketh up the moisture of the body and consumeth the good blood, so discoloureth the face, so defaceth the beauty, so disfigureth the visage, leaving it all bony, lean, pale, and wan, that a person well set awork with envy needeth none other image of death than his own face in a glass. This vice is not only devilish, but also very foolish. For albeit that envy, where it may over, ¹⁵ doth all the hurt it can, yet since the worst most commonly envieth the better, and the feebler the stronger, it happeth, for the more part, that as the fire of the burning hill of Etna burneth only itself, so doth the envious person fret, fume, and burn in his own heart, without ability or power to do the other hurt. And little marvel it is though envy be an ungracious graft ¹⁶; for it cometh of an ungracious stock. It is the first begotten daughter of pride, begotten in bastardy and incest by the devil, father of them both. For as soon as the devil had brought out his daughter, pride, without wife, of his own body, like as the venomous spider bringeth forth her cobweb, when this poisoned daughter of his had helped him out of heaven, at the first sight of Adam and Eve in paradise set in the way to such worship, ¹⁷ the devil anon took his own unhappy daughter to wife, and upon pride begat envy; by whose enticement he set upon our first parents in paradise, and by pride supplanted them, and there gave them so great a fall by their own folly that unto this day all their posterity go crooked thereof. And therefore ever since, envy goeth forth mourning at every man's welfare: more sorry of another man's wealth than glad of her own, of which she taketh no pleasure if other folk fare well with her. In so far forth that one Publius, a Roman, when he saw one Publius Mutius sad and heavy, whom he knew for an envious person, "Surely," quoth he, "either [he] hath a shrewd ¹⁸ turn himself, or some man else a good turn," noting that his envious nature was as sorry of another man's weal as of his own hurt.

I cannot here, albeit I nothing less intend than to meddle much with secular authors in this matter, yet can I not here hold my hand from the putting in remembrance of a certain fable of Aesop; it expresseth so properly the nature, the affection, and the reward of two capital vices, that is to wit, envy and covetousness. Aesop, therefore, as I think ye have heard, feigneth that one of the paynim gods came down into earth, and finding together in a place two men, the one envious, the other covetous, showed himself willing to give each of them a gift, but there should but one of them ask for them both; but look, whatsoever that one that should ask would ask for himself, the other should have the selfsame thing doubled. When this condition was offered, then began there some courtesy between the envious and covetous, whether of them should ask: for that would not the covetous be brought unto for nothing, because himself would have his fellow's request doubled. And when the envious man saw that, he would provide that his fellow should have little good of the doubling of his petition. And forthwith he required, for his part, that he might have one of his eyes put out. By reason of which request, the envious man lost one eye, and the covetous lost both. Lo, such is the wretched appetite of this cursed envy, ready to run into the fire, so he may draw his neighbour with him. Which envy is, as I have said, and as Saint Austin saith, the daughter of pride, in so far forth that, as this holy doctor saith: strangle the mother and thou destroyest the daughter. And therefore, look what manner consideration, in the remembrance of death, shall be medicinable against the pestilent swelling sore of pride, the

selfsame considerations be the next ¹⁹ remedies against the venomous vice of envy. For whosoever envy another, it is for something whereof himself would be proud if he had it. Then, if such considerations of death as we have before spoken of in the repressing of pride should make thee set neither much by those things, nor much the more by thyself for them if thyself hadst them, it must needs follow that the selfsame considerations shall leave thee little cause to envy the selfsame things in any other man. For thou wouldst not, for shame, that men should think thee so mad to envy a poor soul for playing the lord one night in an interlude. And also couldst thou envy a perpetual sick man, a man that carrieth his death's wound with him, a man that is but a prisoner damned to death, a man that is in the cart already carrying forward? For all these things are, as I think, made meetly probable to thee before. It is also to be considered that since it is so that men commonly envy their betters, the remembrance of death should of reason be a great remedy thereof. For I suppose, if there were one right far above thee, yet thou wouldst not greatly envy his estate, if thou thoughtst that thou mightst be his match ²⁰ the next week. And why shouldst thou then envy him now, while thou seest that death may make you both matches the next night, and shall undoubtedly within few years? If it so were that thou knewest a great Duke, ²¹ keeping so great estate and princely port in his house that thou, being a right mean man hadst in thine heart a great envy thereat, and specially at some special day in which he keepeth for the marriage of his child a great honourable court above other times; if thou being thereat, and at the sight of the royalty and honour shown him of all the country about resorting to him, while they kneel and crouch to him and at every word barehead begrace him, if thou shouldst suddenly be surely advertised, that for secret treason, lately detected to the King, he should undoubtedly be taken the morrow, his court all broken up, his goods seized, his wife put out, his children disinherited, himself cast into prison, brought forth and arraigned, the matter out of question, and he should be condemned, his coat armour reversed, his gilt spurs hewn off his heels, himself hanged, drawn, and quartered, how thinkest thou, by thy faith, amid thine envy shouldst thou not suddenly change into pity?

