

MELANCHOLY

PETER DE LA PRIMAUDAYE: The French Academy †

Of the blood and of other humors in the body . . .

We understand by a *Humor*, a liquid and running body into which the food is converted in the liver, to this end: that bodies might be nourished and preserved by them. And as there are four elements of which our bodies are compounded, so there are four sorts of humors answerable to their natures, being all mingled together with the blood, as we may see by experience in blood let out of one's body. For uppermost we see as it were a little skim like to the flower or working of new wine, or of other wine when it is poured forth. Next, we may see as it were small streams of water mingled with the blood. And in the bottom is seen a black and thicker humor, like to the lees of wine in a wine vessel. So that if we know how to consider wisely of these things, it will be easy for us to understand the distinction of these sundry humors, and their nature. Now, concerning the first of them, we are to know that the proper nature of blood is to be hot and moist, wherein it answereth to the nature of air. It is temperate, sweet, and fatty, as also the best and chiefest part of nourishment. For albeit all the other humors do nourish likewise, and are carried of the blood, nevertheless that humor which is properly called blood is the chiefest part of nourishment. * * * Next, that thin skim which is seen on the top of it, resembling the flower of wine, is that humor that is called yellow choler, or the choleric humor, which is hot and dry, of a bitter taste, and answerable to the nature of fire. * * * Moreover, those small streams of water which we see mingled in the blood proceed of the phlegmatic humor that is cold and moist, like to water of whose nature it holdeth * * * and without taste, or as some affirm, it is somewhat brackish, but not fatty. Lastly, the black humor and most earthy, which looketh like the very bottom of a deep, red, and thick wine, or like the lees in a vessel full of wine or oil, is the melancholic humor, or as some term it, black choler, being cold and dry like to the earth, with which it hath some agreement, and of taste somewhat sharp.

Of the diverse temperatures and complexions of men, according to the humors that bear most sway in them . . .

* * * But we account those natures to be well tempered which approach nearest to the perfect temperature. And as every humor ruleth more or

† Translated by "T. B. C.," London, 1594. The first extract is from 2, 64 (pp. 358–59); the second from 2, 68 (pp. 380–82).

less in every one, so he is called either sanguine, or phlegmatic, or choleric, or melancholic. Again, as the other humors bear sway next unto the principal, so is a man said to be either phlegmatic-sanguine, choleric-sanguine, or melancholic-sanguine. The like may be said of the other humors according to their temperature, as also of the affections which have some agreement with them. Hereof it is that, when there is excess of the phlegmatic humor in men, their natures are commonly slothful, they shun labor and give themselves to bodily pleasures, they love dainties, and delicate meats and drinks, they are tender and effeminate, and clean contrary to stout and valiant men. And if there be excess of the choleric humor, their natures are easily provoked and stirred up to wrath, but their anger is as a fire of thorns that, being soon kindled and making a great noise, is by and by quenched again. Their gestures also are more quick and vehement, and their hastiness is commonly foolish and turbulent. They babble much, and are like to vessels full of holes, unable to hold in and keep any secret matter. They are fierce in assailing, but inconstant in sustaining the assault, in some sort resenting the nature of dogs, which bark and bite if they can, and afterward fly away. And if there be excess of the melancholic humor, the natures of such are sad, still hard to please, suspicious, conceited, obstinate, some more and some less. And if the choleric and melancholic humors be corrupt and mingled together, their natures become monstrous, proud, full of envy, fraud, subtilities, venomous and poisonous, hateful and diabolical. And when the malignant spirits know men's nature thus disposed, no doubt but they take occasion thereby to intermingle themselves, if God permit them, and propose to use them for the punishing of men: I say they will join themselves unto them, and make them their instruments, as God on the other side useth those natures that are most moderate and best tempered, making them instruments of his glory.

Now, we may call to mind what we learned before almost to the same end, touching the means whereby evil spirits might trouble the imagination, fantasy and minds of men. We may say as much of the humors of the body, whose motions and nature they know very well. Whereby they can so much the more easily abuse them in their damnable work—and will, as we may judge by the example of him that was possessed and lunatic, of whom the Evangelists make mention.² * * * And by that which they wrote of him, it seemeth that he was subject to the falling sickness, that returneth oftentimes according to the course of the moon, which naturally hath great affinity with the humors, and great power over them. And therefore it is very likely that the evil spirit which tormented this poor lunatic watched the occasions of his disease to afflict him the more, and to cause him to fall either in the fire or in the water, as he did indeed, thereby to work his death. * * * Which example show-

eth unto us what is the malice of the devil, what pleasure he taketh in hurting of men, what means and what occasions he seeketh for and maketh choice of, and what access unto us we may offer him through our corrupt nature, through our vices and sins, and through our inclinations and manners that are naturally evil and perverse, if God letteth him loose the bridle by his just judgment. * * * For this cause, we ought to take good heed that we give not our common enemy those occasions that he seeketh to have from us, to the end that he abuse us not, nor anything that is ours, and which God hath bestowed upon us. This is the reason why the consideration of our temperature, complexion, and natural inclination is very necessary for us: because the knowledge hereof affordeth unto us many good instruments that may stand us in great stead throughout our whole life, as well for the preservation of the health of our bodies, as for the rule and government of our affections and manners, as also in regard of the familiarity and acquaintance which we have one with another. For through the contemplation hereof, we may know, not only the causes of health and sickness, of the life and death of the body, but also of that of the soul. For as the good humors corrupt in our bodies according as we have heard, and breed in them sundry diseases, which finally lead them unto death; even so by means of sin all those good and natural affections, which ought to be the seeds of virtue in us, are corrupted and turn into vices, that are the diseases of the soul, and bring unto it the second and eternal death: as, contrariwise, virtues are the health and life thereof.

