

AI-Generated Graded Readers

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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

Content Note

This adaptation is based on a historical literary work. It may contain expressions, attitudes, or depictions that some readers may consider inappropriate or offensive by today's standards. Such elements have been retained or reflected where necessary in order to preserve the historical and literary character of the original work.

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Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1 — Erasmus of Rotterdam to his friend Thomas More

Dear More, when I was coming back from Italy to England, I had many long hours on the road. I did not want to waste that time on silly stories or empty talk. So I used some of it to think about the studies we both love. In the rest of that time, I let my mind return to my friends in England.

Among all those friends, you came first into my thoughts. Even when you are far away, the thought of you gives me real joy. When I am with you, I always find your company delightful. To speak plainly, I do not think I have known anyone whose company I have enjoyed more.

Because of that, I felt I should do something during the journey. But the road is not the right place for very serious work. A man on horseback cannot easily write a heavy book or think in a deep and careful way for many hours. So I chose a lighter task and decided to amuse myself with a little work in praise of Folly.

You may ask why such a subject came into my head. The first reason is your own name. More sounds close to the word for Folly, though you yourself are very far from being a fool. Anyone who knows you can see that at once. Still, that small play on words helped to begin this idea.

The second reason is that I thought this kind of joke would please you. You have always enjoyed lively wit and cheerful writing, so long as it is not empty or stupid. You know how to laugh at human life without becoming cruel. In that way, you are like a man who can see the world clearly and still smile at it.

Your judgment is strong, and often it does not follow the opinion of the crowd. Yet at the same time, your nature is warm, gentle, and kind. You know how to speak with all kinds of people, and you do it gladly. For that reason, I believe you will receive this small work with good will.

More than that, I hope you will protect it. Once I dedicate it to you, it is no longer mine alone. In a way, it becomes yours as well. If anyone attacks it, you

may defend it as something that now belongs to your name.

I know very well that some people will complain. Some will say this subject is too light for a serious Christian writer. Others will say it is too sharp, too mocking, and too ready to laugh at the faults of mankind. They may even say that I sound like old comic writers, or like Lucian, and that I snap at everyone.

But such people should stop and think before they judge. I am not the first writer to take a light subject and use it for serious meaning. Great writers before me have done the same kind of thing. Some have praised strange animals, some ugly diseases, some low and foolish matters, and yet their works were still accepted as clever and worth reading.

So why should learning alone have no right to play a little? Every other part of life is allowed some rest, some ease, and some recreation. Study should not be the one thing that must always wear a hard face. A light work can still carry truth inside it.

In fact, I believe that foolish subjects are sometimes handled more usefully than proud and heavy ones. One man writes a long book in praise of rhetoric. Another praises philosophy. Another flatters a prince. Another calls for war. Another fills pages with plans for things that hardly matter. Yet a playful work may help the reader more than all these, if it shows human life honestly and pleasantly.

So if I have praised Folly, I have not done it in a foolish way. I have tried to make play serve thought. There is another charge I expect to hear. Some people will say that I bite too hard.

But there has always been room in writing for a man to point out the common errors of human life. The important thing is this: he must not turn freedom into wild abuse. If a writer attacks human faults without naming particular persons, he is not acting like an enemy. He is acting more like a teacher who holds up a mirror.

And really, what have I done here except laugh at the faults that all of us share? A man who sees himself in such a mirror and becomes angry only shows that his own conscience has been touched. The fault is not in the mirror. It is already in the face that looks into it.

I have also taken care not to fill my pages with dirt, shameful language, or personal attacks. I have not gone searching through the worst filth of life just to make people gasp. My purpose has been laughter, not poison. I would rather make the reader smile than wound him.

Besides, since I chose to let Folly speak for herself, it was right to keep the style fit for that speaker. If Folly talks freely, no one should be surprised. A mask has to match the voice behind it. If I had made her speak like a dull teacher, the whole design would have failed.

Still, I hardly need to explain all this to you. You are one of the best defenders a writer could hope for. You know how to take up a cause and argue for it with both skill and grace. And you can do this even when the cause itself is not the strongest in the world.

So I send this little work to you with trust and affection. Read it kindly. If critics attack it, stand up for it bravely. And if they say that laughter has no place in serious writing, or that truth may only speak in dark and solemn clothes, then I hope you will answer them as only you can.

Farewell, my dear More, best of friends and best of debaters. Defend your Moria well. I send it to you from the countryside, with gratitude, friendship, and hope that it may give you some pleasure. The thought of you gave me pleasure when I began it, and so it is only right that the finished piece should now go to you.

Part 2 — Folly Speaks for Herself

I know very well that many people speak badly of me. Even fools often pretend that they do not like Folly. But the moment I stood up before you, all your faces changed.

A little earlier, you looked serious and tired. Your brows were heavy, and your minds seemed far away. Now your eyes are bright, your faces are open, and you are ready to laugh.

That is my first proof. Great speakers often talk for a long time and still cannot

drive sadness out of a room. I do it at once, simply by appearing.

When the sun comes after clouds, the whole world looks new again. When spring comes after winter, the earth seems young again. In the same way, when you saw me, your faces became warmer and more alive.

Perhaps you are wondering why I have come here in this strange way and why I speak so boldly. I will tell you. But first, lend me your ears.

I do not mean the ears you take to church, where you sit quiet and careful. I mean the ears you gladly use for plays, jokes, songs, and cheerful talk. That is the kind of hearing I want from you now.

For a little while, I have decided to speak like a clever performer. I do not mean those bad teachers who fill young heads with empty words. I mean the older speakers who knew how to please people while saying something worth hearing.

They praised gods, heroes, cities, and famous men. I will also give praise. But I will not praise Hercules, Solon, or any other great name.

I will praise myself. Some of you may laugh at that. Very well, laugh if you like.

Who could praise me better than I can praise myself? No one knows me more closely than I know myself. And if self-praise is foolish, then surely it suits me better than anyone else.

To tell the truth, I think I am still more honest than many great men. They hire poets and speakers to praise them in public. Then they stand there with false modesty while listening to lies about their wisdom, courage, and virtue.

I do nothing like that. I do not hide my pride behind another person's mouth. I speak for myself, and that is much cleaner.

There is another thing that surprises me. For so many years, all people have enjoyed my gifts. Yet almost no one has thanked me properly.

Men have written long praises of strange and useless things. Some have praised flies, bald heads, fevers, and ugly diseases. Others have praised cruel rulers and foolish powers.

But who has stood up and truly praised Folly? Almost no one. That is very unfair, because I help everyone every day.

So I have decided to do that work myself. I will not bring you a speech made hard by old words and dead learning. I will speak simply and freely, and I think that will be better.

Do not expect me to begin like a schoolmaster and give you a cold definition of Folly. I will not cut myself into dry little parts either. Why should I, when I am standing here before you?

You can see me with your own eyes. My face tells you what I am. I do not hide one thing inside and show another outside.

I am exactly what I appear to be. That is more than many so-called wise men can say. They walk in rich clothes and serious looks, but under all that dignity they are often only dressed-up fools.

In fact, many of them belong to me completely, though they are ashamed to admit it. They hate my name, but they live by my power. They want to seem wise, even when they are really only wise fools.

You know the kind of people I mean. They love hard words, strange learning, and speech that no one can follow. If they can confuse their listeners, they think they have won.

They throw little pieces of Greek into their Latin. They dig old words out of dead books. Then they look around proudly while simple people nod and pretend to understand.

This also is my work. Many reputations are built not on truth, but on fog. The less people understand, the more deeply they sometimes admire.

But let us come back to me. My name is Folly. That is enough, and I need no grander title.

I do not borrow another face. I do not wear a false name. I stand before you as I am, and that is why I can speak with such ease.

Now you know who is speaking to you. You have seen my face and heard my voice. Next I will tell you where I come from, what family I belong to, and which dear companions help me rule the world.

Part 3 — My Name, My Father, and My Companions

Now I will tell you where I come from. A great goddess should not hide her family. And I have no reason at all to be ashamed of mine.

I was not born from some old and dusty god whose name stays alive only in books. My father is Riches. Yes, Riches himself.

And I say that with pride. For who has more power in the world than Riches? At his command, almost everything moves.

War and peace move by his will. Laws, marriages, business, courts, public meetings, and private plans all turn when he turns. Both great matters and small matters obey him.

Without him, many of the gods would be poor and quiet creatures. They would stay at home and keep very small houses. But when Riches smiles on someone, even the highest powers seem easy to lead.

