

CLASSICS OF THE ALCOHOL LITERATURE
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THOMAS NASH ON DRUNKENNESS

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AMONG the richest sources on the social life of Elizabethan England are the works of one Thomas Nash or Nashe. In his short life of 34 years (1567–1601) Nash produced a number of novels, plays, essays and polemic epistles. These form a veritable treasury of observations on the national manners of his time. The student of inebriety who peruses his writings in the hope of finding material on the drinking habits of the sixteenth-century Englishman will be amply rewarded.

The writings of Nash did not have the depth, the significance, or breadth of conception of his friend Christopher Marlowe, not to speak of his great contemporary William Shakespeare, but the consensus of the experts is that he was the most brilliant knight of the pen of his times. In contrast with the literary conventions of that age, he did not seek inspiration in the lives of the great of past centuries but was attracted by the mode of life that he saw around him and the people whom he saw living this life. The column and the columnist did not exist in those times, but because of his style and the topical nature of his writings he may be called a forerunner of the present-day columnist.

While much information may be gained from Nash, little information is available about him. Much of the time of his adult life he spent in hiding because of debts, political involvements, epidemics, and various and sundry escapades. His whereabouts for considerable periods of time are entirely unknown. It is typical for the scantiness of his biography that there is no record of his death and no tombstone marks the place of his earthly remains. Some letters show that in 1601 he was alive, and the next thing we know is that in 1602 Fitzgeffrey in his *Affaniae* refers to him as dead.

Thomas Nash was a Cambridge man. In 1581 and 1582 he had been at St. John's College, and then became scholar of the Lady Margaret foundation. He graduated with the degree of B.A. in 1585–86, and stayed in Cambridge probably until 1588. He left before obtaining the degree of M.A. His enemies alleged that he had to leave Cambridge because of some indiscretion, but there is no evidence of this in the

records of his college. More likely, he ceased graduate studies because of lack of funds. In any event, the indications from his educational record, as well as from his writings, are that he had all the educational advantages that his time afforded. While he does not seem to have been free of those weaknesses of society which he castigated, it would appear that his troubles were ascribable more to political radicalism than to moral escapades. His play *The Isle of Dogs* (now lost) was branded as "seditious and slanderous matter." The theatre in which it was produced was closed because of this and Nash had to go into hiding.

Royalties were hardly a source of livelihood for even the most popular writers of the Elizabethan age. Authors, if they had no means of their own, were dependent on "patrons." Not only did Nash lack royalties but it seems that he was only rarely able to find patrons, and then no very generous ones. His precarious means of livelihood was the cause of much bitterness to him; and it was a source of continuous discontent to him that the gift of the pen could not furnish him with those simple comforts of life which a cobbler or tailor could gain from his work. Gabriel Harvey,* his arch enemy, said of him: ". . . Pinched with want, vexed with discredite, tormented with other mens felicitie, and ouerwhelmed with his owne misery; in a raving, and franticke moode, most desperately exhibiteth his supplication to the Diuell."

In view of the bitter feud between Nash and the entire Harvey family, one would not be inclined to accept this at face value, but this judgment is confirmed by Nash himself in the first paragraph of his *Pierce Peniless*:†

Having spent many yeeres in studying how to liue, and liu'de a long time without mony: hauing tired my youth with follie, and surfetted my minde with vanitie, I began at length to looke backe to repentaunce, & addresse my endeouors to prosperitie: But all in vaine, I sate vp late, and rose earely, contended with the colde, and conuersed with scarcitie: for all my labours turned to losse, my vulgar Muse was despised & neglected, my paines not regarded, or slightly rewarded, and I my selfe (in prime of my best wit) laid open to pouertie. Wherevpon (in a malecontent humor) I accused my fortune, raild on my patrones, bit my pen, rent my papers, and ragde in all points like a mad man.

Nash's censorious attitude may be attributed more to frustration than to a true moral indignation. His references to inebriety and to

*G. Harvey's *Complete Works* (A. B. GROSART, ed.); Vol. 1. 1884-85.

†This and all subsequent direct quotations from Nash are taken from *The Works of Thomas Nashe* (R. B. MCKERROW, ed.). London; A. H. Bullen, 1904-10.

drinking habits in general are numerous and scattered over many of his works. Apparently he had collected much folklore material on drinking but it is not the object of this presentation to show what he had gathered about former times but rather what he had observed about his contemporaries.

Nash was not a teetotaler, and his wrath is not directed at the use of alcoholic beverages but at inebriety. In his *Anatomy of Absurdity* (1589) he gives various examples of the sobriety or entire abstemiousness practised by great men of classic times and then says:

I doo not alleage these examples, to the end I might condẽne the moderate vse of wine as vnlawfull, but to shew by the comparison, how farre we exceede them in excesse, whose banquets are furnisht with such wastfull superfluitie.