Surely so is it that if we considered everything aright and esteemed it after the very nature, not after men's false opinion, since we be certain that death shall take away all that we envy any man for, and we be uncertain how soon, and yet very sure that it shall not be long, we should never see cause to envy any man, but rather to pity every man, and those most that most hath to be envied for, since they be those that shortly shall most lose.

Of Wrath. Let us now somewhat see how this part of our medicine that is to wit, the remembrance of death, may cure us of the fierce ragious ²² fever of wrath. For wrath is undoubtedly another daughter of pride. For albeit that wrath sometimes riseth upon a wrong done us, as harm to our person, or loss in our goods, which is an occasion given us and it often sudden, by reason whereof the sin is somewhat less grievous, the rule of reason being letted for the while by the sudden brunt of the injury, not forethought upon but coming upon us unprovided,--yet shall ye find that in them which have so turned an evil custom into nature that they seem now naturally disposed to wrath and waywardness, the very root of that vice is pride, although their manner and behaviour be such beside, that folk would little ween it. For go they never so simply, look they never so lowly, yet shall ye see them at every light occasion testy. They cannot abide one merry word that toucheth them, they cannot bear in reasoning to be contraried, but they fret and fume if their opinion be not accepted and their invention be not magnified.

Whereof riseth this waywardness, but of a secret root of setting much by themselves, by which it goeth to their heart when they see any man less esteem them than they seem worthy to themselves?

Wilt thou also well perceive that the setting by ourselves is more than half the weight of our wrath? We shall prove it by them that would haply say nay. Take me one that reckoneth himself for worshipful, and look whether he shall not be much more wroth with one opprobrious and rebukeful word, as 'knave,' 'percase,' or 'beggar' (in which is no great slander) spoken to his face by one that he reckoneth but his match or far under him, than with the selfsame word spoken to him by one that he knoweth and acknowledgeth for a great deal his better.

We see this point confirmed by all the laws made among men, which laws, forasmuch as the actions of trespass be given to revenge men not of the wrongs only done unto them in their bodies or their goods, but also of their contumelies, griefs, and despites, whereby they conceive any displeasure at heart, lest in lack of law to do it for them, they should in following their irous²³ affection, revenge themselves immoderately with their own hands,--the laws, I say, considereth, pondereth, and punisheth the trespasses done to every man, not only after the hurt that is done or loss that is taken, but an if it be such as the party grieved is like to be wroth withal, the punishment is aggrieved or diminished, made less or more, after the difference in degree of worship and reputation between the parties. And this is the provision of the laws almost in every country, and hath been afore Christ was born; by which it appeareth by a common consent that a man's own estimation, setting by himself, disdaineth to take rebuke of one worse than himself, maketh his wrath the sorer.

For the assuaging whereof, the law contenteth him with the larger punishment of the offender.

And this so far forth that in Spain it is sorer taken, and sorer punished, if one give another a dry blow with his fist, than if he draw blood upon him with a sword. The cause is none other but the appeasing of his mind that is so stricken, forasmuch as commonly they take themselves for so very manly men that three strokes with a sword could not anger one of them so much as that it should appear that by a blow given him with a bare hand any man should so far reckon him for a boy that he would not vouchsafe to draw any weapon at him.

So that, as I said, it well appeareth by the common confession of the world, expressed and declared by their laws, that the point and readiness that men have to wax angry groweth of the secret pride by which we set overmuch by ourselves. And like as that kind of good anger that we call a good zeal riseth of that we set, as we should do, so much by our Lord God that we cannot be but wroth with them whom we see set so little by Him that they let not to break His high commandments,--so riseth of much setting by ourselves that affection of anger, by which we be moved against them with ire and disdain that displease us and show by their behaviour that they set less by us than our proud heart looketh for. By which though we mark it not, yet indeed we reckon ourselves worthy more reverence than we do God Himself only.

I doubt not but men will say nay; and I verily believe that they think nay; and the cause is, for that we perceive not of what root the branches of our sins spring. But will ye see it proved that it is so? Look whether we be not more angry with our servants for the breach of one commandment

of our own than for the breach of God's all ten; and whether we be not more wroth with one contumelious or despiteful word spoken against ourselves than with many blasphemous words unreverently spoken of God. And could we, trow ye, be more moved with the diminishing of our own worship than God's, or look to have our own commandments better obeyed than God's, if we did not indeed set more by ourselves than Him?