If he is against a man, wisdom cannot save him. If he is for a man, even thunder itself seems weak. That is the father I claim, and I am glad to claim him.

But I was not born from his head, like some cold child of Wisdom. No, my mother was Youth. She was bright, beautiful, full of life, and full of joy.

I am very happy to name her as my mother. I came from strength, delight, and warm blood. I did not come from dry thought or hard duty.

And do not imagine my father as a weak old man. He was not blind, tired, or broken when I was born. He was strong, proud, and full of young force.

He had also been drinking with the gods. He was cheerful and full of rich pleasure. So you can see that my birth was a very happy one.

As for the place where I was born, it was no poor or dark place. I was not born in a cave. I was not born on a bare island in the sea.

I was born in the Fortunate Islands. There everything grows easily. No one needs hard labor there.

There is no old age there. There is no disease there. The fields do not give rough and common things, but flowers, beauty, sweetness, and soft delight.

It was the perfect place for me. And I began life in the perfect way too. I did not cry when I entered the world.

I smiled at once. I looked at my mother and smiled. I think that was a much better beginning than the one most children choose.

Nor was I fed by some sad or poor nurse. I was raised by two cheerful women. One was Drunkenness, and the other was Ignorance.

They cared for me very well. Under their hands, I grew exactly as I should. With nurses like that, how could I become anything but myself?

And now I see that some of you are looking at the people around me. You want to know who they are. Very well, I will tell you.

That proud woman there is Self-love. She always likes her own face, her own thoughts, and her own place in the world. She is very useful to me.

The smiling one who is always ready to clap is Flattery. She knows how to soften people. She keeps many hearts warm that truth alone would quickly chill.

The one who looks half asleep is Oblivion. She helps people forget pain, shame, fear, and old troubles. Without her, many lives would feel much heavier.

That lazy figure leaning down is Laziness. Next to her stands Pleasure, sweet and rich, crowned and full of perfume. Then comes Madness, with her wild moving eyes.

Beside her is Wantonness, soft, smooth, and well fed. And there are also two male companions with them. One is Intemperance, and the other is Deep Sleep.

These are not just idle followers. They are my household servants. By their help, I rule not only ordinary people, but great people too.

Yes, by their help I have built my power over the whole world. Even emperors feel my rule. Many people think they are leading others, when really one of my dear companions is leading them.

So now you know my family, my birthplace, my nurses, and my companions. I have hidden nothing from you. And now that I have told you all this, I will go on and show you why I truly deserve to be called a goddess.

Part 4 — I Give Life

Now I will prove that I do not use the name of goddess without reason. A true

god or goddess helps human beings. If that is the test, then I deserve high honor.

People praise those who first gave grain, wine, and other useful gifts to mankind. But I give something even greater than those things. I help to give life itself.

Tell me, what is sweeter than life? What is dearer than life? And from whom does life come more truly than from me?

Spears do not create it. Shields do not create it. Hard wisdom does not create it either.

Even Jupiter, the king of gods and men, must put aside his thunder if he wants children. He cannot become a father by looking grand and terrible. He must come down from that high place and play another part.

The same is true of those proud Stoics who think they are almost gods because they speak so much about reason. Let one of them wish for children, and what must he do? He must drop his stiff face, his proud silence, and his hard rules for a while.

In short, any wise man who wants children must come to me. He may talk about reason all day long. But when it comes to this matter, he still needs Folly.

Think about marriage too. What man would gladly enter it if he calmly weighed every trouble that may come with it? What woman would choose it so quickly if she thought too carefully about childbirth and the hard work of raising children?

If people looked at these things with cold reason alone, many of them would turn away. Houses would stay empty. Families would never begin.

So if you owe your life to marriage, then you owe that marriage partly to my servant Madness. And if you owe your life to marriage, then you owe your life to me as well. That is plain enough.

Then think of women who suffer pain in childbirth. Would many of them choose the same road again if they remembered every pain too clearly? No. That is why my other servant, Oblivion, is so useful.

Forgetfulness is kinder than strict memory. It softens pain and lets life go forward again. Without that help, many hearts would grow much colder.

Even Venus herself would not deny my power here. Desire alone is not enough. Beauty alone is not enough.

At the center of love there is always something a little blind, a little foolish, and a little wild. But that is not a weakness. That is exactly what keeps the world alive.

Out of that little sweet foolishness come all kinds of people. From it come farmers, merchants, soldiers, fathers, mothers, and children. But not only them.

From it also come philosophers, monks, priests, cardinals, and popes. Yes, even the most serious and holy-looking men begin in the same way as everyone else. They too owe their first life to me.

So do not think my gift is small. I do not only bring jokes, laughter, and songs. I stand at the very beginning of human life.

Every cradle gives witness for me. Every marriage gives witness for me. Every family in the world gives witness for me.

But perhaps you will say that this is not enough. Perhaps you will say that giving life is only the first gift, and that life would still be hard and bitter if I did nothing more. Very well, I agree.

It would be too small a thing if I only helped life begin. I must also show that I help life stay sweet while it goes on. And that, I think, will be even easier to prove.

Part 5 — I Give Pleasure

But perhaps you will say that life alone is not enough. A person may be alive and still live badly. Very well. Then I will show you something more. I do not only help life begin. I also make life pleasant while it lasts.

Tell me honestly, what is life if pleasure is taken away from it? I know some of you are smiling already, because you see my meaning before I finish. If all joy were removed, what would be left but weight, labor, and trouble?

Even the Stoics, who speak so proudly against pleasure, do not really hate it as much as they pretend. They attack it in public, but many of them quietly keep

a place for it in private. This is no great surprise. It is hard to fight against something so dear to human life.

Look carefully at the whole course of human life. What part of it is not rough, bitter, sad, or dull unless some pleasure is mixed into it? Work needs pleasure. Rest needs pleasure. Even duty becomes easier when some sweetness is joined to it.

Without that sweetness, life loses its color. A day may still pass, but it does not feel like living. It feels like carrying a burden from morning to night.

That is why I say that pleasure and Folly belong close together. Where I am present, human beings find the day lighter. Where I am absent, everything grows hard, dry, and cold.

There is an old saying that knowing nothing is the happiest thing. I will not force that too far, but I understand the truth inside it. Too much sharp thought often makes life heavier, not better.

A person who sees every danger too clearly grows afraid. A person who remembers every pain too exactly grows tired. A person who judges everything too strictly soon loses the power to enjoy anything at all.

But I give people another way to live. I place hope before them. I soften memory. I help them begin again after pain, loss, or shame.

If they loved only reason, many would stop in the middle of life and go no farther. They would say the road is too hard and the reward too small. But I keep them moving.

I help them laugh again after tears. I help them trust again after hurt. I help them look at tomorrow with some warmth, even when today has not been kind.

This is not a small gift. It is one of the greatest gifts in the world. For life is not made sweet by reason alone.

Reason can warn, measure, and judge. But it cannot by itself make a child laugh, make friends cheerful, or make a tired heart willing to begin again. I do those things.

So when people enjoy food, company, rest, hope, love, and little daily joys, they should remember me. I am there in all such moments. I am the one who keeps

life from becoming only a long lesson in pain.

And now that I have shown this, I can go on to something even clearer. If you want to see where my gifts appear most plainly, then look at the ages of human life itself. Begin with childhood, move on to youth, and then look at old age, and you will see that I am present in them all.

Part 6 — Childhood, Youth, and Old Age

And now I will take human life step by step. Let us begin with childhood. Everyone knows that this is the sweetest part of life.

Children are loved by all. We kiss them, hold them, protect them, and forgive them very easily. Even hard people often grow soft when they are near a child.

Why is that? It is not because children are wise. It is because they come into the world with that gentle and lovely folly which draws love from others.

Nature herself seems to have planned it that way. She gives children little knowledge and little judgment, so that the burden of growing up may be easier for them. She also makes them pleasant to others, so that parents and nurses will gladly care for them.

Think what would happen if a child came into the world already serious, sharp, and full of reason. Such a child would not seem sweet. It would seem strange.

No one likes a child who is too much like a grown man. A child should laugh, wonder, forget, and know only a little. That is what makes childhood beautiful.

Then comes youth. Youth is welcomed everywhere. People help it, praise it, and open doors for it.

And why is youth loved so much? Because I am there too. Youth knows little, but because of that it is bold, bright, warm, and full of hope.

It moves quickly. It trusts easily. It does not yet feel the full weight of life.

That is why youth has such charm. It is fresh because it is still close to me. It shines because it is still light.

But little by little, that changes. Experience grows. Care grows. Thought grows heavier.

