

THE COMPLAINT OF PEACE.

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Translated from the
QUERELA PACIS (A. D. 1521)
of
ERASMUS

CHICAGO LONDON
THE OPEN COURT PUBLISHING CO.

1917

PUBLISHERS' PREFACE.

THIS translation of the *Querela Pacis* of Erasmus is reprinted from a rare old English version. It is probably the 1802 reprint of the translation made by T. Paynell but published anonymously. We are indebted to Mr. C. K. Ogden, editor of the *Cambridge Magazine*, for calling our attention to this quaint and timely publication and for furnishing the typewritten copy.

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THE COMPLAINT OF PEACE.

(Peace speaks in her own person.)

THOUGH I certainly deserve no ill treatment from mortals, yet if the insults and repulses I receive were attended with any advantage to them, I would content myself with lamenting in silence my own unmerited indignities and man's injustice. But since, in driving me away from them, they remove the source of all human blessings, and let in a deluge of calamities on themselves, I am more inclined to bewail their misfortune, than complain of ill usage to myself; and I am reduced to the necessity of weeping over and commiserating those whom I wished to view rather as objects of indignation than of pity.

For though rudely to reject one who loves them as I do, may appear to be savage cruelty; to feel an aversion for one who has deserved so well of them, base ingratitude; to trample on one who has nursed and fostered them with all a parent's care, an unnatural want of filial affection; yet voluntarily to renounce so many and so great advantages as I always bring in my train, to go in quest

of evils infinite in number and shocking in nature, how can I account for such perverse conduct, but by attributing it to downright madness? We may be angry with the wicked, but we can only pity the insane. What can I do but weep over them? And I weep over them the more bitterly, because they weep not for themselves. No part of their misfortune is more deplorable than their insensibility to it. It is one great step to convalescence to know the extent and inveteracy of a disease.

Now, if I, whose name is Peace, am a personage glorified by the united praise of God and man, as the fountain, the parent, the nurse, the patroness, the guardian of every blessing which either heaven or earth can bestow; if without me nothing is flourishing, nothing safe, nothing pure or holy, nothing pleasant to mortals, or grateful to the Supreme Being; if, on the contrary, war is one vast ocean, rushing on mankind, of all the united plagues and pestilences in nature; if, at its deadly approach, every blossom of happiness is instantly blasted, every thing that was improving gradually degenerates and dwindles away to nothing, every thing that was firmly supported totters on its foundation, every thing that was formed for long duration comes to a speedy end, and every thing that was sweet by nature is turned into bitterness; if war is so unhallowed that it becomes the deadliest bane of piety and religion; if there is nothing more calamitous to mortals, and more detestable to heaven, I ask, how in the name of God, can I believe those beings to be rational creatures; how can I believe them to be otherwise than stark mad; who, with such a waste of treasure, with so ardent

a zeal, with so great an effort, with so many arts, so much anxiety, and so much danger, endeavour to drive me away from them, and purchase endless misery and mischief at a price so high?

If they were wild beasts who thus despised and rejected me, I could bear it more patiently; because I should impute the affront to nature, who had implanted in them so savage a disposition. If I were an object of hatred to dumb creatures, I could overlook their ignorance, because the powers of mind necessary to perceive my excellence have been denied to them. But it is a circumstance equally shameful and marvellous, that though nature has formed one animal, and one alone, with powers of reason, and a mind participating of divinity; one animal, and one alone, capable of sentimental affection and social union; I can find admission among the wildest of wild beasts, and the most brutal of brutes, sooner than with this one animal; the rational, immortal animal called man.

Among the celestial bodies that are revolving over our heads, though the motions are not the same, and though the force is not equal, yet they move, and ever have moved, without clashing, and in perfect harmony. The very elements themselves, though repugnant in their nature, yet, by a happy equilibrium, preserve eternal peace; and amid the discordancy of their constituent principles, cherish, by a friendly intercourse and coalition, an uninterrupted concord.

In living bodies, how all the various limbs harmonize, and mutually combine, for common defence against injury! What can be more hetero-

geneous, and unlike, than the body and the soul? and yet with what strong bonds nature has united them, is evident from the pang of separation. As life itself is nothing else but the concordant union of body and soul, so is health the harmonious co-operation of all the parts and functions of the body.

