

Christian Morals, Part I

Sir Thomas Browne

Anglican · Post-Reformation · Meditation

STROMATA 210

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INTRODUCTION

Christian Morals is Browne's last work, left unfinished at his death in 1682 and not published until 1716, a string of short, aphoristic exhortations to virtue, each section a self-contained meditation rather than a developed argument. The prose is dense with the same ornate, image-heavy Latinate style that made *Religio Medici* and *Urn Burial* distinctive: classical allusion, coined words, and long balanced clauses piled one on another. Read it slowly, a section or two at a time rather than straight through - the aphoristic form rewards pausing. Part I concerns itself chiefly with the cultivation of virtue against the pull of wealth and self-regard, closing on reflections on providence and the examined conscience.

Section 1

Tread softly and circumspectly in this funambulatory (narrow) track and narrow path of goodness: pursue virtue virtuously: leaven not good actions nor render virtues disputable. Stain not fair acts with foul intentions: maim not uprightness by halting concomitances, nor circumstantially deprave substantial goodness.

Consider whereabouts thou art in Cebes's table, or that old philosophical pinax of the life of man: whether thou art yet in the road of uncertainties; whether thou hast yet entered the narrow gate, got up the hill and asperous way, which leadeth unto the house of sanity; or taken that purifying potion from the hand of sincere erudition, which may send thee clear and pure away unto a virtuous and happy life.

In this virtuous voyage of thy life hull not about like the ark, without the use of rudder, mast, or sail, and bound for no port. Let not disappointment cause despondency, nor difficulty despair. Think not that you are failing from Lima to Manilla, when you may fasten up the rudder, and sleep before the wind; but expect rough seas, flaws, and contrary blasts: and 'tis well, if by many cross tacks and veerings you arrive at the port; for we sleep in lions' skins in our progress unto virtue, and we slide not but climb unto it.

Sit not down in the popular forms and common level of virtues. Offer not only peace-offerings but holocausts unto God: where all is due make no reserve, and cut not a cummin-seed with the Almighty:

to serve Him singly to serve ourselves, were too partial a piece of piety; not like to place us in the illustrious mansions of glory.

Section 2

Rest not in an ovation but a triumph over thy passions. Let anger walk hanging down the head; let malice go manacled, and envy fetter'd after thee. Behold within thee the long train of thy trophies, not without thee. Make the quarrelling Lapithytes sleep, and Centaurs within lie quiet. Chain up the unruly legion of thy breast. Lead thine own captivity captive, and he Cæsar within thyself.

Section 3

He that is chaste and continent not to impair his strength, or honest for fear of contagion, will hardly be heroically virtuous. Adjourn not this virtue until that temper, when Cato could lend out his wife, and impotent satyrs write satyrs upon lust: but be chaste in thy flaming days, when Alexander dar'd not trust his eyes upon the fair sisters of Darius, and when so many think there is no other way but Origen's.

Section 4

Show thy art in honesty, and lose not thy virtue by the bad managery of it. Be temperate and sober; not to preserve your body in an ability for wanton ends; not to avoid the infamy of common transgressors that way, and thereby to hope to expiate or palliate obscure and closer vices; not to spare your purse, nor simply to enjoy health: but in one word, that thereby you may truly serve God, which every sickness will tell you you cannot well do without health. The sick man's sacrifice is but a lame oblation. Pious treasures laid up in healthful days, plead for sick non-performances without which we must needs look back with anxiety upon the lost opportunities of health; and may have cause rather to envy than pity the ends of penitent publick sufferers, who go with healthful prayers unto the last scene of their lives, and in the integrity of their faculties return their spirit unto God that gave it.

Section 5

Be charitable before wealth make thee covetous, and lose not the glory of the mite. If riches increase, let thy mind hold pace with them; and think it not enough to be liberal, but munificent. Though a cup of cold water from some hand may not be without its reward, yet stick not thou for wine and oil for the wounds of the distressed; and treat the poor, as our Saviour did the multitude, to the reliques of some baskets. Diffuse thy beneficence early, and while thy treasures call thee master: there may be an Atropos of thy fortunes before that of thy life, and thy wealth cut off before that hour, when all men shall be poor; for the justice of death looks equally upon the dead, and Charon expects no more from Alexander than from Irus.