Then beauty starts to fade. Quick joy becomes slower. Sweetness becomes thinner. The farther youth moves away from me, the less alive it becomes.

After that comes old age. And old age is a hard thing. It is heavy to the person who bears it, and often painful to those who must watch it.

But even here I do not leave human beings alone. I help old age in my own way. I lead it back, little by little, toward a second childhood.

I do this through forgetfulness. I wash old minds with Oblivion. By that means, many old people lose some of their pain, some of their sharp care, and some of the heavy thought that would make old age unbearable.

You may say, "But then they become foolish." Yes, of course they do. But childhood is also foolish, and that is one reason it is pleasant.

Who would want a child with the hard judgment of an old man? And who would gladly live with an old man whose long experience was joined to full sharpness, full memory, and a hard tongue? Such a person would be difficult both to himself and to others.

So I make old age softer. I make it simpler. I free it from many of the cares that trouble stronger and more active years.

That is why old people often become easier company than very serious adults. They talk simply. They forget quickly. Sometimes they even grow warm with love again, though they would laugh at themselves if they fully understood it.

Old people and children are also drawn to one another. And no wonder. They are alike in many ways.

The one has more years and more wrinkles, but both are weak, both forget, both enjoy small things, and both speak in a softer and less steady way. In many parts of life, they meet each other halfway.

As old people move closer to death, they often become still more childlike. And that too is my doing. In that way they go from life to death more gently, with less struggle and less fear than sharp reason might give them.

So do not run after magic fountains of youth. You already have something better. I am the one who keeps childhood sweet, youth bright, and old age bearable.

I bring warmth to the beginning of life, beauty to the middle of it, and softness

to the end. And if you think that nothing is better than youth and nothing harder than old age, then you must also admit how much you owe to me.

Part 7 — Even the Gods Need Me

But why should I speak only about human beings? Lift your eyes to heaven for a moment. Look at the gods themselves.

Then ask this question. Which of them would seem pleasant, lovable, or worth much if my power were taken away? I think the answer is clear.

Even the gods need me. Without me, many of them would seem ugly, dull, or foolish in the worst way. With me, they become charming.

Look first at Bacchus. Why is he always shown as young, full of life, and rich with hair? It is because he lives in drink, dancing, games, and happy noise.

He does not keep company with hard wisdom. He does not sit still with cold thought. He is cheerful, wild, and merry, and that is why people love him.

He is not ashamed to be called foolish. In fact, he seems to enjoy it. He would rather be the god of laughter and play than the god of serious faces.

And who can blame him? Who would not rather belong to Bacchus than to some dark and fearful god who makes everyone tremble? Better joy than terror.

Better to be young, laughing, and full of life than to sit in power and frighten the world. Many people would choose that at once, and they would choose well.

Then look at Cupid. Why is he always shown as a boy? It is because love itself is playful, restless, and not at all serious in the way wise men wish it to be.

Cupid does not move by calm thought. He runs, laughs, burns, and wounds. He acts quickly and thinks little.

That is why he stays young. Love is never very old in its ways. It is always quick, foolish, and warm.

And what about Venus? Why does she remain forever beautiful and smiling? Why does she seem always in her first bright age?

It is because she belongs near me. She lives by beauty, delight, laughter, and desire. Those things do not grow well in the shadow of severe wisdom.

The poets say that her hair shines like gold. They also show her always laughing. That too is not by accident.

She is close to my father's house, close to pleasure, and close to youth. That is why she stays so full of charm.

Think also of Flora, whom the Romans loved greatly. She is the goddess of flowers, spring, and all sweet growth. Her whole power rests on pleasure and delight.

And if you search the old stories more carefully, you will find the same thing everywhere. Even the gods who seem serious at first are full of strange acts, wild loves, tricks, and laughter.

One steals. Another dances. Another sings rude songs. Another makes a fool of himself in love. Another becomes funny simply because of the way he looks.

Priapus, Mercury, Vulcan, Silenus, Pan, and the rest all give us examples. One makes people laugh by his body, another by his tricks, another by his songs, and another by his drunken games.

The nymphs dance. The satyrs leap and play. Pan sings rough songs that the gods still enjoy. And when they have had plenty of nectar, they become even more foolish.

In truth, if someone told the whole story of what the gods do when they are full of drink and pleasure, I myself would laugh very hard. They do many things that no wise teacher would praise.

Yet that is exactly the point. Those things make them lively. Those things make them easy to remember. Those things give them color.

Without such folly, they would lose much of what makes them interesting. They might still be powerful, but they would no longer be pleasant.

So do not think I rule only the earth. My hand reaches much higher than that. Even heaven is full of my signs.

The gods may look grand in paintings and poems, but if you look closely, you will find me beside them almost everywhere. I am in their youth, their laughter, their loves, their games, and their little acts of foolishness.

That is why I say again that my power is not small. It reaches from the cradle

to old age, and from earth up to heaven. And now that I have shown you this, it is time to leave the gods for a while and look down again at mankind, where you will see just as clearly that human life too is ruled much more by passion than by reason.

Part 8 — Passion Rules Human Life

Now let us leave the gods and look down again at the earth. You will find the same truth here too. Nothing lively, lucky, or pleasant in human life can do without me.

Nature herself arranged it that way. She did not want human life to be too hard, too dry, or too sad. So she mixed Folly into it, as if she were adding flavor to food.

The Stoics say that wisdom means being ruled by reason. They say Folly means being ruled by passion. Very well. Then let us ask a simple question.

How much reason did Nature really give us? And how much passion? If you look honestly, the answer is clear.

Reason was given only a very small place. It sits in one corner, like a weak ruler in a little room. But the passions spread through the whole body and make much louder claims.

Nature even set two strong powers against reason. One is anger, which lives in the heart and rises quickly. The other is desire, which reaches everywhere and pulls with great force.

And how strong is reason against those two? We all know the answer from daily life. Reason calls out, warns, and gives good advice, but passion shouts louder and often wins.

A person knows what is right and still does what is wrong. A person sees danger and still rushes toward it. A person praises calm self-control in the morning and loses it before the day is over.

This happens so often that no one can deny it. Human life is not ruled by reason as much as proud teachers pretend. It is ruled far more by feeling, desire, heat, and sudden force.

That is why I say again that I am not a small thing in life. I am woven into it. I stand close to the deepest movements of the human heart.

Even those who are born for public life and worldly business need my help. They may have a little more sense than others. But even they cannot manage life by reason alone.

So they come to me, whether they admit it or not. And I give them advice fit for the world as it really is. I tell them to take a wife.

You may laugh, but I am serious. Marriage is a foolish thing in some ways, yet it is also pleasant, lively, and necessary. Through it, hard male roughness is softened and made easier to live with.

A man by himself often becomes dry, severe, and difficult. Life with a woman changes that. Her folly, her warmth, her softness, and her changeable nature sweeten him.

I know that some proud thinkers speak badly of women. They want to judge them by hard rules. They want to ask whether women are fully reasonable or not, as if life were a courtroom.

But that is the wrong way to look at the matter. The point is much simpler. Women do not live by the same hard spirit that many men admire in themselves, and because of that they often make life gentler.

If a woman tries too much to become severe, sharp, and grand in the style of men, she usually becomes less natural, not more admirable. It is never wise to fight openly against nature. When people try to force nature into a strange shape, the result often turns awkward at once.

So I say again that human life moves better under my rule than under the cold rule of reason alone. Anger, desire, warmth, attraction, and all the soft forces of daily life do more to keep the world going than many fine books ever do.

Men may speak grandly about reason, law, and virtue. But when they live, choose, love, marry, fight, forgive, and begin families, they show the truth. They belong to me much more than they belong to the schools.

And now that I have shown you that, I can go one step farther. For if you really want to see how strongly my power works in the world, then we must look more

closely at women, love, and the first great joy of human life.

Part 9 — Women, Love, and the First Joy of Life

Now let us look more closely at women. I hope they will not be angry with me. After all, I am a woman too, and I am speaking for my own side as much as for yours.

Some men speak as if women should try to become hard, sharp, and severe. They seem to think that the nearer a woman comes to dry wisdom, the better she becomes. I do not agree.

A woman is most powerful when she is most fully herself. Her beauty, softness, quick mind, and lively ways are not small things. They are part of the great design by which human life is made warm and attractive.

If a woman tries too hard to become grave and hard like a proud old teacher, she does not rise above nature. She only moves away from it. And when people fight too openly against nature, they usually become less graceful, not more.

So if I say that women belong closely to Folly, I do not mean it as an insult. I mean it as praise. That very thing often makes them happier than men.