Also, in many of his writings, Nash mentions that good beer or good wine makes good blood.

An interesting comparison between the mixing of foods and the mixing of drinks, in the *Anatomy of Absurdity*, gives an explanation of the alleged ill effects of mixing drinks and at the same time reveals some dietetic theories of his times:

Thirdly they object, that the nourishment of diuers meates is no lesse noysome, then the drinking of diuers kinds of Wines is daungerous. Euery one knowes that he that washeth his braines with diuers kinds of wines, is the next doore to a drunken man, and he like (say they) to be endangered by diseases, who affecteth variety in his diet. Here doe I denie the coherence of the cõparison, for what is hee that by eating ouermuch, doth incurre the like inconuenience that he dooth, that drinketh much? hee that hath ouerloded his stomacke with sundry meates, is pained a little perhaps in his bellie, hee that hath ouercharged his braine with wyne, is no better then a mad man for the time; which the rather seemes to me, because the grosenes of ye meate remaining in one place, expecteth the administration of digestion, and beeing thorowly consumed, is suddainly voided, but Wine beeing by nature lighter, ascendeth higher, and tickleth the braine placed in the top, with the inflamation of a hote fume, and therefore diuersitie of wines at once, is shunned of them that are wise, least the matter which is readie to possesse the head on a suddaine, in a moment ouerturne the seate of reason, which daunger in the diuersitie of meates, no reason can be rendred why we shoulde dread.

Nash's main discourse on inebriety is contained in *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Diuell*, which was first published in 1592 under the formidable title "Pierce Penilesse his Supplication to the Diuell. Describing the ouer-spreading of *Vice*, and suppression of *Vertue*. Pleasantly

interlac'd with variable delights: and pathetically intermixt *with conceipted reproofes.*" It appears that this first edition went to press in the author's absence, and thus without the benefit of his supervision. From a letter to the publisher it is clear that Nash was not all too pleased, and that he objected in particular to the title of his work. In requesting changes to be made in the second edition, he wrote: "Now this is that I woulde haue you to do in this second edition; First, cut off that long-tayld Title, and let mee not in the forefront of my Booke, make a tedious Mountebanks Oration to the Reader, when in the whole there is nothing praise-worthie." It seems that the imposition of an embarrassingly sensational title on an author by his publisher is not a modern invention but an old tradition of the trade.

There are many conjectures relative to the relation of the name "Pierce" to "purse" and "Percy," but these are of no particular interest here. It is sufficient to mention that the name Pierce had come to stand for plain-spoken countryman. Whether Pierce in connection with penniless had been used before Nash or whether it was his own combination, is not known.

The *Supplication to the Diuell* is a petition that the gold in the strongholds of the rich might be set free and that Pierce might receive his legitimate share of this gold. This supplication, which is forwarded to the devil by a "knight of the post," occupies only one page of the book, and the rest is devoted to the motivation of the petition. The motivation consists of a violent attack on greed, pride, envy, wrath, drunkenness, and similar vices. Inebriety is given an entire section under the heading "The Complaint of Drunkennes." But there is also a short passage relating to inebriety in an earlier section, which reads as follows:

The chiefe spur vnto wrath is Drunkennes, which, as the touch of an Ashen bough causeth a gidinesse in the Vipers head, and the Batte, lightly strooke with the leafe of a Tree, loseth his remembrance: so they, being but lightly sprinckled with the iuyce of the Hop, become sencelesse, and haue their reason strooken blind, as soone as euer the Cup scaleth the Fortresse of their Nose. Then run their words at random, like a dog that hath lost his master, and are vppe with this man and that man, and generally inuay against al men, but those that keep a wet corner for a friend, and will not thinke scorne to drinke with a good fellowe and a Souldiour: and so long do they practise this vaine on their Ale-bench, that when they are sober, they cannot leaue it.