Section 6

Give not only unto seven, but also unto eight, that is, unto more than many. Though to give unto every one that asketh may seem severe advice, yet give thou also before asking; that is, where want is silently clamorous, and men's necessities not their tongues do loudly call for thy mercies. For though sometimes necessitousness be dumb, or misery speak not out, yet true charity is sagacious, and will find out hints for beneficence.

Acquaint thyself with the physiognomy of want, and let the dead colours and first lines of necessity suffice to tell thee there is an object for thy bounty. Spare not where thou canst not easily be prodigal, and fear not to be undone by mercy; for since he who hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the Almighty rewarder, who observes no ides but every day for his payments, charity becomes pious usury, Christian liberality the most thriving industry; and what we adventure in a cockboat may return in a carrack unto us. He who thus casts his bread upon the water, shall surely find it again; for though it falleth to the bottom, it sinks but like the ax of the prophet, to rise again unto him.

Section 7

If avarice be thy vice, yet make it not thy punishment. Miserable men commiserate not themselves, boweless unto others, and merciless unto their own bowels. Let the fruition of things bless the possession of them, and think it more satisfaction to live richly than die rich. For since thy good works, not thy goods, will follow thee; since wealth is an appertinence of life, and no dead man is rich; to famish in plenty, and live poorly, to die rich, were a multiplying improvement in madness, and use upon use in folly.

Section 8

Trust not to the omnipotency of gold, and say not unto it thou art my confidence. Kiss not thy hand to that terrestrial sun, nor bore thy ear unto its servitude. A slave unto mammon makes no servant unto God. Covetousness cracks the sinews of faith; numbs the apprehension of any thing above sense; and only affected with the certainty of things present, makes a peradventure of things to come; lives but unto one world, nor hopes but fears another; makes their own death sweet unto others, bitter unto themselves; brings formal sadness, scenical mourning, and no wet eyes at the grave.

Section 9

Persons lightly dipt, not grain'd in generous honesty, are but pale in goodness, and faint hued in integrity. But be thou what thou virtuously art, and let not the ocean wash away thy tincture. Stand magnetically upon that axis, when prudent simplicity hath fixt there; and let no attraction invert the poles of thy honesty. That vice may be uneasy and even monstrous unto thee, let iterated good ads and long confirmed habits make virtue almost natural, or a second nature in thee. Since virtuous superstructions have commonly generous foundations, dive into thy inclinations, and early discover what nature bids thee to be, or tells thee thou may'st be. They who thus timely descend into themselves, and cultivate

the good seeds which nature hath set in them, prove not shrubs but cedars in their generation. And to be in the form of the best of the bad, or the worst of the good, will be no satisfaction unto them.

Section 10

Make not the consequence of virtue the ends thereof. Be not beneficent for a name or cymbal of applause; nor exalt and just in commerce for the advantages of trust and credit, which attend the reputation of true and punctual dealing: for these rewards, though unsought for, plain virtue will bring with her. To have other by-ends in good actions sowers laudable performances, which must have deeper roots, motives, and instigations, to give them the stamp of virtues.

Section 11

Let not the law of thy country be the non ultra of thy honesty; nor think that always good enough which the law will make good. Narrow not the law of charity, equity, mercy. Join gospel righteousness with legal right. Be not a mere Gamaliel in the faith, but let the sermon in the mount be thy Targum unto the law of Sinai.

Section 12

Live by old ethicks and the classical rules of honesty. Put no new names or notions upon authentick virtues and vices. Think not, that morality is ambulatory; that vices in one age are not vices in another; or that virtues, which are under the everlasting seal of right reason, may be stamped by opinion. And therefore though vicious times invert the opinions of things, and set up new ethicks against virtue, yet hold thou unto old morality; and rather than follow a multitude to do evil, stand like Pompey's pillar conspicuous by thyself, and single in integrity. And since the worst of times afford imitable examples of virtue; since no deluge of vice is like to be so general but more than eight will escape; eye well those heroes who have held their heads above water, who have touched pitch and not been defiled, and in the common contagion have remained uncorrupted.