Animals destitute of reason live with their own kind in a state of social amity. Elephants herd together; sheep and swine feed in flocks; cranes and crows take their flight in troops; storks have their public meetings to consult previously to their emigration, and feed their parents when unable to feed themselves; dolphins defend each other by mutual assistance; and everybody knows, that both ants and bees have respectively established by general agreement, a little friendly community.

But I need dwell no longer on animals, which, though they want reason, are evidently furnished with sense. In trees and plants one may trace the vestiges of amity and love. Many of them are barren, unless the male plant is placed on their vicinity. The vine embraces the elm, and other plants cling to the vine. So that things which have no powers of sense to perceive any thing else, seem strongly to feel the advantages of union.

But plants, though they have not powers of perception, yet, as they have life, certainly approach very nearly to those things which are endowed with sentient faculties. What then is so completely insensible as stony substance? yet even in this, there appears to be a desire of union. Thus the loadstone attracts iron to it, and holds it fast in its embrace, when so attracted. Indeed, the

attraction of cohesion, as a law of love, takes place throughout all inanimate nature.

I need not repeat, that the most savage of the savage tribes in the forest, live among each other in amity. Lions show no fierceness to the lion race. The boar does not brandish his deadly tooth against his brother boar. The lynx lives in peace with the lynx. The serpent shews no venom in his intercourse with his fellow serpent; and the loving kindness of wolf to wolf is proverbial.

But I will add a circumstance still more marvellous. The accursed spirits, by whom the concord between heaven and human beings was originally interrupted, and to this day continues interrupted, hold union with one another, and preserve their usurped power, such as it is, by unanimity!¹

Yet man to man, whom, of all created beings, concord would most become, and who stands most in need of it, neither nature, so powerful and irresistible in every thing else, can reconcile; neither human compacts unite; neither the great advantages which would evidently arise from unanimity combine, nor the actual feeling and experience of the dreadful evils of discord cordially endear. To all men the human form is the same, the sound made by the organs of utterance similar; and while other species of animals differ from each other chiefly in the shape of their bodies, to men alone is given a reasoning power, which is indeed common to all men, yet in a manner so exclusive, that it is not at the same time common

¹ Thus Milton:

“O shame to men! Devil with devil damned
Firm concord holds; men only disagree.”

to any other living creature. To this distinguished being is also given the power of speech, the most conciliating instrument of social connection and cordial love.

Throughout the whole race of men are sown by nature the seeds of virtue, and of every excellent quality. From nature man receives a mild and gentle disposition, so prone to reciprocal benevolence that he delights to be loved for the pleasure of being loved, without any view to interest; and feels a satisfaction in doing good, without a wish or prospect of remuneration. This disposition to do disinterested good, is natural to man, unless in a few instances, where, corrupted by depraved desires, which operate like the drugs of Circe's cup, the human being has degenerated to the brute. Hence even the common people, in the ordinary language of daily conversation, denominate whatever is connected with mutual good will, humane; so that the word humanity no longer describes man's nature, merely in a physical sense; but signifies humane manners, or a behaviour, worthy the nature of man, acting his proper part in civil society.

Tears also are a distinctive mark fixed by nature, and appropriated to her favourite, man. They are a proof of placability, a forgiving temper; so that if any trifling offence be given or taken, if a little cloud of ill humour darken the sunshine, there soon falls a gentle shower of tears, and the cloud melts into a sweet serenity.

Thus it appears, in what various ways nature has taught man her first great lesson of love and union. Nor was she content to allure the benevolence by the pleasurable sensations attending it;

nor did she think she has done enough, when she rendered friendship pleasant; and therefore she determined to make it necessary. For this purpose, she so distributed among various men different endowments of the mind and the body, that no individual should be so completely furnished with all of them, but that he should want the occasional assistance of the lowest orders, and even of those who are most moderately furnished with ability. Nor did she give the same talents either in kind or in degree to all, evidently meaning that the inequality of her gifts should be ultimately equalized by a reciprocal interchange of good offices and mutual assistance. Thus, in different countries, she has caused different commodities to be produced, that expediency itself might introduce commercial intercourse.

