

Of Envy

THERE be none of the affections, which have been noted to fascinate or bewitch, but love and envy. They both have vehement wishes; they frame themselves readily into imaginations and suggestions; and they come easily into the eye, especially upon the present of the objects; which are the points that conduce to fascination, if any such thing there be. We see likewise, the Scripture calleth envy an evil eye; and the astrologers, call the evil influences of the stars, evil aspects; so that still there seemeth to be acknowledged, in the act of envy, an ejaculation or irradiation of the eye. Nay, some have been so curious, as to note, that the times when the stroke or percussion of an envious eye doth most hurt, are when the party envied is beheld in glory or triumph; for that sets an edge upon envy: and besides, at such times the spirits of the person envied, do come forth most into the outward parts, and so meet the blow.

But leaving these curiosities (though not unworthy to be thought on, in fit place), we will handle, what persons are apt to envy others; what persons are most subject to be envied themselves; and what is the difference between public and private envy.

A man that hath no virtue in himself, ever envieth virtue in others. For men's minds, will either feed upon their own good, or upon others' evil; and who wanteth the one, will prey upon the other; and whoso is out of hope, to attain to another's virtue, will seek to come at even hand, by depressing another's fortune.

A man that is busy, and inquisitive, is commonly envious. For to know much of other men's matters, cannot be because all that ado may concern his own estate; therefore it must needs be, that he taketh a kind of play-pleasure, in looking upon the fortunes of others. Neither can he, that mindeth but his own business, find much matter for envy. For envy is a gadding passion, and walketh the streets, and doth not keep home: *Non est curiosus, quin idem sit malevolus.*

Men of noble birth, are noted to be envious towards new men, when they rise. For the distance is altered, and it is like a deceit of the eye, that when others come on, they think themselves, go back.

Deformed persons, and eunuchs, and old men, and bastards, are envious. For he that cannot possibly mend his own case, will do what he can, to impair another's; except these defects light upon a very brave, and heroical nature, which thinketh to make his natural wants part of his honor; in that it should be said, that an eunuch, or a lame man, did such great matters; affecting the honor of a miracle; as it was in Narses the eunuch, and Agesilaus and Tamberlanes, that were lame men.

The same is the case of men, that rise after calamities and misfortunes. For they are as men fallen out with the times; and think other men's harms, a redemption of their own sufferings.

They that desire to excel in too many matters, out of levity and vain glory, are ever envious. For they cannot want work; it being impossible, but many, in some one of those things, should surpass them. Which was the character of Adrian the Emperor; that mortally envied poets, and painters, and artificers, in works wherein he had a vein to excel.

Lastly, near kinsfolks, and fellows in office, and those that have been bred together, are more apt to envy their equals, when they are raised. For it doth upbraid unto them their own fortunes, and pointeth at them, and cometh oftener into their remembrance, and incurreth likewise more into the note of others; and envy ever redoubleth from speech and fame. Cain's envy was the more vile and malignant, towards his brother Abel, because when his sacrifice was better accepted, there was no body to look on. Thus much for those, that are apt to envy.

Concerning those that are more or less subject to envy: First, persons of eminent virtue, when they are advanced, are less envied. For their fortune seemeth, but due unto them; and no man envieth the payment of a debt, but rewards and liberality rather. Again, envy is ever joined with the comparing of a man's self; and where there is no comparison, no envy; and therefore kings are not envied, but by kings. Nevertheless it is to be noted, that unworthy persons are most envied, at their first coming in, and afterwards overcome it better; whereas contrariwise, persons of worth and merit are most envied, when their fortune continueth long. For by that time, though their virtue be the same, yet it hath not the same lustre; for fresh men grow up that darken it.

Persons of noble blood, are less envied in their rising. For it seemeth but right done to their birth. Besides, there seemeth not much added to their fortune; and envy is as the sunbeams, that beat hotter upon a bank, or steep rising ground, than upon a flat. And for the same reason, those that are advanced by degrees, are less envied than those that are advanced suddenly and per saltum.

Those that have joined with their honor great travels, cares, or perils, are less subject to envy. For men think that they earn their honors hardly, and pity them sometimes; and pity ever healeth envy. Wherefore you shall observe, that the more deep and sober sort of politic persons, in their greatness, are ever bemoaning themselves, what a life they lead; chanting a quanta patimur! Not that they feel it so, but only to abate the edge of envy. But this is to be understood, of business that is laid upon men, and not such, as they call unto themselves. For nothing increaseth envy more, than an unnecessary and ambitious engrossing of business. And nothing doth extinguish envy more, than for a great person to preserve all other inferior officers, in their full lights and pre-eminences of their places. For by that means, there be so many screens between him and envy.

Above all, those are most subject to envy, which carry the greatness of their fortunes, in an insolent and proud manner; being never well, but while they are showing how great they are, either by outward pomp, or by triumphing over all opposition or competition; whereas wise men will rather do sacrifice to envy, in suffering themselves sometimes of purpose to be crossed, and overborne in things that do not much concern them. Notwithstanding, so much is true, that the carriage of greatness, in a plain and open manner (so it be without arrogancy and vain glory) doth draw less envy, than if it be in a more crafty and cunning fashion. For in that course, a man doth but disavow fortune; and seemeth to be conscious of his own want in worth; and doth but teach others, to envy him.

Lastly, to conclude this part; as we said in the beginning, that the act of envy had somewhat in it of witchcraft, so there is no other cure of envy, but the cure of witchcraft; and that is, to remove the lot (as they call it) and to lay it upon another. For which purpose, the wiser sort of great persons, bring in ever upon the stage somebody upon whom to derive the envy, that would come upon themselves; sometimes upon ministers and servants; sometimes upon colleagues and associates; and the like; and for that turn there are never wanting, some persons of violent and undertaking natures, who, so they may have power and business, will take it at any cost.

Now, to speak of public envy. There is yet some good in public envy, whereas in private, there is none. For public envy, is as an ostracism, that eclipseth men, when they grow too great. And therefore it is a bridle also to great ones, to keep them within bounds.

This envy, being in the Latin word *invidia*, goeth in the modern language, by the name of discontentment; of which we shall speak, in handling sedition. It is a disease, in a state, like to infection. For as infection spreadeth upon that which is sound, and tainteth it; so when envy is gotten once into a state, it traduceth even the best actions thereof, and turneth them into an ill odor. And therefore there is little won, by intermingling of plausible actions. For that doth argue but a weakness, and fear of envy, which hurteth so much the more, as it is likewise usual in infections; which if you fear them, you call them upon you.

This public envy, seemeth to beat chiefly upon principal officers or ministers, rather than upon kings, and estates themselves. But this is a sure rule, that if the envy upon the minister be great, when the cause of it in him is small; or if the envy be general, in a manner upon all the ministers of an estate; then the envy (though hidden) is truly upon the state itself. And so much of public envy or discontentment, and the difference thereof from private envy, which was handled in the first place.

We will add this in general, touching the affection of envy; that of all other affections, it is the most importune and continual. For of other affections, there is occasion given, but now and then; and therefore it was well said, *Invidia festos dies non agit*: for it is ever working upon some or other. And it is also noted, that love and envy do make a man pine, which other affections do not, because they are not so continual. It is also the vilest affection, and the most depraved; for which cause it is the proper attribute of the devil, who is called, the envious man, that soweth tares amongst the wheat by night; as it always cometh to pass, that envy worketh subtilly, and in the dark, and to the prejudice of good things, such as is the wheat.