Look at the difference. Men often grow rough, dry, and heavy with care. Their faces harden, their skin grows coarse, and their whole way of life pulls them toward age.

Women, by contrast, often stay nearer to youth. Their skin is softer, their voices lighter, and their whole appearance more gentle. In many ways they carry a kind of lasting spring with them.

And what do most women want more than anything else in this matter? They want to please men. That is plain enough, and there is no reason to hide it.

So they dress carefully. They wash, bathe, scent themselves, smooth their skin, shape their brows, and spend long time before the mirror. They do all this because they know very well where much of their power lies.

Wise men may laugh at such things if they wish. But those same wise men are often the first to look, the first to praise, and the last to turn away. So I do not take

their laughter very seriously.

And what is it, really, that men enjoy so much in women? It is not severe logic. It is not cold wisdom. It is beauty, play, softness, laughter, warmth, and that sweet foolishness which makes love possible.

Think of the small talk between lovers. Think of the little games, the easy lies, the smiles, the half-serious quarrels, the shy looks, the playful words, and all the foolish things said in private. These are not side matters. They are the living heart of love.

A philosopher may call all this silly. Very well. Let him call it silly. Life is often sweetest exactly where philosophy grows most impatient.

Men and women do not come together through reason alone. If they did, most of them would stay far apart. It is charm, desire, warmth, and happy foolishness that bring them near.

That is why women are often drawn to fools too. Fools joke, laugh, and speak freely. They turn even serious things toward play, and many women enjoy that more than the hard truth-telling of stern wise men.

There is a kind of truth in fools that other people do not have. A fool often shows in his face what he really feels. He does not hide one thing in his heart and say another with his mouth.

Women notice that. They are often quick to catch false tones and empty pride. So they take pleasure in men who are lively, open, and amusing, even when those men are not at all wise.

And really, who can blame them? What woman would choose to spend all her hours with a man who speaks only in hard truths, dark lessons, and heavy judgments? Better a cheerful fool than a cold statue.

I say the same thing about the first and chief delight of life. It does not come from books. It does not come from logic. It comes from the living, moving traffic between man and woman.

There, more than anywhere else, my power is clear. I am in the smile, the wish to please, the little vanity, the laughter, the bold hope, the quick forgiveness, and the sweet blindness that keeps love alive. Take those things away, and what

remains is not love, but a contract.

So when men praise reason and still go running after beauty, softness, and delight, they confess my power whether they mean to or not. They may speak one way in public, but their hearts tell the truth.

And now that I have shown you where one of the first and greatest joys of life comes from, I can move on. For perhaps some of you will say that not everyone places the best pleasure of life in love, and that many prefer drink, company, laughter, and friendship instead. Very well. I am ready for that too.

Part 10 — Feasts, Friendship, and Marriage

But perhaps some of you will say, “Not everyone finds the best joy in love.” Some people prefer drinking, eating, laughter, and good company. Very well. I am strong there too.

No feast is truly pleasant without me. Food alone is not enough. Wine alone is not enough.

If there is no laughter, no jokes, and no light foolish talk, a feast quickly grows dull. People eat, drink, and sit heavily. Their bodies are full, but their minds are empty.

So what do they do? They call for someone who can make the room laugh. They bring in a joker, a fool, or some cheerful flatterer to drive away silence and stiffness.

That is my work. I am the one who seasons a feast. All those little customs that make eating and drinking lively belong more to me than to the wise.

And that is why they help life so much. The more folly such things have, the more they wipe away weariness. A hard life needs laughter, or it soon becomes too bitter to bear.

But now let us move to something even more praised. Many people say that friendship is one of the greatest goods in the world. They say life without it would hardly be life at all.

Very well. I will not fight against that. I will only show that friendship too

begins with me and stays alive by my help.

Let me ask you something simple. When we close our eyes to a friend's faults, what is that? When we excuse what should perhaps not be excused, what is that? When we even call a fault a lovely little charm, what is that?

It is Folly, of course. A lover kisses a marked face and calls it beautiful. A father looks at a weak child and calls that child perfect. A friend sees what is wrong and still chooses love.

Wise people may laugh at this. But this is exactly what joins hearts together. Without it, most friendships would break almost at once.

Ordinary people are full of faults. No one is free from weakness. If friendship needed clear sight at every moment, very few friends would remain friends for long.

Human beings differ too much, fail too often, and hurt one another too easily. Friendship stays alive because people forgive, soften, overlook, and choose not to examine everything too closely. In other words, friendship lives because I am there.

What I say about friendship is even more true of marriage. Marriage is not a short meeting. It is a whole life shared by two people.

And if husband and wife saw each other with complete sharpness every day, peace would not last long. Many marriages would never begin, and many others would quickly end.

A man does not calmly study every weakness before he marries. A woman does not keep a full count of every future pain before she enters that life. If they did, they would draw back in fear.

But I send my servants ahead. Flattery softens words. Gentleness calms anger. Ignorance hides what does not need to be seen. A little happy blindness keeps the house quiet.

Some people may call this deceit. I call it kindness. Better a peaceful home with a little sweet foolishness than a house full of jealousy, sharp truth, and daily battle.

And what is true of marriage is true of life together in general. No people

would long bear their rulers. No servants would bear their masters. No masters would bear their servants. No student would bear a teacher, and no teacher a student, if all of them looked at one another with hard and exact judgment every hour.

Life goes on because people excuse one another. They flatter, forgive, ignore, smooth over, and make things lighter. Society itself rests on these small acts.

So do not think I rule only in low pleasures. I am necessary in the dining room, in friendship, in marriage, and in daily life itself. Without some taste of Folly, human life would become too cold, too strict, and too painful to live.

Part 11 — Self-Love Makes Life Possible

And now I will speak about one of my closest companions. Her name is Self-love. She is so near to me that she is almost like my sister.

Without her, very few people could bear themselves for long. A person who cannot like himself even a little will soon become heavy to himself and to others.

Think about it. How can a man live in peace with others if he is always at war inside his own heart? How can he give joy to anyone if he feels no ease in his own life?

If I were taken away, people would not only grow tired of others. They would grow tired of themselves. Their own faces, their own acts, and even their own thoughts would begin to trouble them.

Nature has not been kind to human beings in every way. She often makes them quick to admire what belongs to other people and slow to value what belongs to themselves.

Because of that, many good things would be wasted without Self-love. Beauty would lose its grace. Youth would lose its brightness. Skill would lose its courage.

A person needs some inward pleasure in himself if he is to move well in the world. It is not enough to have gifts. One must also be able to use them without shame and fear.

Take Self-love away, and what happens? The speaker loses force. The singer

loses ease. The actor becomes stiff. The poet grows cold.

The painter too loses confidence, and the doctor loses the bold face that often helps him almost as much as his medicine. In many parts of life, people trust the person who trusts himself.

This is why everyone flatters himself at least a little. It may be foolish, but it is useful. Before others can praise us, we usually begin that work for ourselves.

Happiness depends on this more than many wise men think. A large part of happiness is simply being willing to be what one is. Self-love makes that possible.

Because of her, a man is not ashamed of his face, his family, his house, or his way of life. He may not have the best of everything, but he can still live without hating his own condition.

The same thing happens among whole peoples. One nation praises its own looks. Another praises its courage. Another praises its learning, its old blood, or its religion.

Often these praises are foolish. But they still serve a purpose. They help people stay attached to their own place in the world.

If all men saw themselves and their neighbors with perfect fairness, many would become restless and bitter. They would always be looking away from what they have and longing for what belongs to others.

Self-love stops that. She gives each person some sweet taste for his own life. That is why people can stay where they are and still go on living with some warmth.

Nature is wiser in this than the philosophers. When she gives less in one place, she often gives more Self-love in return. By that means, she keeps the world from falling into endless grief and envy.

Nor is this useful only for quiet living. It also helps people act. No great work was ever begun without some confidence greater than strict reason would allow.

Men write books, make speeches, fight wars, seek office, build houses, and chase glory because they think well enough of themselves to begin. If they judged themselves too exactly, many would never take the first step.

Of course, they are often wrong. But even then, the world still moves because

of them. Action often comes from a happy mistake about one's own worth.

So do not laugh too quickly at Self-love. She keeps people from sinking into disgust. She helps them bear their own face and their own life.

And because she does that, she also helps friendship, work, pleasure, and hope. She is one of the gentlest and most useful servants in my whole house.

Now that I have shown you this, I can go farther. For self-love does not only shape private life. It also reaches into great public deeds, into war, power, fame, and the business of the world.