Section 13

Let age not envy draw wrinkles on thy cheeks; be content to be envy'd, but envy not. Emulation may be plausible and indignation allowable, but admit no treaty with that passion which no circumstance can make good. A displacency at the good of others because they enjoy it, though not unworthy of it, is an absurd depravity, sticking fast unto corrupted nature, and often too hard for humility and charity, the great suppressors of envy. This surely is a lion not to be strangled but by Hercules himself, or the highest stress of our minds, and an atom of that power which subdueth all things unto itself.

Section 14

We not thy humility unto humiliation from adversity, but look humbly down in that state when others look upwards upon thee. Think not thy own shadow longer than that of others, nor delight to take the altitude of thyself. Be patient in the age of pride, when men live by short intervals of reason under the dominion of humor and passion, when it's in the power of every one to transform thee out of thyself, and run thee into the short madness. If you cannot imitate Job, yet come not short of Socrates, and those patient Pagans who tired the tongues of their enemies, while they perceived they spit their malice at brazen walls and statues.

Section 15

Let not the sun in capricorn go down upon thy wrath, but write thy wrongs in ashes. Draw the curtain of night upon injuries, shut them up in the tower of oblivion, and let them be as though they had not been. To forgive our enemies, yet hope that God will punish them, is not to forgive enough. To forgive them ourselves, and not to pray God to forgive them, is a partial piece of charity. Forgive thine enemies totally, and without any reserve that, however, God will revenge thee.

Section 16

While thou so hotly disclaimest the devil, be not guilty of diabolism. Fall not into one name with that unclean spirit, nor act his nature whom thou so much abhorrest; that is, to accuse, calumniate, backbite, whisper, detract, or sinistrously interpret others. Degenerous depravities, and narrow-minded vices! not only below St. Paul's noble Christian but Aristotle's true gentleman. Trust not with some that the epistle of St. James is apocryphal, and so read with less fear that stabbing truth, that in company with this vice "thy religion is in vain." Moses broke the tables, without breaking of the law; but where charity is broke, the law itself is shattered, which cannot be whole without Love, which is "the fulfilling of it." Look humbly upon thy virtues; and though thou art rich in some, yet think thyself poor and naked without that crowning grace, which "thinketh no evil, which envieth not, which beareth, hopeth, believeth, endureth all things." With these sure graces, while busy tongues are crying out for a drop of cold water, mutes may be in happiness, and sing the Trisagion in heaven.

Section 17

However thy understanding may waver in the theories of true and false, yet fasten the rudder of thy will, steer straight unto good and fall not foul on evil. Imagination is apt to rove, and conjecture to keep no bounds. Some have run out so far, as to fancy the stars might be but the light of the crystalline heaven shot through perforations on the bodies of the orbs. Others more ingeniously doubt whether there hath not been a vast tract of land in the Atlantick ocean, which earthquakes and violent causes have long ago devoured. Speculative misapprehensions may be innocuous, but immorality pernicious; theoretical mistakes and physical deviations may condemn our judgments, not lead us into judgment. But perversity of will, immoral and sinful enormities walk with Adraste and Nemesis at their backs, pursue us unto judgment, and leave us viciously miserable.

Section 18

Bid early defiance unto those vices which are of thine inward family, and having a root in thy temper plead a right and propriety in thee. Raise timely batteries against those strong holds built upon the rock of nature, and make this a great part of the militia of thy life. Delude not thyself into iniquities from participation or community, which abate the sense but not the obliquity of them. To conceive sins less, or less of sins, because others also transgress, were morally to commit that natural fallacy of man, to take comfort from society, and think adversities less because others also suffer them. The politick nature of vice must be opposed by policy; and, therefore, wiser homilies project and plot against it: wherein, notwithstanding, we are not to rest in generals, or the trite stratagems of art. That may succeed with one, which may prove successless with another: there is no community or commonweal of virtue: every man must study his own œconomy, and adapt such rules unto the figure of himself.