TIMOTHY BRIGHT: A Treatise of Melancholy †

How melancholy altereth those actions which rise out of the brain.

Touching actions which rise from the brain, melancholy causeth dullness of conceit,¹ both by reason the substance of the brain in such persons is more gross, and their spirit not so prompt and subtle as is requisite for ready understanding. Again, almost all the senses standing in a kind of passive nature, a substance cold and dry—and by consequent hard—is not so meet thereto; which, as it serveth well to retain that which is once engraven, so like adamant it keepeth, in comparison of other temper, that which once it hath received: whereby as they are unfit to commit readily to memory, so retain they that is committed in surer custody. Sometime it falleth out that melancholy men are found very witty, and quickly discern, either because the humor of melancholy with some

1. Ingenerious.

2. See Matthew 17:14-18, Mark 9:14-29, Luke 9:37-42.

London, 1586. This extract is from chapter 22, pp. 129-31. 1. Apprehension.

heat is so made subtle that, as from the driest wood riseth the clearest flame, and from the lees of wine is distilled a strong and burning aqua vitae, in like sort their spirits, both from the dryness of the matter, and straining of the gross substance from which they pass, receiving a pureness, are instruments of such sharpness, which is the dry light that Hercules, are instruments of such sharpness, which is the dry light that Hercules approved. To this, other reasons may be added, as: exercise of their wits, wherein they be indefatigable, which maketh them seem to have that of a natural readiness which custom of exercise, and use hath found in them. Moreover, while their passions be not yet vehement, whereby they might be overcarried, melancholy breedeth a jealousy of doubt in that they take in deliberation, and causeth them to be the more exact and curious in pondering the very moments of things. To these reasons may be added the vehemency of their affections once raised: which carrieth them, with all their faculties thereto belonging, into the depth of that they take pleasure to inter-meddle in. For though the melancholy man be not so easily affected with any other passion as with those of fear, sadness, and jealousy, yet being once thoroughly heat with a contrary passion, retaineth the fervency thereof far longer time than any other complexion, and more fervently boileth therewith, by reason his heart and spirit hath more solidity of substance to entertain deeply the passion, which in a more rare and thin sooner vanisheth away. Thus greediness of desire in those things which they affect maketh them diligent and painful, wary and circumspect, and so in actions of brain and sense not inferior to the best tempers; as also it maketh them stiff in opinion. Their resolution riseth of long deliberation, because of doubt and distrust which, as it is not easily bred, so it is also hard to remove. Such persons are doubtful, suspicious, and thereby long in deliberation, because those domestical fears, or that internal obscurity, causeth an opinion of danger in outward affairs where there is no cause of doubt. Their dreams are fearful, partly by reason of their fancy, waking, is most occupied about fears and terrors, which retaineth the impression in sleep; and partly through black and dark fumes of melancholy rising up to the brain, wherof the fantasy forgeth objects, and disturbeth the sleep of melancholy persons. * * *

DEMONOLOGY

LEWES LAVATER: Of Ghosts and Spirits Walking by Night †

Melancholic persons and mad men imagine many things which in very deed are not.

There have been very many in all ages which have utterly denied that there be any spirits or strange sights. The philosophers of Epicurus's sect did jest and laugh at all those things which were reported of them, and counted them as feigned and counterfeit, by the which only children and fools and plain simple men were made afraid. * * * True it is that many men do sadly¹ persuade themselves that they see or hear ghosts: for that which they imagine they see or hear proceedeth either of melancholy, madness, weakness of the senses, fear, or of some other perturbation; or else when they see or hear beasts, vapors, or some other natural things, then they vainly suppose they have seen sights I wot not what * * *

There is no doubt but that almost all those things which the common people judge to be wonderful sights are nothing less than so.² But in the mean season it can not be denied but that strange sights, and many other such like things, are sometimes heard and also seen.

And first it can not be denied but that some men which, either by dispositions of nature or for that³ they have sustained great misery, are now become heavy and full of melancholy, imagine many times with themselves, being alone, miraculous and strange things. Sometimes they affirm in great sooth that they verily hear and see this or that thing, which not withstanding neither they nor yet any other man did once see or hear: which thing we sometimes see by experience to be true in those men which be troubled with great headaches or subject to other diseases of the body, or cannot take rest in the night, or are distraughted of their wits. Those which dwell with such kind of men, when they hear them tell such absurd tales, such strange things, and such marvelous visions, albeit they pity their unfortunate estate, yet can they not many times contain themselves from laughing. * * *

¹Translated into English by "R. 11..." London, 1572. The extracts here printed are from 1,2 (pp. 9-10), 2,2 (pp. 102-9), 2,4 (p. 114), 2,13 (pp. 159-61), and 2,15 (p. 163).

1. Seriously.
2. I.e., delusions.
3. Because.