Part 12 — War, Politics, and the Weakness of Wise Men

Now let us move from private life to public life. No great action is praised more loudly than war. And yet, what is more foolish than war?

Men often begin it for small causes. Then both sides suffer, and even the side that wins may lose more than it gains. The dead say nothing, and the living carry the cost.

When battle begins, trumpets sound, bodies fall, and fear runs everywhere. In such a moment, what use are thin scholars who have spent their whole lives over books? Their blood is too cold, their spirits too weak, and their bodies too soft for such work.

War is carried on by rougher men. It is driven by men who have more force than judgment. They may understand less, but they are the ones who rush forward.

Some people will say, "But war also needs wise advice." Very well, I agree that plans and counsel matter. But war itself is not the work of philosophers.

It is managed by hard, practical, and often very foolish men. Such men act quickly, risk boldly, and do not stop to examine every side of a question. That is why they succeed where wiser men often fail.

And this is not true only in war. Wise men are often poor workers in public life as well. They may speak beautifully in schools, but that does not mean they can guide ordinary people.

Socrates himself, though called the wisest of men, did not fit easily into public

life. Plato too was no master of the noisy crowd. Other famous teachers froze, trembled, or failed when they had to face people directly.

Even Cicero, so great in Roman speech, could not begin speaking without shaking. Later writers may praise that as care and seriousness. I call it another sign that too much wisdom weakens the hand when action is needed.

If such men shake before words, what would they do before swords? If they tremble before listeners, how would they stand in the dust and fear of battle? It is much easier to praise reason in a quiet room than to trust it in danger.

Some people also love to repeat Plato's saying that the best state is one ruled by philosophers, or one whose ruler becomes a philosopher. It sounds noble. But history often tells a different story.

Men too much in love with thought are often bad rulers. They understand ideas better than people. They know arguments better than they know the world.

A ruler must deal with living men and women, not perfect ideas. People are moved by habit, fear, hope, anger, pride, and desire. Anyone who forgets that will soon fail, no matter how clever his mind may be.

Even when a philosopher is not dangerous, he is often difficult. Invite him to a feast, and he brings silence or argument. Take him to dance, and he moves badly. Bring him to the theater, and his face alone can spoil the pleasure.

Let him buy, sell, flatter, persuade, or manage some common business, and he often seems less like a man than like a block of wood. He is not useful to himself, to his friends, or to his country because he has lived too far away from ordinary life.

That is why such men are often disliked. Their way of speaking is different, their way of feeling is different, and their whole life seems out of step with everyone else. They do not bend where human life needs bending.

But what is actually done among men that is not full of folly? Public life is made by fools, moved by fools, and carried on among fools. If one single wise man tries to stand against the whole stream, he will only make himself lonely.

So my advice is simple. If someone truly wants to live by wisdom alone, let him leave the city, go into a desert, and enjoy his wisdom there by himself. Here

among human beings, life moves by warmer and less exact rules.

Part 13 — Cities, Glory, and Public Life

But let me return to my main road. If the perfectly wise man is so poor at common life, then who first drew wild and rough people together into cities? It was not cold philosophy. It was softer and stranger powers, things closer to story, music, hope, and pleasing speech.

People tell us that Amphion moved stones with music and that Orpheus drew living creatures after him by the sweetness of his song. You may believe those stories or not. The meaning is still clear.

Men are not first gathered by hard argument. They are led by imagination, delight, and the charm of words. A crowd will often follow a song, a sign, or a story long before it follows a lesson.

Think also of Rome when the people were angry and close to tearing the city apart. It was not some dry speech full of philosophy that calmed them. A simple story about the belly and the other parts of the body did more than a hundred stern arguments could have done.

The same thing happened in other places. Themistocles helped his people not only with sense, but with clever images and lively examples. Sertorius too ruled men not by naked truth alone, but with signs and devices that caught the eye and the mind.

Lycurgus did much the same. So did Minos and Numa. They guided whole peoples with stories, holy signs, and shaped appearances.

Wise men may laugh at such things. They may call them childish. But cities stand by such means.

Show me one city that was ever truly ruled by Plato's ideas, by Aristotle's divisions, or by Socrates' questions. I do not see one. People do not live by such things.

They live by custom, habit, fear, hope, honor, and the wish to belong. They live by images that move the heart. All these things stand much nearer to me than

to philosophy.

And now look at those great public acts that history praises so loudly. What moves them? Is it pure truth and calm reason? Very often it is nothing so noble.

Very often it is only empty glory. Men want to be seen, praised, remembered, and carried high in the mouths of others. They want the crowd to clap. They want their names to remain after their bodies are gone.

Wise men call that foolish, and in one sense they are right. What could be more foolish than to beg for the favor of the crowd? What could be more foolish than to buy applause, enjoy the shouting of fools, and feel grand because a bronze image of you stands in a public place?

And yet many famous deeds begin there. Men enter danger because they want honor. They take office because they want to be seen. They give away wealth because they want praise. They even die because they want a noble name.

Laugh at this if you wish. I often do. But if you take it away entirely, many great public acts disappear with it.

Cities, laws, authority, religion, empire, and public order are often kept alive by this same noble foolishness. Without it, many people would never take up burdens that cost more than they return. Without it, they would stay quietly at home and do almost nothing for the common life.

The same is true in the arts and in learning. What first drove men to spend whole nights awake, to wear out their health, and to chase after books, speeches, songs, and inventions? It was not calm wisdom.

It was the thirst for glory. It was the wish to leave a name behind. It was the dream that later people would say, "Here was a great man."

That desire is thin as smoke, and still men chase it with all their strength. They lose sleep, peace, money, and comfort for it. They trouble themselves greatly in order to gain something that cannot even be held in the hand.

Yet even here I do not complain too much. For though the cause is foolish, the result is often useful to others. Men may act from vanity, and still the world may gain books, speeches, buildings, and discoveries from their labor.

So once again you see my way. I do not always produce useless things. Even

when I move men by vain hopes, useful works may still grow from that movement. The wise speak against me, and still they enjoy the fruit of what I have stirred.

Now perhaps you think I have claimed enough. I have taken for myself life, pleasure, childhood, youth, old age, friendship, marriage, war, public life, and glory. But I can go farther still.

I can even touch prudence. Some people may think that strange, as if I were trying to mix fire and water. But wait a little and you will see my meaning.

If prudence means experience, then who deserves the name more? The man who acts, risks, tries, fails, and learns? Or the man who stands back in fear and gathers only words from old books?

The fool often learns real caution by doing. The wise man often learns only careful speech by watching. One burns his hand and then knows the fire. The other talks about heat and still stays cold.

There are two things that often block human knowledge. One is shame. The other is fear.

Shame makes a person hold back. Fear makes him imagine danger and stop before he begins. But I free people from both of these. That is why they dare to act.

And by acting, they come to know the world. They learn what books alone cannot teach. They learn by falling, by losing, by trying again, and by moving among real things instead of only among ideas.

There is another point too. Human things do not have only one face. Almost everything has two sides.

What looks like death may turn out to be life. What looks beautiful may hide ugliness. What seems like wealth may be deep poverty inside. What looks noble may be shameful when closely seen.

A prince may seem rich and grand, and yet be the poorest of men because he is never satisfied. A man may appear honorable and still be low within. Outward form deceives us all the time.

So if someone boasts that he will strip away every covering and show everything exactly as it is, he may do less good than he thinks. For human life

itself stands partly on appearance. Strip all of that away at once, and you do not purify life. You only spoil it.

Think of a stage play. One man enters dressed as a king, another as a servant, another as a woman, another as a god. If some clever fool rushed in and pulled off every costume in the middle of the play, what would happen?

He would not make the play wiser. He would ruin it. The whole point of the performance would be lost.

Life is much the same. Men walk about in borrowed clothes, playing different parts, until they are called away. If you tear every mask away too quickly, you do not improve the world. You only make it impossible to enjoy.

That is why I say again that common life does not stand by bare truth alone. It stands by custom, appearance, hope, praise, pride, and all the moving shows that keep human beings acting together. And now that I have shown you how cities and public life grow under my rule, I can turn next to those learned people who spend their lives chasing fame through books, schools, and the sweet sound of their own names.

Part 14 — Learning, Schoolmasters, and Poets

Now let us turn to learned people. There too you can see some of my finest victories. Many of them live in trouble, noise, dirt, and hard work, and yet they think themselves very happy.

Look first at schoolmasters. Their life is hard enough to break stronger people than they are. They grow old in small rooms full of boys, noise, bad air, and dirt.