Section 19

Be substantially great in thyself, and more than thou appearest unto others; and let the world be deceived in thee, as they are in the lights of heaven. Hang early plummets upon the heels of pride, and let ambition have but an epicycle and narrow circuit in thee. Measure not thyself by thy morning shadow,

but by the extent of thy grave; and reckon thyself above the earth, by the line thou must be contented with under it. Spread not into boundless expansions either of designs or desires. Think not that mankind liveth but for a few; and that the rest are born but to serve those ambitions, which make but flies of men and wildernesses of whole nations. Swell not into vehement actions which imbroil and confound the earth; but be one of those violent ones which force the kingdom of heaven. If thou must needs rule, be Zeno's king, and enjoy that empire which every man gives himself. He who is thus his own monarch contentedly sways the scepter of himself, not envying the glory of crowned heads and elohims of the earth. Could the world unite in the practise of that despised train of virtues, which the divine ethicks of our Saviour hath so inculcated upon us, the furious face of things must disappear; Eden would be yet to be found, and the angels might look down, not with pity, but joy upon us.

Section 20

Though the quickness of thine ear were able to reach the noise of the moon, which some think it maketh in its rapid revolution; though the number of thy ears should equal Argus his eyes; yet stop them all with the wise man's wax, and be deaf unto the suggestions of tale-bearers, calumniators, pickthank or malevolent delators, who, while quiet men sleep, sowing the tares of discord and division, distract the tranquillity of charity and all friendly society. These are the tongues that set the world on fire, cankers of reputation, and, like that of Jonas his gourd, wither a good name in a night. Evil spirits may sit still, while these spirits walk about and perform the business of hell. To speak more strictly, our corrupted hearts are the factories of the devil, which may be at work without his presence; for when that circumventing spirit hath drawn malice, envy, and all unrighteousness unto well rooted habits in his disciples, iniquity then goes on upon its own legs; and if the gate of hell were shut up for a time, vice would still be fertile and produce the fruits of hell. Thus when God forsakes us, Satan also leaves us: for such offenders he looks upon as sure and sealed up, and his temptations then needless unto them.

Section 21

Annihilate not the mercies of God by the oblivion of ingratitude: for oblivion is a kind of annihilation; and for things to be as though they had not been, is like unto never being. Make not thy head a grave, but a repository of God's mercies. Though thou hadst the memory of Seneca, or Simonides, and conscience the punctual memorist within us, yet trust not to thy remembrance in things which need phylacteries. Register not only strange, but merciful occurrences. Let Ephemerides not Olympiads give thee account of his mercies: let thy diaries stand thick with dutiful mementos and asterisks of acknowledgment. And to be compleat and forget nothing, date not his mercy from thy nativity; look beyond the world, and before the æra of Adam.

Section 22

Paint not the sepulcher of thy self, and strive not to beautify thy corruption. Be not an advocate for thy vices, nor call for many hour-glasses to justify thy imperfections. Think not that always good which thou thinkest thou canst always make good, nor that concealed which the sun doth not behold: that which

the sun doth not now see, will be visible when the sun is out, and the stars are fallen from heaven. Mean while there is no darkness unto conscience; which can see without light, and in the deepest obscurity give a clear draught of things, which the cloud of dissimulation hath conceal'd from all eyes. There is a natural standing court within us, examining, acquitting, and condemning at the tribunal of ourselves; wherein iniquities have their natural thetas and no nocent is absolved by the verdict of himself. And therefore although our transgressions shall be tried at the last bar, the process need not be long: for the Judge of all knoweth all, and every man will nakedly know himself; and when so few are like to plead not guilty, the assize must soon have an end.

Section 23

Comply with some humours, bear with others, but serve none. Civil complacency consists with decent honesty: Flattery is a juggler, and no kin unto sincerity. But while thou maintainest the plain path, and scornest to flatter others, fall not into self-adulation, and become not thine own parasite. Be deaf unto thyself, and be not betrayed at home. Self-credulity, pride, and levity lead unto self-idolatry. There is no Damocles like unto self-opinion, nor any Siren to our own fawning conceptions. To magnify our minor things, or hug ourselves in our apparitions; to afford a credulous ear unto the clawing suggestions of fancy; to pass our days in painted mistakes of ourselves; and tho' we behold our own blood, to think ourselves the sons of Jupiter; are blandishments of self-love, worse than outward delusion. By this imposture wise men sometimes are mistaken in their elevation, and look above themselves. And fools, which are antipodes unto the wise, conceive themselves to be but their Periœci, and in the same parallel with them.

