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Democritus

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THE ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY

Dear Friends:

Robert Burton (1577-1640) was a quiet English scholar and an Anglican Clergyman. He studied in secret, but revealed his findings openly. He explored the wisdom of the ancients and passed judgment upon the foibles of his own time. By nature a kindly man, Burton was in no sense of the word a controversialist, but he did have opinions, tempered by his clerical dedications. His principal contribution to the improvement of the human race was *THE ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY*, which he published under the pseudonym "Democritus, Junior." The work first appeared in 1621, and there were several later editions with revisions and alterations by the author. In 1931, my old friend, Paul Jordan-Smith, re-issued the work with an English translation of the numerous Latin phrases which ornament the original. We have in our Library, two old editions of *THE ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY*, and the 1660 issue is the one used by Mr. Jordan-Smith, and contains his bookplate.

It has been pointed out that Burton was a pioneer psychologist, anticipating many recent opinions and correcting a number of modern errors. He notes that melancholy is both a religious and a physical problem, and that cures involve the services of both clergymen and physicians. He takes it for granted that unless these two professions cooperate, cures are unlikely.

The causes of melancholy are numerous and difficult to classify, but Burton, with his skill in arranging data under proper headings, valiantly attempts to clarify the confusion. Melancholy is a chronic kind of depression, an ailment with most distressing symptoms--a burden upon both the sufferer and those intimately associated with him. All effects originate in appropriate causes. Mental debility often begins with unfortunate mental habits which, becoming chronic, are difficult to correct. Some persons are more susceptible to melancholy because of their temperaments. The individual with inordinate ambitions is likely to suffer from numerous frustrations when he cannot accomplish his purposes. Those who live alone in somber environment are often addicted to self-pity and perpetuate old grievances and disappointments, thus abusing the faculties of the mind. Burton devotes considerable space to the love-sick, whose emotional traumas destroy natural optimism. He does not deny the seriousness of amatory disappointments, but takes it for granted that every individual is equipped with those internal resources which can rescue him from his despondencies. Religion appears to be especially useful in such cases.

Melancholy is at the root of many severe mental ailments. Once the nature departs from its own inner tranquillity, the disposition suffers; constructive situations are ignored and hope is overshadowed by fear and futility. In such cases Burton recommends strenuous physical exercises to restore the tone of the body, and thus promote sleep. Emotional fatigue often leads to insomnia, but long walks, work in a garden, or diligence in a strenuous trade will lead to peaceful slumber. Burton also concerned himself with diet. Man's spirit is sustained by God, but his body requires proper nutrition. He recognized a valid relationship between dyspepsia and despondency. No doubt he had ample opportunity to explore this area, for he lived in a day of gluttony. Then, as now, overeating was a status symbol. It was also evident that the melancholiac sought consolation at the dinner table, and hoped to revive his failing spirit with the aid of distilled spirits. The whole concept was erroneous, for in one sense at least, a man is what he eats.

Some individuals are born with unstable dispositions. To the degree that they are problems to their parents, their parents are problems to them. Those who resent correction when it is necessary soon lose the skill to discipline themselves. This is an important point. Unless the mind and the emotions are disciplined by integrity, responsibilities become tragedies and normal occurrences are viewed as disasters. A well-ordered household can stand the shocks of circumstances, and the well-organized individual is victorious over the adversities of providence. There is an old proverb which would have delighted Burton if he did not already know it: "The devil finds work for idle hands to do." The abuse of leisure, as Aristotle noted long before, is a cardinal sin. Thus it is more common to find melancholia in persons who waste time. It is frequently a disease of the wealthy, the well-to-do, or the lazy. Any person who does not work will ultimately worry. It is advisable, therefore, that those of fair means should dedicate themselves to the improvement of their minds. The poor who yearn after learning have scant opportunity for study, whereas those free of financial burdens lack the incentive to enrich their inner lives.

There are cases in which drudgery brings with it depression and discouragement. This can be corrected by taking a better attitude toward routine activity. To realize the importance of simple tasks is to regain composure and peace of mind. The history of human society provides adequate proof that those with moderate endowments and limited opportunity, can be more happy than the over-privileged. Worry plagues those who think a little, but not enough to free themselves from the gloom of ignorance. Either the mind should be allowed to rest in peace, or else it must be strengthened for the achievement of high purposes.

Burton was deeply concerned with the universe. He studied cosmogony from a more-or-less theological point of view, but with numerous excursions in Greek philosophy. He recognized that man was created according to a plan and must live by that plan if he is to enjoy complete security. Both the troubled and the troublemakers have broken the laws of human conduct. That which is contrary to the common good is an affliction upon both the spirit and the body. The ten commandments must be obeyed or the individual will ultimately become ill. When one breaks the rules governing physical health he will develop an assortment of disabilities. His digestion will be disturbed and he will develop the sallow symptom of chronic illness. Those who break the religious code which is both reasonable and proper, may find their sensory perceptions impaired. When the body becomes uncomfortable for any reason, melancholy usually follows.