They shout all day. They threaten, strike, and frighten children with loud voices and hard faces. To anyone outside, their life looks poor and miserable.

But by my kindness they do not see it that way. They think themselves great men. That dirty room seems to them like a kingdom.

The stink seems sweet. The slavery seems like power. They would not change their little rule over boys for the rule of a great tyrant.

They are happy because they can command. A little fear in others makes them

feel strong. That is enough for them.

And they are pleased with themselves in another way too. Most of them fill children's heads with small and foolish things, yet they believe themselves greater than the old masters of learning.

Somehow they also make simple fathers and mothers believe the same thing. So the praise they give themselves comes back to them from outside. Nothing makes a person happier than hearing from others what he already thinks of himself.

Then comes another pleasure. If one of them finds some rare old word in a broken book, or works out the meaning of half-dead letters on an old stone, he swells with pride at once.

He acts as if he had won a war. He walks about in triumph, though the prize is only some dry little fact that no one else needs. Still, his joy is real, and I do not take that joy away.

Then there are poets. Let a poet read out a few poor verses, and if he finds listeners foolish enough to praise them, he quickly begins to think that some great old poet now lives inside him.

A weak poem becomes a noble one the moment applause touches it. He hears praise and at once believes that he has become another Virgil. That is one of my sweetest tricks.

Poets also love to praise one another. They admire, praise, and smooth one another with great warmth. Each man sees genius in his friend because he wishes to hear the same thing said back to him.

But let one of them make a small mistake, and then the peace ends. At once there are angry words, sharp jokes, insults, and quarrels. Their friendship is warm, but their pride is warmer.

And grammarians are no better. I once knew a learned old man who knew many things. He had studied Greek, Latin, medicine, philosophy, and more.

Yet after all that, he spent over twenty years hurting his own mind over grammar alone. He thought himself lucky if he might live long enough to decide exactly how the parts of speech should be divided.

Imagine it. A man with a long life behind him, and this is the battle he chooses.

Not a kingdom, not justice, not peace, but a fight over words.

That too is my work. Men wear themselves out over very small things and feel grand while doing it. It is foolish, yes, but it also keeps them pleased and busy.

The same thing happens among many who work in the arts. Players, musicians, speakers, and poets often love themselves most when they know the least. The emptier the head, the wider the feathers spread.

And still the crowd often admires them. In truth, foolish things are often loved by foolish hearers. Since there are always more fools than wise judges, confidence often wins more praise than real skill.

So why should such people trouble themselves with true knowledge? True knowledge costs much. It brings doubt, labor, and care, and in the end only a few careful minds will value it.

But happy ignorance is easier. It speaks boldly, trusts itself, and finds many admirers. That is why so many learned people would rather lose land or money than give up one foolish opinion of their own.

Whole groups of scholars live this way. One school praises its own masters. Another school praises its own method. Each thinks itself the best and looks down on the rest.

Their learning becomes a mirror. They do not look into it to find truth. They look into it to admire themselves. And because they do that, they remain under my rule even while speaking proudly against me.

So do not think that learning frees people from Folly. Often it only gives Folly better clothes and a louder voice. And if you think these scholars are amusing, wait until we come to the theologians, who can make simple things dark and call that greatness.

Part 15 — Theologians and Their Dark Language

And now we come to the theologians. Here too my power is very easy to see. These men love hard questions the way other people love good food.

They do not like a plain road. If a matter is simple, they quickly make it

difficult. If a thing is already difficult, they make it darker still.

They divide, cut, sharpen, and turn every question in many ways. Then they grow proud because no ordinary person can follow them. They think darkness is depth.

If they are going to speak about love, they may begin from some far river. If they are going to speak about the cross, they may begin from some strange sign or monster. If they are going to speak about fasting, they may wander off to the stars.

If they speak about faith, they may start from shapes and numbers. In this way, the thing they should explain is almost lost before they reach it. Yet they think such wandering shows great learning.

I once heard one of them speak before a large crowd about the Trinity. He wanted everyone to see that his learning was uncommon. So he did not speak plainly.

Instead, he began with letters, syllables, and grammar. He moved from one small part of speech to another, as if heaven itself were hidden inside school rules. Many people sat there amazed, though some were clearly wondering where he was going.

At last he declared that the Trinity could be proved from the first rules of grammar so clearly that even a mathematician could not make it plainer. He had spent many months beating his brains over this. In the end, he had almost ruined his eyes.

Yet he did not think that price too high. He was pleased with his own glory. Blindness itself seemed cheap to him if it came with such praise.

I also knew another old divine, a man of great age, who seemed to believe that all wisdom in the world lay hidden in the name of Jesus. He broke the letters apart and found secret meanings in each one. Then he joined those meanings together again and claimed that he had uncovered deep holy truth.

The audience listened with wide eyes. The theologians especially were struck with wonder, almost as if they had turned to stone. I myself could hardly keep from laughing.

But this is exactly their way. The less clear the speech, the more pleased they often are. If no one understands, they take that as a sign that the matter must be very deep.

A plain and honest preacher tries to help his hearers understand. A vain theologian tries to make them admire. That is why one gives light and the other gives fog.

They also love long openings that do not really belong to the subject. They begin far away and wander slowly, so that the listeners whisper to one another, “What is he trying to say?” That whisper itself gives them pleasure.

After that, they bring in some words from Scripture, but often only in passing. The very thing that should stand in the center is pushed aside. Then they suddenly leap into some question in divinity that seems to belong neither to earth nor to heaven.

This too they call skill. Then they raise their voices, swell with pride, and throw grand titles into the air. One is called subtle, another more subtle, another most subtle, another holy, another seraphic, another beyond question.

Then come the syllogisms, the little traps of argument, the majors, the minors, the conclusions, and all the other tools they love so much. They pour them out before simple listeners as if they were pouring treasure from a chest. But often the treasure is only dust.

At last, when one thinks they should come to the heart of the matter, they bring in some thin little story and stretch it into many meanings. They pull it upward, sideways, inward, and beyond itself until it hardly looks like a story at all. By then, the hearers are lost, but the speaker is happy.

So do not tell me that theologians stand far from Folly. They are among my finest servants, especially when they are most pleased with their own learning. The darker they make a thing, the more they think they shine.

And now that I have shown you these masters of thick language, I can go on to others who wear religion on their bodies, in their titles, and in their high offices, while often forgetting the simple work those offices were meant to serve.

Part 16 — Priests, Bishops, Cardinals, and Popes

And now let us move from the schools to high places. Court lords are among my best servants. They may be weak, foolish, and empty, but they think themselves excellent.

They wear gold, jewels, silk, and rich colors. They think this is enough. As for true wisdom or true goodness, they are happy to leave that to someone else.

They learn how to bow, how to smile, and how to say grand titles at the right time. They know how to flatter without shame. These are the skills that make a fine courtier.

If you look at their lives, the picture is not noble at all. They sleep late, hear a quick prayer at the bedside, eat, drink, gamble, laugh, and pass from one pleasure to another. In this way whole days and years go by without any real work.

Yet they are pleased with themselves all the same. The ladies think themselves almost like goddesses because of their long dresses. The men push close to power and feel greater when they carry heavier chains on their shoulders.

And princes are not alone in this kind of life. Popes, cardinals, and bishops have followed the same path very closely. In some things, they have even gone farther.

Think first about bishops. If a bishop truly considered what his office means, his life would become very serious at once. His white robe should remind him of a clean life. His miter should remind him of holy knowledge.

His gloves should remind him to handle sacred things with pure hands. His staff should remind him to care for the flock. The cross carried before him should remind him to conquer earthly desires.

If a bishop held all that in his mind every day, he would not live lightly. He would have to work, watch, teach, correct, and care for others with great effort. That would be a hard life indeed.

But many of them choose an easier way. They feed themselves well enough, and the care of the flock is passed to someone else. It goes to helpers, to lower officers, or to poor vicars.

They do not even remember what the word bishop really means. It means labor, care, and trouble. Yet when it is time to gather money, they become very sharp-eyed indeed.

Now let us look at cardinals. If they truly saw themselves as the successors of the apostles, they would think very differently about their place. They would remember that they are not masters of spiritual things, but servants trusted with them for a time.

Their white linen should remind them of honesty and a clean life. Their red should remind them of burning love for God. Their wide outer robes should remind them of a charity large enough to help everyone in need.

They should instruct, comfort, warn, correct, make peace, and resist evil. They should be ready to spend not only their money, but even their lives for Christ's people. That is what such signs ought to mean.