The following is the full text of the section on inebriety:

The Complaint of Drunkennes

From Gluttony in meates, let me discend to superfluitie in drinke: a sinne, that euer since we haue mixt our selues with the Low-countries, is counted honourable: but before we knew their lingring warres, was held in the highest degree of hatred that might be. Then, if we had seene a man goe wallowing in the streetes, or lye sleeping vnder the boord, we would haue spet at him as a toade, and cald him foule drunken swine, and warnd al our friends out of his company: now, he is no body that cannot drinke *super nagulum*,* carouse the Hunters hoop, quaffe *vpsey freze crosse*, with healthes, gloues, mumpes, frolickes, and a thousand such dominiering inuentions. He is reputed a pesaunt and a boore that wil not take his licour profoundly. And you shall heare a Cauallier of the first feather, a princookes that was but a Page the other day in the Court, and now is all to be frenchified in his Souldiers sute, stand vppon termes with, Gods wounds, you dishonour me sir, you do me the disgrace if you do not pledge me as much as I drunke to you: and, in the midst of his cups, stand vaunting his manhood, beginning euerie sentence with When I first bore Armes, when he neuer bare any thing but his Lords rapier after him in his life. If he haue beene ouer and visited a towne of Garrison, as a trauailer or passenger, he hath as great experience as the greatest Commander and chiefe Leader in *England*. A mightie deformer of mens manners and features, is this vn-necessary vice of all other. Let him bee indued with neuer so many vertues, and haue as much goodly proportion and fauour as nature can bestow vppon a man: yet if hee be thirstie after his owne destruction, and hath no ioy nor comfort, but when he is drowning his soule in a gallon pot, that one beastly imperfection will vtterlie obscure all that is commendable in him; and all his good qualities sinke like lead down to the bottome of his car-rowsing cups, where they will lie, like lees and dregges, dead and vnregarded of any man.

Clim of the clough, thou that vset to drinke nothing but scalding lead and sulphur in hell, thou art not so greedie of thy night geare. O, but thou hast a foule swallow, if it come once to carousing of humane blood; but thats but seldome, once in seauen yeare, when theres a great execution, otherwise thou art tide at rack and manger, and drinke nothing but the *Aqua vitae* of vengeance all thy life time. The Prouerbe giues it forth, thou art a knaue, and therefore I haue more hope thou art some manner of good fellowe: let mee intreate thee (since thou hast other iniquities inough to circumuent vs withall) to wipe this sin out of the catalogue of thy subtilties: helpe to blast the Vines, that they may beare no more grapes, and sowre the wines in the cellers of Marchants storehouses, that our Countrey-men may not pisse out all their witte and thrift against the walles.

King Edgars Ordinance Against Drinking

King *Edgar*, because his subjects should not offend in swilling, and bibbing,

*Drinking *super nagulum*, a deuise of drinking new come out of Fraunce; which is, after a man hath turned vp the bottom of the cup, to drop it on his naile, & make a pearle with that is left; which, if it shed, & he cannot make stand on, by reason thers too much, he must drinke againe for his pennance.

as they did, caused certaine yron cups to be chained to euery fountaine and wells side, and at euery Vintners doore, with yron pinnes in them, to stinte euery man how much he should drinke: and he that went beyond one of those pinnes forfeited a penny for euery draught. And, if Stories were well searcht, I beleue hoopes in quart pots were inuented to that ende, that euery man should take his hoope, and no more. I haue heard it iustified for a trueth by great Personages, that the olde Marquesse of *Pisana* (who yet liues) drinckes not once in seauen yeare: and I haue read of one *Andron* of *Argos*, that was so seldome thirstie, that he trauailed ouer the hote burning sands of *Lybia*, and neuer dranke. Then why should our colde Clime bring forth such fierie throates? Are we more thirstie than *Spaine* and *Italy*, where the Sunnes force is doubled? The *Germaines* and lowe Dutch, me thinkes, should bee continually kept moyst with the foggie aire and stinking mistes that arise out of their fennie soyle: but as their Countrey is ouer-flown with water, so are their heads alwaies ouer-flown with wine, and in their bellies they haue standing quag-mires and bogs of English beere.

The Priuat Lawes Amongst Drunkards

One of their breede it was that writ the Booke *De Arte bibendi*, a worshipfull treatise, fitte for none but *Silenus* and his Asse to set forth: besides that volume, we haue generall rules and iniunctions, as good as printed precepts, or Statutes set downe by Acte of Parliament, that goe from drunkard to drunkard; as still to keepe your first man, not to leaue any flockes in the bottome of the cup, to knock the glasse on your thumbe when you haue done, to haue some shooing horne to pul on your wine, as a rasher of the coles, or a redde herring, to stirre it about with a candles ende to make it taste better, and not to holde your peace whiles the pot is stirring.

