

Of Praise

PRAISE is the reflection of virtue; but it is as the glass or body, which giveth the reflection. If it be from the common people, it is commonly false and naught; and rather followeth vain persons, than virtuous. For the common people understand not many excellent virtues. The lowest virtues draw praise from them; the middle virtues work in them astonishment or admiration; but of the highest virtues, they have no sense of perceiving at all. But shows, and species virtutibus similes, serve best with them. Certainly fame is like a river, that beareth up things light and swoln, and drowns things weighty and solid. But if persons of quality and judgment concur, then it is (as the Scripture saith) *nomen bonum instar unguenti fragrantis*. It fireth all round about, and will not easily away. For the odors of ointments are more durable, than those of flowers. There be so many false points of praise, that a man may justly hold it a suspect. Some praises proceed merely of flattery; and if he be an ordinary flatterer, he will have certain common attributes, which may serve every man; if he be a cunning flatterer, he will follow the archflatterer, which is a man's self; and wherein a man thinketh best of himself, therein the flatterer will uphold him most: but if he be an impudent flatterer, look wherein a man is conscious to himself, that he is most defective, and is most out of countenance in himself, that will the flatterer entitle him to perforce, *spretā conscientia*. Some praises come of good wishes and respects, which is a form due, in civility, to kings and great persons, *laudando praecipere*, when by telling men what they are, they represent to them, what they should be. Some men are praised maliciously, to their hurt, thereby to stir envy and jealousy towards them: *pessimum genus inimicorum laudantium*; insomuch as it was a proverb, amongst the Grecians, that he that was praised to his hurt, should have a push rise upon his nose; as we say, that a blister will rise upon one's tongue, that tells a lie. Certainly moderate praise, used with opportunity, and not vulgar, is that which doth the good. Solomon saith, He that praiseth his friend aloud, rising early, it shall be to him no better than a curse. Too much magnifying of man or matter, doth irritate contradiction, and procure envy and scorn. To praise a man's self, cannot be decent, except it be in rare cases; but to praise a man's office or profession, he may do it with good grace, and with a kind of magnanimity. The cardinals of Rome, which are theologues, and friars, and Schoolmen, have a phrase of notable contempt and scorn towards civil business: for they call all temporal business of wars, embassages, judicature, and other employments, *sbirrerie*, which is under-sheriffries; as if they were but matters, for under-sheriffs and catchpoles: though many times those under-sheriffries do more good, than their high speculations. St. Paul, when he boasts of himself, he doth oft interlace, I speak like a fool; but speaking of his calling, he saith, *magnificabo apostolatū meum*.

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