If they truly thought that way, they would not be so eager for high office. Or if they still wanted it, they would take it as a life of hard work and great care. They would live more like the early apostles and less like great lords.

And now we come to the popes. If they really wished to follow Christ, what kind of life would they choose? They would choose poverty, labor, teaching, the cross, and contempt for worldly glory.

If they thought seriously about the name father, or about the title holiness, they would not rush so eagerly toward that chair. Few men would spend all they have to gain it. Fewer still would defend it with swords, poison, and every kind of force.

For what would wisdom bring them there? It would take away profit. It would strip away many pleasures. It would replace rich ease with hard duty.

A truly wise pope would have to stay awake, work, pray, teach, suffer, and forget himself. He would have to think less about power and more about the life of Christ. That is not the road many ambitious men wish to walk.

And the matter does not stop with them. Many common priests live in much the same spirit. Their shaved heads should remind them to leave worldly desires behind and think of heavenly things. But often the reminder does not work.

They think they have done enough if they mumble a few prayers in a careless

way. I sometimes wonder whether even God can understand those prayers, since the men saying them do not seem to understand them themselves. Yet when profit is near, they are very alert indeed.

Many of them know laws about money and rights better than they know Scripture. And if some hard duty appears, they pass it to another person. They toss burdens from one to another like a ball passed from hand to hand.

The common people hand religion over to the clergy, as if they themselves were no part of the Church. Then the clergy pass it farther on. Secular priests pass it to regulars, regulars to monks, monks to stricter orders, and all of them try to lay the weight on someone else.

The same thing happens at the top. Popes are very eager in gathering money, but they pass their apostolic work to bishops. Bishops pass it to parish priests, parish priests to vicars, and those men pass it on again, while the flock is left to whoever is willing to take the wool.

I do not wish to search too closely into all their lives. If I did that, my praise of myself might begin to sound too much like open attack. What I have said is enough for my purpose.

I only wanted to show again that no one lives pleasantly unless he belongs to my side. Even in robes, titles, ceremonies, and sacred offices, my power is plain to see. And now, since that is clear, I can go on and show you something more: Fortune herself walks so closely with me that wise men often lose where fools happily win.

Part 17 — Fortune Loves Fools

What I have said so far has had one purpose. I wanted to show that no one lives pleasantly unless he belongs, in some way, to my side. And how could it be otherwise?

Fortune herself walks very close to me. In truth, she is almost the same as I am. She rules much of human life, and she has never loved wise men very much.

Wise men make her uncomfortable. They stop, think, doubt, and fear. They

look too carefully before they move.

But fools are another matter. Fortune smiles on them. She likes careless men, bold men, and men who act first and think later.

You know the kind of person I mean. He throws himself forward and trusts that something will work out. And very often, strange as it seems, it does.

Meanwhile the wise man stands aside and grows afraid. He sees danger before him, risk on each side, and trouble at the end of every road. By the time he has thought enough, the chance is gone.

That is why Fortune so often seems to help men with little wit and much confidence. They are quick, they are bold, and they do not shame themselves with too much fear.

Wisdom, on the other hand, often makes men shy. It fills them with doubt. It keeps them back. So what happens in the end?

Very often the wise are left with poverty, hunger, and dark corners. They live unknown, neglected, and disliked. They have too much care to move easily in the world.

Fools do much better. They have money, offices, honor, and public power. They are found close to rulers. They are trusted in worldly business. In short, they flourish.

If happiness means pleasing princes and living among great and shining people, then what is less useful there than wisdom? Those places do not always reward truth.

They reward boldness, ease, smooth speech, and a face that never blushes. A wise man may condemn such things, but his condemnation does not bring him nearer to power.

Think of a merchant. If he followed strict wisdom at every step, how rich would he become? If he stopped at every oath, every lie, every rough bargain, and every doubtful gain, he would likely remain poor.

I am not praising such ways as holy. I am only saying what happens in the world. The world often rewards men who move boldly through doubtful things more than men who stop and think about them.

The same is true of honors and church offices. If a man wants position, a thick-skinned fool may get there sooner than a wise man. A wild ox may push through more easily than a careful thinker.

And what about love? There too the wise do not always win. A young woman often runs more quickly to a fool than to a wise man.

Why? Because the fool amuses her. He makes her laugh. He speaks freely. The wise man may be too sharp, too cold, or too heavy for her taste.

Women often fear a wise man and avoid him, just as they might avoid something dangerous. But a fool feels easier, lighter, and more alive. In the great comedy of love, that often matters more.

The same rule holds wherever people wish to live merrily. Anyone who wants laughter, play, and easy company shuts the door against the too-wise man and lets almost anyone else in first.

Wisdom sits stiffly in the corner. Folly gets the best seat in the room. That is simply how human life is made.

Go where you like, among bishops, princes, judges, rulers, friends, enemies, rich people, poor people, and ordinary folk. Everywhere you will find the same thing. Money does almost everything.

And because the wise man speaks so badly of money, money takes special care not to come near him. That too is one of the funniest arrangements in the world.

So do not imagine that worldly success belongs to those who see most clearly. Very often it belongs to those who act with cheerful blindness. They understand less, but they move faster.

That is one reason why I have so many followers. The world is not ruled by exact justice, and it is certainly not ruled by philosophers. Fortune herself prefers confidence to caution, movement to delay, and happy fools to trembling sages.

Now perhaps you think I have praised myself enough. Truly, I could go on much longer. But even a good speech must come toward its end.

So before I finish, I will do one more thing. I will show you that not only daily life, but even famous writers and respected sayings have spoken well of me, whether they meant to or not.

Part 18 — Scripture Turns Against Human Wisdom

Very well, then. Let us look at famous writers and old sayings. Even there, you will find many voices that help my case.

People often say that when a man has little material, he should invent some. Children are even taught that one great skill in life is knowing when and how to play the fool. That alone should tell you something.

If even the likeness of folly can win praise, then folly itself must have some real power. Wise people do not always admit this clearly, but they show it often enough. They praise the thing while pretending to laugh at it.

Horace says that we should mix a little folly into our serious plans. He also says that it is pleasant to play the fool at the right time. He understood very well that life becomes too hard when it is ruled only by strict reason.

Even in Homer, young people are sometimes called foolish in a kindly way. The word is not always used as a curse. Sometimes it points to youth, softness, openness, and a life not yet made cold by too much thought.

And what are many great stories, if not long tales of foolish kings, foolish crowds, foolish hopes, and foolish wars? Cicero himself says that all things are full of fools. On that point, at least, I am happy to agree with him.

But perhaps some people will say, “Those are only poets and writers. Their words are not enough for Christians.” Very well. Then let us turn to Holy Scripture.

I know some theologians will not enjoy seeing me enter this ground. They think such things belong only to them. But after living so long among them, I have learned enough of their language to walk here without fear.

Ecclesiastes says that the number of fools is infinite. Now think about that. If fools are without number, who is left outside my kingdom?

Perhaps a few rare people may be imagined. But where are they? Who has seen them? The plain meaning is that folly reaches almost all mankind.

Jeremiah helps me too. He says that every man is made foolish through his own wisdom. That is a wonderful line. It gives wisdom to God alone and leaves

folly to the rest of us.

And why, says Jeremiah, should a man glory in his wisdom? The answer is simple enough. Because he has no great reason to glory in it. Human wisdom, when it grows proud, often turns into folly very quickly.

Ecclesiastes also cries out, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” And what is human life, if not exactly that? It is a passing show full of noise, effort, pride, hope, and foolish movement.

Men run in, speak loudly, make plans, chase honors, and then disappear. In that sense, life really is like a little stage play of folly. The wise preacher saw that much very clearly.

He also says that a fool changes like the moon, while the wise remain like the sun. Many interpreters say the sun stands for God, the one true light, and the moon for human life. If that is so, then wisdom in the full sense belongs only to God.

And if full wisdom belongs only to God, what belongs to man? Change, weakness, and folly. Once again, the road leads back to me.

Solomon says too that foolishness is joy to the fool. I like that sentence very much. It plainly admits that joy and folly live close together.

He also says that he who increases knowledge increases sorrow, and that much understanding brings grief. That is exactly what I have been telling you all along. The more sharply people see, the more heavily life often weighs on them.

And again, he says that the heart of the wise is where sadness lives, while the heart of fools follows mirth. That is hard on the proud wise, but it is not hard to understand. Wisdom often grows dark. Folly often keeps life warm.

Solomon even says that he gave his heart to know wisdom and knowledge, madness and folly. Notice that well. He did not think the matter complete without me.