The Eight Kinds of Drunkenesse

Nor haue we one or two kinde of drunkards onely, but eight Kindes. The first is Ape drunke, and he leapes, and sings, and hollowes, and daunceth for the heauens: the second is Lion drunke, and he flings the pots about the house, calls his Hostesse whore, breakes the glasse windowes with his dagger, and is apt to quarrell with any man that speaks to him: the third is Swine drunke, heauy, lumpish, and sleepe, and cries for a little more drinke, and a fewe more cloathes: the fourth is Sheepe drunke, wise in his owne conceipt, when he cannot bring forth a right word: the fifth is Mawdlen drunke when a fellowe will weepe for kindnes in the midst of his Ale, and kisse you, saying; By God, Captaine, I loue thee; goe thy waies, thou dost not thinke so often of me as I do of thee, I would (if it pleased GOD) I could not loue thee so well as I doo; and then he puts his finger in his eie, and cries: the sixt is Martin drunke, when a man is drunke, and drinks himselfe sober ere he stirre: the seuenth is Goate drunke, when, in his drunkennes, he hath no minde but on Lechery: the eighth is Foxe drunke, when he is craftie drunke, as many of the Dutch men bee, that will neuer bargain but when they are drunke. All these *species*, and more, I haue seene practised in one Company at one sitting, when I haue bene permitted to remaine sober amongst them, onely to note their seuerall humors. Hee

that plies any one of them harde, it will make him to write admirable verses, and to haue a deepe casting head, though hee were neuer so verie a Dunce before.

The Discommodities of Drunkenesse

Gentlemen, all you that will not haue your braines twice sodden, your flesh rotten with the Dropsie, that loue not to goe in greasie dublets, stockings out at the heeles, and weare alehouse daggers at your backes, forswear this slauering brauery, that will make you haue stinking breathes, and your bodies smell like Brewers aprons: rather keepe a snuffe in the bottome of the glasse to light you to bed withall, than leaue neuer an eye in your head to lead you ouer the threshold. It will bring you, in your olde age, to be companions with none but Porters and Car-men, to talke out of a Cage, railing as drunken men are wont, a hundred boies wondering about them; and to die sodainly, as *Fol Long*, the Fencer, did, drinking *Aqua vitæ*. From which (as all the rest) good Lord deliuer *Pierce Penillesse*.

The nurse of this enormitie (as of all euills) is Idlenes, or sloth, which, hauing no painfull Prouidence to set himselfe a worke, runnes headlong, with the raines in his owne hand, into all lasciuiousnesse and sensualitie that may be. Men, when they are idle, and know not what to do, saith one, let vs goe to the Stilliard, and drinke Rhenish wine. Nay, if a man knew where a good whorhouse were, saith another, it were somewhat like. Nay, saith the third, let vs goe to a dicing-house or a bowling alley, and there we shall haue some sport for our money. . . .

In the above text it will be noted that Nash attributes the spread of inebriety to an importation from "the Low-countries" by soldiers returning from the wars there. It is interesting that excessive drinking habits are ascribed by the individual as well as by nations to bad company. It would appear that the idea of the influence of the wars in the Netherlands on the drinking habits of the English was not original with Nash. The historian William Camden, in his *Britannia* (1586), said: "The English, who had hitherto, of all the Northern nations, shown themselves the least addicted to immoderate drinking, and been commended for their sobriety, first learned in these wars with the Netherlands to swallow a large quantity of intoxicating liquor, and to destroy their own health by drinking that of others."* Since John of Salisbury had said in the twelfth century that "the habits of drinking made the English famous among all foreign nations," the allegations of Camden and of Nash do not seem to be particularly cogent. They are in a class with the assertion of Sebastian Franck†

*Quoted by FRENCH, R. V. *Nineteen Centuries of Drink in England*. London; Longmans, Green, & Co., 1884.

†Cf. A Document of the Reformation Period on Inebriety: Sebastian Franck's "On the Horrible Vice of Drunkenness," etc. (Classics of the Alcohol Literature.) *Quart. J. Stud. Alc.* 2: 391, 1941.

that the Germans learned to drink excessively from the French, although Tacitus had already described the Germans as heavy imbibers.

The description of *The Eight Kinds of Drunkenness*, which is frequently quoted at second hand in the alcohol literature, is practically the only passage from Nash with which students of inebriety are acquainted. Apparently Nash elaborated a passage from the *Ship of Fools*, one of the most popular books of the sixteenth century, which reads as follows:

Some sowe dronke, swaloyng mete without measure
Some mawdelayne dronke, mournynge lowdly and hye

Some are Ape dronke full of lawghter and of Toyes
Some mery dronke syngynge with wynches and boyes.

This passage does not appear in the German original, *Das Narrenschiff* (1494) by Sebastian Brandt or Brant, but appears to be an addition by the English imitator Alexander Barclay, whose *Ship of Fools* was published in 1509. It is apparently based on popular versions of old legends which had migrated from the Orient.* The significance of Thomas Nash's work lies not so much in this well-known passage on types of drunkards as in the description of the drinking manners of his time.

E. M. J.

*See: HAGGARD, H. W. and JELLINEK, E. M. *Alcohol Explored*. New York; Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1942.