Section 24

Be not a Hercules furens abroad, and a poltron within thyself. To chase our enemies out of the field, and be led captive by our vices; to beat down our foes, and fall down to our concupiscences; are solecisms in moral schools, and no laurel attends them. To well manage our affections, and wild horses of Plato, are the highest Circenses: and the noblest digladiation is in the theatre of ourselves; for therein our inward antagonists, not only like common gladiators, with ordinary weapons and down-right blows make at us, but also, like retiary and laqueary combatants, with nets, frauds, and entanglements, fall upon us. Weapons for such combats are not to be forged at Lipara: Vulcan's art doth nothing in this internal militia; wherein not the armour of Achilles, but the armature of St. Paul, gives the glorious day, and triumphs not leading up into capitols, but up into the highest heavens. And, therefore, while so many think it the only valour to command and master others, study thou the dominion of thyself, and quiet thine own commotions. Let right reason be thy Lycurgus, and lift up thy hand unto the law of it: move by the intelligences of the superiour faculties, not by the rapt of passion, nor merely by that of temper and constitution. They who are merely carried on by the wheel of such inclinations, without the hand and guidance of sovereign reason, are but the automatus part of mankind, rather lived than living, or at least underliving themselves.

Section 25

Let not fortune, which hath no name in Scripture, have any in thy divinity. Let Providence, not chance, have the honour of thy acknowledgments, and be thy Œdipus in contingences. Mark well the paths and winding ways thereof; but be not too wise in the construction, or sudden in the application. The hand of Providence writes often by abbreviatures, hieroglyphicks or short characters, which, like the Laconism on the wall, are not to be made out but by a hint or key from that Spirit which indited them. Leave future occurrences to their uncertainties, think that which is present thy own; and since it is easier to foretel an eclipse, than a soul day, at some distance, look for little regular below. Attend with patience the uncertainty of things, and what lieth yet unexerted in the chaos of futurity. The uncertainty and ignorance of things to come, makes the world new unto us by unexpected emergencies; whereby we pass not our days in the trite road of affairs affording no novelty; for the novelizing spirit of man lives by variety, and the new faces of things.

Section 26

Though a contented mind enlargeth the dimension of little things; and unto some 'tis wealth enough not to be poor; and others are well content, if they be but rich enough to be honest, and to give every man his due yet fall not into that obsolete affectation of bravery, to throw away thy money, and to reject all honours or honourable stations in this courtly and splendid world. Old generosity is superannuated, and such contempt of the world out of date. No man is now like to refuse the favour of great ones, or be content to say unto princes, stand out of my sun. And if any there be of such antiquated resolutions, they are not like to be tempted out of them by great ones; and 'tis fair if they escape the name of hypocondriacks from the genius of latter times, unto whom contempt of the world is the most contemptible opinion; and to be able, like Bias, to carry all they have about them were to be the eighth wise-man. However, the old tetrick philosophers look'd always with indignation upon such a face of things; and observing the unnatural current of riches, power, and honour in the world, and withal the imperfection and demerit of persons often advanced unto them, were tempted unto angry opinions, that affairs were ordered more by stars than reason, and that things went on rather by lottery than election.

Section 27

If thy vessel be but small in the ocean of this world, if meanness of possessions be thy allotment upon earth, forget not those virtues which the great disposer of all bids thee to entertain from thy quality and condition; that is, submission, humility, content of mind, and industry. Content may dwell in all stations. To be low, but above contempt, may be high enough to be happy. But many of low degree may be higher than computed, and some cubits above the common commensuration; for in all states virtue gives qualifications and allowances, which make out defects. Rough diamonds are sometimes mistaken for pebbles; and meanness may be rich in accomplishments, which riches in vain desire. If our merits be above our stations, if our intrinsecal value be greater than what we go for, or our value than our valuation, and if we stand higher in God's, than in the Censor's book; it may make some equitable balance in the inequalities of this world, and there may be no such vast chasm or gulph between disparities as common measures determine. The Divine eye looks upon high and low differently from that of man. They who seem to stand upon Olympus, and high mounted unto our eyes, may be but in the valleys, and low ground unto his; for he looks upon those as highest who nearest approach his Divinity, and upon those as lowest who are farthest from it.