She furnished other animals with appropriate arms or weapons for defence or offence, but man alone she produced unarmed, and in a state of perfect imbecillity, that he might find his safety in association and alliance with his fellow-creatures. It was necessity which led to the formation of communities; it was necessity which led communities to league with each other, that, by the union of their force, they might repel the incursion either of wild beasts or banditti. So that there is nothing in the whole circle of human affairs, which is entirely sufficient of itself for self-maintenance, or self-defence.

In the very commencement of life, the human race had been extinct, unless conjugal union had continued the race. With difficulty could man be born into the world, or as soon as born would

he die, leaving life at the very threshold of existence, unless the friendly hand of the careful matron, and the affectionate assiduities of the nurse, lent their aid to the helpless babe. To preserve the poor infant, Nature has given the fond mother the tenderest attachment to it, so that she loves it even before she sees it.

Nature, on the other hand, has given the children a strong affection for the parent, that they may become supports, in their turn, to the imbecillity of declining age; and that thus filial piety may remunerate (after the manner of the stork) to the second childhood of decrepitude, the tender cares experienced in infancy from parental love. Nature has also rendered the bonds both of kindred and affinity strong; a similarity of natural disposition, inclinations, studies, nay of external form, becomes a very powerful cause of attachment; and there is a secret sympathy of minds, a wonderful lure to mutual affection, which the ancients, unable to account for, attributed, in their admiration of it, to the tutelar genius, or the guardian angel.

By such and so many plain indications of her meaning has Nature taught mankind to seek peace, and ensure it. She invites them to it by various allurements, she draws them to it by gentle violence, she compels them to it by the strong arm of necessity. After all, then, what infernal being, all-powerful in mischief, bursting every bond of nature asunder, fills the human bosom with an insatiable rage for war? If familiarity with the sight had not first destroyed all surprise at it, and custom, soon afterwards, blunted the sense of its

evil, who could be prevailed upon to believe that those wretched beings are possessed of rational souls, the intellects and feelings of human creatures, who contend, with all the rage of furies, in everlasting feuds, and litigations, ending in murder! Robbery, blood, butchery, desolation, confound, without distinction, every thing sacred and profane. The most hallowed treaties, mutually confirmed by the strongest sanctions, cannot stop the enraged parties from rushing on to mutual destruction, whenever passion or mistaken interest urges them to the irrational decision of the battle.

Though there were no other motive to preserve peace, one would imagine that the common name of man might be sufficient to secure concord between all who claim it. But be it granted that Nature has no effect on men as men, (though we have seen that Nature rules as she ought to do in the brute creation), yet, must not Christ therefore avail with christians? Be it granted that the suggestions of nature have no effect with a rational being, (though we see them have great weight even on inanimate things without sense) yet, as the suggestions of the christian religion are far more excellent than those of nature, why does not the christian religion persuade those who profess it, of a truth which it recommends above all others, that is, the expediency and necessity of *peace on earth*, and *good-will towards men*; or at least, why does it fail of effectually dissuading from the unnatural, and more than brutal, madness of waging war?

When I, whose name is Peace, do but hear the

word Man pronounced, I eagerly run to him as to a being created purposely for me, and confidently promising myself, that with him I may live for ever in uninterrupted tranquillity; but when I also hear the title of Christian added to the name of Man, I fly with additional speed, hoping that with christians I may build an adamantine throne, and establish an everlasting empire.

But here also, with shame and sorrow, I am compelled to declare the result. Among Christians, the courts of justice, the palaces of princes, the senate-houses, and the churches, resound with the voice of strife, more loudly than was ever heard among nations who knew not Christ. Insomuch that though the multitude of wrangling advocates always constituted a great part of the world's misfortune, yet even this number is nothing compared with the successive inundation of suitors always at law.

