

A Visit to Bedlam

Ned Ward

Table of Contents

<u>A Visit to Bedlam</u>	1
<u>Ned Ward</u>	2

A Visit to Bedlam

Ned Ward

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.
<http://www.blackmask.com>

Thus we prattled away our time till we came in sight of a noble pile of building, which diverted us from our former discourse, and gave my friend the occasion of asking me my thoughts on this magnificent edifice. I told him, I conceived it to be the Lord Mayor's Palace, for I could not imagine so stately a structure could be designed for any quality inferior. He smiled at my innocent conjecture, and informed me this was Bedlam, an hospital for mad folks.

"In truth," said I, "I think they were mad that built so costly a College for such a crack-brain society," adding, it was a pity so fine a building should not be possessed by such as had a sense of their happiness. It was a mad age when this was raised, and no doubt the chief of the City were in a great danger of losing their senses, so contrived it the more noble for their own reception, or they would never have flung away so much money to so foolish a purpose.

"You must consider," says my friend, "this stands upon the same foundation as the Monument, and the fortunes of a great many poor wretches lie buried in this ostentatious piece of vanity; and this, like the other, is but a monument of the City's shame and dishonour, instead of its glory. Come let us take a walk in, and view its inside."

Accordingly we were admitted through an iron gate, within which sat a brawny Cerberus of an indigo colour, leaning upon a money-box. We turned in through another iron barricade, where we heard such a rattling of chains, drumming of doors, ranting, holloaing, singing and rattling, that I could think of nothing but Don Quevado's vision, where the damned broke loose, and put Hell in an uproar.

The first whimsy-headed wretch of this lunatic family that we observed, was a merry fellow in a straw cap, who was saying to himself that he had an army of eagles at his command. Then clapping his hand upon his head he swore by his crown of moonshine that he would battle all the stars in the skies but he would have some claret. In this interim came a gentleman with a red face to stare at him. "No wonder," said his Aerial Majesty, "that claret is so scarce, look there's a rogue carries more in his nose than I, that am Prince of the Air, have had in my belly for a twelvemonth."

"If you are the Prince of the Air," said I, "why don't you command the Man in the Moon to give you some?" To which he replied, "The Man in the Moon's a sorry rascal; I sent to him for a dozen bottles but t'other day, and he swore by his bush, his cellar had been dry this six months. But I'll be even with the rogue. I expect a cloud laden with claret to be sent me by the Sun every day, and if a spoonful of lees would save him from choking, the old drunkard should not have a drop."

We then moved on till we found another remarkable figure worth our observing, who was peeping through his wicket, eating bread and cheese, and talking all the while like a carrier at his supper, chewing his words with his victuals. All that he spoke was in praise of bread and cheese. Bread was good with cheese, and cheese was good with bread, and bread and cheese was good together, and abundance of such stuff, to which my friend and others stood listening.

The next unhappy object amongst this scatter-brained fraternity was a scholar of St. John's College, in Cambridge, who was possessed with melancholy, but was very inoffensive, and had the liberty of the gallery. He was a very musical man, which is thought to be one great occasion of his distemper. My friend walked up to him, and introduced some talk, to divert himself with a few of his frenzical extravagancies.

Another lunatic who had liberty of ranging the house caught hold of my school-fellow's arm, and expressed himself after this manner: "Dost thou know, friend, what thou art doing? Why, thou art talking to a madman, a fiddling fellow, who has so many crotchets in his head that he cracked his brains about his bass and trebles." "Prithee," says my companion, "what was the occasion of thy distemper?" To which he answered, "I am under the

A Visit to Bedlam

confinement for the noble sin of drinking; and if thou hast not a care it will bring thee into the same condition."

We peeped into another room where a fellow was as hard at work as if he'd been treading mortar.

"What is it, friend," said I, "thou art taking all this pains about?"

He answered me thus, still continuing in action: "I am trampling down conscience under my feet, lest he should rise up and fly in my face. Have a care he does not fright thee, for he looks like the devil and is as fierce as a lion, but that I keep him muzzled. Therefore get thee gone, or I will set him upon thee." Then he fell a-clapping his hands, and cried, "Halloo, halloo, halloo, halloo, halloo," and thus we left him raving.

Another was holding forth with as much vehemence against Kingly government, as a brother of Commonwealth doctrine rails against plurality of livings. I told him he deserved to be hanged for talking of treason. "Now," says he, "you're a fool; we madmen have as much privilege of speaking our minds, within these walls, as an ignorant dictator, when he spews out his nonsense to a whole parish. Prithee come and live here, and you may talk what you will, and nobody will call you in question for it. Truth is persecuted everywhere abroad, and flies hither for sanctuary. I can use her as I please and that's more than you dare do. I can tell great men such bold truths as they don't love to hear, without the danger of a whipping post, and that you can't do. For if ever you see a madman hanged for speaking of truth, or a lawyer whipped for lying, I'll be bound to prove my wig a wheel-barrow."

We then walked into the women's apartment to see what whimsical vagaries their wandering fancies would move them to entertain us withal.

One poor object that happened under our observation was a meagre, old, grey-headed wretch, who looked as wild as an angry cat, and all her tone was, "The wind is -- blow, devil, blow; the wind is -- blow, devil blow." A seaman who was staring at her, and listening to what she said, must needs be inquisitive how the wind sat, and asking her, "Where is the wind, mother?" She hastily replied, "The wind is at my stern. Blow, fool, blow." She was so pleased she had sold him a bargain, that she fell into an extravagant fit of laughter in which he left her.

Having well tired ourselves with the frantic humours and rambling ejaculations of the mad folks, we took a turn to make some few remarks upon the looseness of the spectators, amongst whom we observed abundance of intriguing. Mistresses, we found, were to be had of all ranks, qualities, colours, prices and sizes, from the velvet scarf to the Scotch plaid petticoat. Commodities of all sorts went off, for there wanted not a suitable Jack to every Jill. Every fresh comer was soon engaged in an amour; though they came in single they went out by pairs; 'tis a new Whetstone's Park now the old one's ploughed up, where a sportsman at any hour in the day may meet with game for his purpose; 'tis as great a conveniency to London, as the Long Cellar to Amsterdam, where any stranger may purchase a purge at a small expense. All that I can say of Bedlam, is this, 'tis an almshouse for madmen, a showing room for harlots, a sure market for lechers, a dry walk for loiterers.