Although Burton did not have the benefit of the Freudian vocabulary, he devoted considerable space to the various psychological disturbances which arise from mental confusion. He recognized many environmental factors, including social disorders, economic pressures, and those almost constant wars which plagued Europe for centuries. He was aware of epidemical diseases, natural disasters, and religious conflicts. He was quick to realize that peace comes not from the compatibility of nations, but depends upon inner strength alone. Troubles try the spirit but will not destroy it in a life dedicated to faith, hope and charity. Man has been wonderfully equipped to survive the shocks which the flesh is heir to. He cannot be defeated, but he can voluntarily surrender to the predicaments of his generation. The body is held within the prison of time and place, but the spirit is forever free to search for truth with patience and diligence.

Burton has been accused of over-simplifying the cause and cure of mental disorders. At the same time, however, it is evident that his basic premise is correct. He may have lapsed into Latin occasionally, but his conclusions are stated in good English. The bewildering assortment of psychological disturbances which befuddle the modern practitioner have descended to this generation and become considerably worse in the centuries that have elapsed since Burton wrote his book.

Robert Burton took the name "Democritus, Junior" because he attempted to expand the philosophical principles of the Greek philosopher, Democritus, one of the first and most important of the atomists. Burton seems to have been especially intrigued with the ancient Greek philosopher's definition of the soul, which was an intangible body composed of highly attenuated atoms. In the early seventeenth century the scientific approach to life came to dominate human thinking. Among the contemporaries of Burton were Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, and the early Utopians. There is internal evidence in the ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY that Burton was also well-informed on Rosicrucian mysticism and alchemy. He approached the "new learning" with considerable spiritual insight. Like Bacon, he approved of "astrologia sana," and was a pivotal figure in the broad program of universal reformation which was to liberate the world from bondage to scholasticism. The emphasis was upon the dignity of the individual, who was no longer to be merely the helpless vassal of the church and state. Liberation was to come, not through revolution, but through regeneration. By releasing his own internal potential the human being was to take his proper place in the Divine Plan of things. He must prepare himself for freedoms he had never known, and upon his shoulders was to rest the destiny of humankind. The ultimate goal could only be attained through the cultivation of inner graces and the unfoldment of the rational powers. Melancholy and other psychological disturbances resulted from the conflict between inevitable change and human resistance to new ideas. Change was the irresistible force and man, the immovable object.

The mind must be broad but not shallow, deep but not narrow. We are still experiencing the bewilderment resulting from inadequate internal resources confronted with ever-expanding knowledge. Mental health is best preserved by a firm conviction that all things are working together for good, but the process, like that of the growth of the physical body, is attended by physical, emotional, and mental discomforts. Burton no doubt appreciated the words of the Bard, "All is well that ends well," but would have pointed out that between the beginning and the end there are numerous inconveniences.

Always most sincerely,

Manly P. Hall

The following list of books is recommended reading. These books may be ordered from The Philosophical Research Society, Inc. (address on page one). Please add 35¢ for handling. California residents, include sales tax. Note: Prices subject to change without notice.

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>AUTHOR</u>		<u>PRICE</u>
Cosmic Memory	Rudolph Steiner	(p)	\$ 2.95
Crude Black Molasses	Cyril Scott	(p)	1.35
Culture - Man's Adaptive Dimension	M. F. A. Montagh	(p)	2.50
The Cosmic Doctrine	Dion Fortune		4.50
Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus	H. C. Roberts, Trans.		5.95
Clairvoyance	C. W. Leadbeater		2.25
Curious Lore of Precious Stones	George F. Kunz	(p)	4.50
Culpeper's Complete Herbal (Remedies)	Nicholas Culpeper		6.95
The Comte de St. Germain	I. Cooper-Oakley	(p)	2.50
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Cider Vinegar - Nature's Great Health Promoter & Safest Cure of Obesity	Cyril Scott	(p)	1.25
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Consciousness of the Atom	Alice A. Bailey	(p)	1.75
Consciousness & Reality	Muses & Young (ed. by)		10.00
The Chicadees (A Zen Story)	Conrad Hyers		3.95
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The Ceramic Art of Japan	Hugo Munsterberg		13.75

BOOKS BY MANLY P. HALL

The Guru	\$ 5.50	Most Holy Trinosophia	
Pathways of Philosophy	6.50	(St. Germain)	10.00
Self-Unfoldment	6.50	Words to the Wise	6.50
Way of Heaven	5.00	Collected Writings, Vol. II	6.50

IN THESE DAYS A THOUGHTFUL CONSIDERATION OF THE DEEPER MEANING OF LIFE, THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE MIND BY REGULAR STUDY, AND THE ENRICHMENT OF THE HEART THROUGH A BROADENING OF UNDERSTANDING IS DEFINITELY INDICATED. MOST OF OUR STUDY GROUPS HAVE SMALL SOCIAL ACTIVITIES, AND COMBINE SERIOUS WORK WITH THE PLEASURES OF GOOD COMPANY. WHY NOT SEND FOR OUR STUDY GROUP PROGRAM OUTLINE. MAKE GOOD USE OF LEISURE.