Section 28

When thou lookest upon the imperfections of others, allow one eye for what is laudable in them, and the balance they have from some excellency, which may render them considerable. While we look with fear or hatred upon the teeth of the viper, we may behold his eye with love. In venomous natures something may be amiable: poisons afford antipoisons: nothing is totally, or altogether uselessly bad. Notable virtues are sometimes dashed with notorious vices, and in some vicious tempers have been found illustrious acts of virtue; which makes such observable worth in some actions of king Demetrius, Antonius, and Ahab, as are not to be found in the fame kind in Aristides, Numa, or David. Constancy, generosity, clemency, and liberality, have been highly conspicuous in some persons not mark'd out in other concerns for example or imitation. But since goodness is exemplary in all, if others have not our

virtues, let us not be wanting in theirs; nor scorning them for their vices whereof we are free, be condemned by their virtues wherein we are deficient. There is dross, alloy, and embasement in all human tempers; and he flieth without wings, who thinks to find ophir or pure metal in any. For perfection is not, like light, center'd in any one body; but, like the dispersed seminalities of vegetables at the creation, scattered through the whole mass of the earth, no place producing all, and almost all some. So that 'tis well, if a perfect man can be made out of many men, and, to the perfect eye of God, even out of mankind. Time, which perfects some things, imperfects also others. Could we intimately apprehend the ideated man, and as he flood in the intellect of God upon the first exertion by creation, we might more narrowly comprehend our present degeneration, and how widely we are fallen from the pure exemplar and idea of our nature: for after this corruptive elongation from a primitive and pure creation, we are almost lost in degeneration; and Adam hath not only fallen from his Creator, but we ourselves from Adam, our Tycho and primary generator.

Section 29

Quarrel not rashly with adversities not yet understood; and overlook not the mercies often bound up in them: for we consider not sufficiently the good of evils, nor fairly compute the mercies of Providence in things afflictive at first hand. The famous Andreas Doria being invited to a feast by Aloysio Fieschi with design to kill him, just the night before fell mercifully into a fit of the gout and so escaped that mischief. When Cato intended to kill himself, from a blow which he gave his servant, who would not reach his sword unto him, his hand so swell'd that he had much ado to effect his design. Hereby any one but a resolved Stoick might have taken a fair hint of consideration, and that some merciful genius would have contrived his preservation. To be sagacious in such intercurrents is not superstition, but wary and pious discretion; and to condemn such hints were to be deaf unto the speaking hand of God, wherein Socrates and Cardan would hardly have been mistaken.

Section 30

Break not open the gate of destruction, and make no haste or bustle unto ruin. Post not heedlessly on unto the non ultra of folly, or precipice of perdition. Let vicious ways have their tropicks and deflexions, and swim in the waters of sin but as in the Asphaltick lake, though smeared and defiled, not to sink to the bottom. If thou hast dipt thy foot in the brink, yet venture not over Rubicon. Run not into extremities from whence there is no regression. In the vicious ways of the world it mercifully falleth out that we become not extempore wicked, but it taketh some time and pains to undo ourselves. We fall not from virtue, like Vulcan from heaven, in a day. Bad dispositions require some time to grow into bad habits; bad habits must undermine good, and often repeated acts make us habitually evil: so that by gradual depravations, and while we are but staggeringly evil, we are not left without parentheses of considerations, thoughtful rebukes, and merciful interventions, to recal us unto ourselves. For the wisdom of God hath methodiz'd the course of things unto the best advantage of goodness, and thinking considerators overlook not the tract thereof.

Section 31

Since men and women have their proper virtues and vices; and even twins of different sexes have not only distinct coverings in the womb, but differing qualities and virtuous habits after; transplace not their proprieties, nor confound not their distinctions. Let masculine and feminine accomplishments shine in their proper orbs, and adorn their respective subjects. However unite not the vices of both sexes in one; be not monstrous in iniquity, nor hermaphroditically vitious.

Section 32

If generous honesty, valour, and plain dealing, be the cognisance of thy family, or charateristick of thy country, hold fast such inclinations suckt in with thy first breath, and which lay in the cradle with thee. Fall not into transforming degenerations, which under the old name create a new nation. Be not an alien in thine own nation; bring not Orontes into Tiber; learn the virtues not the vices of thy foreign neighbours, and make thy imitation by discretion not contagion. Feel something of thyself in the noble acts of thy ancestors, and find in thine own genius that of thy predecessors. Rest not under the expired merits of others, shine by those of thy own. Flame not like the central fire which enlighthneth no eyes, which no man seeth, and most men think there's no such thing to be seen. Add one ray unto the common lustre; add not only to the number but the note of thy generation; and prove not a cloud but an asterisk in thy region.