And therefore this deadly sore of wrath, of which so much harm groweth, that maketh men unlike themselves, that maketh us like wood ²⁴ wolves or furies of hell, that driveth us forth headlong upon sword points, that maketh us blindly run forth upon other men's destruction with our own ruin, is but a cursed branch rising and springing out of the secret root of pride.

And like as it is in physic a special thing necessary to know where and in what place of the body lieth the beginning, and, as it were, the fountain of the sore from which the matter is always ministered unto the place where it appeareth (for the fountain once stopped, the sore "shall soon heal of itself, the matter failing that fed it,--which continually resorting ²⁵ from the fountain to the place, men may well daily purge and cleanse the sore, but they shall hardly heal it), likewise, I say, fareth it by the sore of the soul: if we perceive once the root and dig up that, we be very sure the branches be surely gone. But while the root remaineth, while we cut off the branches, we let ²⁶ well the growing and keep it somewhat under, but fail they may not always to spring again.

And therefore, since this ungracious branch of wrath springeth out of the cursed root of pride and setting much by ourselves, so secretly lurking in our heart that uneth ²⁷ we can perceive it ourselves, let us pull up well the root, and surely the branch of wrath shall soon wither away. For taken once away the setting by ourselves, we shall not greatly dote upon that we set little by.

So shall there of such humility, contempt and abjection of ourselves shortly follow in us high estimation, honour, and love of God, and every other creature in order for His sake, as they shall appear more or less lief ²⁸ unto Him.

And since by the destruction of pride followeth, as I have said, the destruction of wrath, we shall apply to the repression of wrath the selfsame considerations in the remembrance of death that we before have shown to serve to the repression of pride. For who could be angry for the loss of goods, if he well remembered how little while he should keep them, how soon death might take them from him? Who could set so much by himself, to take to heart a lewd, rebukeful word spoken to his face, if he remembered himself to be as he is, a poor prisoner damned to death; or so very wroth as we be now with some bodily hurt done us upon some one part of the body, if we deeply remembered that we be, as we be indeed, already laid in the cart carrying towards execution.

And if the wretchedness of our own estate nothing moved us, which being such as it is, should if it were well pondered, make us little regard the causes of our wrath, considering that all the while we live we be but in dying, yet might the state of him that we be wroth withal, make us ashamed to be wroth. For who would not disdain to be wroth with a wretched prisoner, with him that is in the cart and in the way to hanging, with him that were a-dying? And of this would a man be the more ashamed, if he considered in how much peril and jeopardy of himself his own life and his own soul is, while he striveth, chideth and fighteth with another, and that oftentimes for

how very ²⁹ trifles. First, shame were it for men to be wroth like women, for fantasies and things of naught, if there were no worse therein. And now shall ye see men fall at variance for kissing of the pax, or going before in procession, or setting of their wives' pews in the church. Doubt ye whether this wrath be pride? I doubt not but wise men will agree that it is either foolish pride or proud folly.

How much is it now the more folly, if we consider that we be but going in pilgrimage and have here no dwelling-place, then, to chide and fight for such follies by the way. How much more shame and folly is it yet, when we be going together to our death, as we be indeed.

If we should see two men fighting together for very great things, yet would we reckon them both mad, if they left not off when they should see a ramping lion coming on them both, ready to devour them both. Now when we see surely that the death is coming on us all and shall undoubtedly within short space devour us all, and how soon we know not all, is it not now more than madness to be wroth and bear malice one to another, and for the more part for as very trifles, as children should fall at variance for cherry-stones, death coming, as I say, upon us to devour us all?

If these things and such others as they be very true, so they were well and deeply remembered, I little doubt but they would both abate the crooked branch of wrath and pull up from the bottom of the heart the cankered root of pride.

From *The English Works of Sir Thomas More*, vol. 1, edited by W. E. Campbell. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1931, pp. 476-486.

¹ living.

² fellow.

³ without.

⁴ evil.

⁵ Apoc. iii. 16.

⁶ Gal. v. 19.

⁷ Apoc. iii. 17.

⁸ simple, poor.

⁹ Ps. iv. 8.

¹⁰ looks down on.

¹¹ honour, dignity.

¹² worthless fellow, rogue.

¹³ Ps. cxxxix. 7.

¹⁴ drag along for a time.

¹⁵ prevail, have dominion.

¹⁶ shoot.

¹⁷ honour.

¹⁸ ill, bad.

¹⁹ nearest, best.

²⁰ equal.

²¹ See Introduction, p. 21.

²² raging.

²³ angry.

²⁴ mad.

²⁵ returning

²⁶ prevent.

²⁷ scarcely.

²⁸ dear

²⁹ what mere.