I behold a city enclosed with walls. Hope springs in my bosom that men, christian men, must live in concord here, if any where, surrounded, as they are, by the same ramparts, governed by the same laws, embarked, as it were, in the same bottom, in the voyage of life, and therefore exposed to one common danger. But, ill-fated as I am, here also I find all happiness vitiated by dissension, that I can scarcely discover a single tenement in which I can take up my residence for the space of a few days only, unmolested.

But I leave the common people, who are tossed about, like the waves, by the winds of passion. I enter the courts of kings as into a harbour, from

the storm of folly. Here, say I to myself, here must be a place for Peace to lodge in. These personages are wiser than the vulgar; they are the minds of the commonalty, the eyes of the people. They claim also to be the vicegerents of Him who was the teacher of charity, the Prince of Peace, from whom I come with letters of recommendation, addressed, indeed, in general, to all men, but more particularly to such as these.

Appearances, on my entrance into the palace, promise well. I see men saluting each other with the blandest, softest, gentlest expressions of respect and love; I see them shaking hands, and embracing with the most ardent professions of esteem; I see them dining together, and enjoying convivial pleasures in high glee and jollity; I see every outward sign of the kindest offices and humanity; but sorry am I to add, that I do not see the least symptom of sincere friendship. It is all paint and varnish. Every thing is corrupted by open faction, or by secret grudges and animosities. In one word, so far am I from finding in the palaces of princes a habitation for Peace, that in them I discover all the embryos, seminal principles, and sources of all the wars that ever cursed mankind, and desolated the universe.

Unfortunate as I am in my researches for a place to rest in, whither shall I next repair? I failed among kings, it is true; but perhaps the epithet great belongs to kings, rather than good, wise, or learned; and perhaps they are more under the influence of caprice and passion than of sound and sober discretion. I will repair to the learned world. It is said, learning makes the man; phi-

losophy, something more than man; and theology exalts man to the divine nature. Harassed as I am with the research, I shall surely find among these a safe retreat to rest my head in undisturbed repose.

Here also I find war of another kind, less bloody indeed, but not less furious. Scholar wages war with scholar; and, as if truth could be changed by change of place, some opinions must never pass over the sea, some never can surmount the Alps, and others do not even cross the Rhine; nay, in the same university, the rhetorician is at variance with the logician, and the theologian with the lawyer. In the same kind of profession, the scotist contends with the thomist, the nominalist with the realist, the platonic with the peripatetic; insomuch that they agree not in the minutest points, and often are at daggers drawing *de lana caprina*, till the warmth of disputation advances from argument to abusive language, and from abusive language to fisty-cuffs; and, if they do not proceed to use real swords and spears, they stab one another with pens dipt in the venom of malice; they tear one another with biting libels, and dart the deadly arrows of their tongues against their opponent's reputation.

So often disappointed, whither shall I repair? Whither, but to the houses of religion? Religion! that anchor in the storm of life? The profession of religion is indeed common to all christians; but they who come recommended to us under the appellation of priests, profess it in a more peculiar manner, by the name they bear, the service they perform, and the ceremonies they observe.

When I take a view of them at a distance, every outward and visible sign makes me conclude, that among them, at least, I shall certainly find a safe asylum. I like the looks of their white surplices; for white is my own favourite colour. I see figures of the cross about them, all symbolical of peace. I hear them all calling one another by the pleasant name of brother, a mark of extraordinary goodwill and charity; I hear them salute each other with the words, "Peace be unto you": apparently happy in an address so ominous of joy. I see a community of all things; I see them incorporated in a regular society, with the same place of worship, the same rules, and the same daily congregation. Who can avoid being confidently certain that here, if no where else in the world, a habitation will be found for peace?

O, shame to tell! there is scarcely one man in these religious societies that is on good terms with his own bishop; though even this might be passed over as a trifling matter, if they were not torn to pieces by party disputes among each other. Where is the priest to be found, who has not a dispute with some other priest? Paul thinks it an insufferable enormity that a christian should go to law with a christian; and shall a priest contend with a priest, a bishop with a bishop? But perhaps it may be offered as an apology for these men, that, by long intercourse with men of the world, and by possessing such things as the world chiefly values, they have gradually adopted the manners of the world, even in the retreat of the church and the cloister. To themselves I leave

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