Section 33

Since thou hast an alarum in thy breast, which tells thee thou hast a living spirit in thee above two thousand times in an hour; dull not away thy days in slothful supinity and the tediousness of doing nothing. To strenuous minds there is an inquietude in overquietness, and no laboriousness in labour; and to tread a mile after the flow pace of a snail, or the heavy measures of the lazy of Brazilia, were a most tiring pennance, and worse than a race of some furlongs at the Olympicks. The rapid courses of the heavenly bodies are rather imitable by our thoughts, than our corporeal motions; yet the solemn motions of our lives amount unto a greater measure than is commonly apprehended. Some few men have surrounded the globe of the earth; yet many in the set locomotions and movements of their days have measured the circuit of it, and twenty thousand miles have been exceeded by them. Move circumspectly not meticulously, and rather carefully sollicitous than anxiously sollicitudinous. Think not there is a lion in the way, nor walk with leaden sandals in the paths of goodness; but in all virtuous motions let prudence determine thy measures. Strive not to run like Hercules, a furlong in a breath: festination may prove precipitation; deliberating delay may be wise cunctation, and slowness no slothfulness.

Section 34

Since virtuous actions have their own trumpets, and, without any nose from thyself, will have their resound abroad; busy not thy best member in the encomium of thyself. Praise is a debt we owe unto the virtues of others, and due unto our own from all, whom malice hath not made mutes, or envy struck dumb. Fall not, however, into the common prevaricating way of self-commendation and boasting, by

denoting the imperfections of others. He who discommendeth others obliquely, commendeth himself. He who whispers their infirmities, proclaims his own exemption from them; and, consequently, says, I am not as this publican, or hic niger, whom I talk of. Open ostentation and loud vain-glory is more tolerable than this obliquity, as but containing some froth no ink, as but confining of a personal piece of folly, nor complicated with uncharitableness. Superfluously we seek a precarious applause abroad: every good man hath his plaudite within himself; and though his tongue be fluent, is not without loud cymbals in his breast. Conscience will become his panegyrist, and never forget to crown and extol him unto himself.

Section 35

Bless not thyself only that thou wert born in Athens; but, among thy multiplied acknowledgements, lift up one hand unto heaven, that thou wert born of honest parents; that modesty, humility, patience, and veracity, lay in the same egg, and came into the world with thee. From such foundations thou mayst be happy in a virtuous precocity, and make an early and long walk in goodness; so mayst thou more naturally feel the contrariety of vice unto nature, and resist some by the antidote of thy temper. As charity covers, so modesty preventeth a multitude of sins; withholding from noon-day vices and brazen-brow'd iniquities, from sinning on the house-top, and painting our follies with the rays of the sun. Where this virtue reigneth, though vice may show its head, it cannot be in its glory. Where shame of sin sets, look not for virtue to arise; for when modesty taketh wing, Astræa goes soon after.

Section 36

The heroical vein of mankind runs much in the soldiery, and courageous part of the world; and in that form we oftenest find men above men. History is full of the gallantry of that tribe; and when we read their notable acts, we easily find what a difference there is between a life in Plutarch and in Laërtius. Where true fortitude dwells, loyalty, bounty, friendship, and fidelity may be found. A man may confide in persons constituted for noble ends, who dare do and suffer, and who have a hand to burn for their country and their friend. Small and creeping things are the product of petty souls. He is like to be mistaken, who makes choice of a covetous man for a friend, or relieth upon the reed of narrow and poltron friendship. Pitiful things are only to be found in the cottages of such breath; but bright thoughts, clear deeds, constancy, fidelity, bounty, and generous honesty are the gems of noble minds; wherein, to derogate from none, the true heroick English gentleman hath no peer.

Source: Sir Thomas Browne, *Christian Morals* (published posthumously, 1716), Part I.

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Translation: Author died 1682. Original English composition, no translation involved.

<https://www.thestromata.com/texts/christian-morals-part-1>