So do not tell me that Scripture always stands with the proud wise against Folly. Again and again it speaks in a way that weakens their pride and gives me room to speak. The more they boast, the more the holy words turn against them.

And now that I have shown you this much, I can go one step farther. For Scripture does not only humble human wisdom. It also opens the way to

something stranger still.

It suggests that the truest religious life itself may look foolish to the world. And that is exactly where I will go next.

Part 19 — Holy Folly

And now I will go one step farther. Some people may not like it, but I will say it plainly. The Christian religion itself seems to have a close tie with Folly and very little friendship with the kind of wisdom the world praises.

If you want proof, look first at the kinds of people who are most quickly drawn to holy things. Very often it is children, old people, women, and simple fools who stand nearest the altars and take the greatest joy in religion. They do not come by long argument. They come by simple feeling and natural impulse.

Then think about the first founders of the faith. They were plain and simple people. They were not proud lovers of worldly learning. In many ways, they stood far from the kind of wisdom later ages admire so much.

Look also at the people most deeply swallowed up by Christian zeal. To ordinary eyes, they often seem more out of the common road than anyone else. They give away their money, bear injuries, let themselves be cheated, and do not draw a hard line between friend and enemy.

They turn away from pleasure. They accept poverty. They stay awake in prayer. They fill their lives with tears, labor, and reproach. They grow tired of this life and long for death, because they hope for something better beyond it.

To common understanding, such people do not look wise. They look almost senseless. It is as if their minds are living somewhere else and not fully in their own bodies. And what else does the world call that but madness?

So it should not seem strange if the apostles once appeared to be drunk with new wine. Nor should it seem strange if Paul appeared mad to Festus. When holy zeal burns strongly, ordinary people almost always mistake it for folly.

But I will go farther still. I will say that the happiness Christians seek with so much labor is itself a kind of madness and folly. Do not be angry at the words.

Look at the matter.

Christians and Platonists agree in at least one thing. They both say that the soul is tied down in the prison of the body. Because the body is heavy and gross, it keeps the soul from fully seeing and enjoying things as they truly are.

That is why philosophy was once called a practice for death. It pulls the mind away from visible and bodily things. In that sense, it does something close to what death itself later completes.

As long as the soul uses the body's parts in the ordinary way, people say the man is in his right mind. He sees, hears, speaks, and moves in the common manner. He fits the world, and the world is satisfied with him.

But when the soul begins to pull away from the body, when it strains against that prison and tries to rise above it, people grow uneasy. If this happens because of sickness or damage in the body's tools, everyone quickly says that the man is mad.

And yet strange things are often seen in such moments. Some people seem to know what is about to happen. Others speak in ways beyond their usual power. It is as if the soul, being less tied down, begins to show something of its own hidden strength.

You may see something like this in people close to death. At that edge, they sometimes speak in a way they never spoke before. Their bodies are weaker, yet their minds seem, in some strange way, larger.

So if the same kind of thing appears in holy life, why should anyone be surprised? When a person begins to live less for the body and more for something higher, he naturally starts to look strange to people who are still fully tied to ordinary things.

The world sees visible things and takes them for the whole of life. It trusts comfort, gain, praise, safety, and success. But the holy person begins to care less for these things and more for what cannot be seen.

That is why the world looks at such a person and thinks, "He is not in his right mind." In truth, it may be that he has only stopped living by the world's measure.

And now that I have brought you this far, I can go still deeper. For if the soul

really does begin to rise above the body, then Christian happiness must be something very different from ordinary happiness. It must be a joy that the world can hardly understand, because it begins where worldly wisdom comes to an end.

Part 20 — A Taste of the Life to Come

I will now go a little farther. A holy person does not wish only to live well in this world. A holy person wants something more.

Such a person wants the soul to rise above the body. He wants to be less tied to passing things and more open to what is eternal. That is why holy people often seem strange to the crowd.

The crowd thinks religion means standing in church, hearing prayers, and watching holy actions. But a truly holy person wants his whole life to change. He wants to become a new man.

He wants to leave the old self behind. He wants to become one with Christ and, through that love, one with other people too. This is much more than outward religion.

Because of this, ordinary people and holy people often look at each other in opposite ways. Common people say, “These holy people are mad.” And the holy often think, “These people are asleep.”

If madness must be named here, I say the holier kind is better. It is not the madness of a broken mind. It is the soul going out beyond the small prison of the self.

Think of people in love. Even Plato saw something here. When love grows strong, a person no longer lives only inside himself.

He lives in the one he loves. He forgets himself. He goes out of himself, and in that very movement he feels joy.

That is why people say of a lover, “He is not himself.” And when the strong feeling passes, they say, “Now he has come back to himself.” The words are simple, but they tell the truth.

Love is sweet partly because it carries a person outside his own small life. He

leaves the narrow room of the self and lives, for a time, in someone else. In that way, joy becomes larger.

If this is true in human love, then what shall we say of the life to come? Holy people long for that life with their whole hearts. They believe that there the spirit will stand above the body in a full and perfect way.

In that future life, the spirit will no longer be dragged down as it is now. It will rule freely. It will be joined to the highest good from which all good things come.

Then the whole person will go out of that little prison of the self and enter a joy too great to be fully spoken. That is full happiness. That is the great reward for which holy souls wait.

Of course, that happiness will be complete only in the life to come. But because holy people already practice for it, they sometimes receive a very small taste of it even now. This too is important.

It is only a drop, not the full river. Yet even that small drop is greater than all the pleasures of this world gathered together in one place. Spiritual things are better than bodily things.

Things that cannot be seen are better than things that can be touched. That is why Scripture says that the eye has not seen, the ear has not heard, and the heart has not fully understood what God has prepared for those who love Him. Mary chose that better part.

And when this taste comes to a holy person, something strange happens. He begins to suffer a condition not very different from madness. At least, it looks that way to others.

He may speak broken words that do not seem to fit together. His sounds may not follow ordinary speech. Even he himself may not fully notice what he is saying.

His face may change again and again. One moment he is full of joy. Then he is sad.

Then he weeps. Then he laughs. Then he sighs deeply. His whole body seems to show that he is feeling something sweet and painful at the same time.

When he comes back to ordinary awareness, he often says that he does not know where he has been. He cannot say clearly whether he was in the body or

outside it, awake or asleep. He remembers very little in a clear way.

He does not fully know what he saw, heard, said, or did. He only knows one thing. While he was so far outside himself, he was very happy.

And because of that, he is sorry when he comes back again. He would gladly remain in that sweet madness. He wants it to last.

That, I say, is a small foretaste of the happiness to come. It is not yet the full feast. But it is enough to show why holy people seem so strange to the world.

The world looks at them and thinks they have lost ordinary sense. In truth, they may only have touched a joy that ordinary sense cannot hold. That is why they look different.

So now my point should be clear. The deepest Christian joy does not look wise by the world's measure. It looks foolish, excessive, and almost mad.

But perhaps that is because the world's measure is too small. It knows how to count money, honor, comfort, and success. It does not know how to measure the joy of a soul that has begun to rise beyond all those things.

I have now said almost all that I wished to say. Only a little remains. And before I finish, I must speak once more in my own proper way, so that no one forgets who has been talking all this time.

Part 21 — Folly Says Goodbye

And so this is the joy that holy people seek. It is not the joy of money, honor, comfort, or praise. It is a joy that begins when the soul starts to rise above the body and when a person lives less for this world and more for the next.

That is why such people can look foolish to everyone else. They do not speak, choose, or hope in the ordinary way. Their happiness begins where worldly wisdom fails.

I have gone far enough now. In fact, I have gone a little farther than I first meant to go. But if I have spoken too boldly, or too freely, then remember who has been speaking.

It was not only Folly. It was also a woman. So if my words have run beyond

good order, you should not be too surprised.

And remember this as well. There is an old saying that even a fool may sometimes speak at the right time. I am happy to end with that.

Perhaps you are waiting for a neat ending, with all my points gathered together in fine order. If that is what you expect, then you expect too much from me.

Do not think that I remember every word I have thrown out in this long speech. I have spoken as Folly speaks, freely, quickly, and in many directions at once. That is part of my nature.

There is an old proverb that says a man should not remember too carefully what was done over the cup. I will make a new one of my own.

I do not like the man who remembers too exactly what he has heard from me. A speech like this should leave warmth, laughter, and a little light in the mind, not a hard list of points.

So now I will stop. You have listened well, and that is enough for me.

Farewell, then. Clap your hands. Live well. Drink freely. Stay cheerful, my excellent disciples of Folly.