

Classic Poetry Series

Sebastian Brant

- poems -

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16. Of Gluttony and Feasting

He shows a fool in every wise
Who day and night forever hies
From feast to feat to fill his paunch
And make his figure round and staunch,
As though his mission he were filling
By drinking too much wine and swilling
And bringing hoar-frost o'er the grape.
In to the fool's ship toss the ape,
He kills all reason, is not sage,
And will regret it in old age.
His head and hands will ever shake,
His life a speedy end may take,
For wine's a very harmful thing,
And man shows no strong reasoning
Who only drinks for sordid ends,
A drunken man neglects his friends
And knows no prudent moderation,
And drink leads to fornication;
It oft induces grave offense,
A wise man drinks with common sense.
For wine old Noah cared no whit,
Although he found and planted it;
By wine Loth twice to sin was led,
Through wine the Baptist lost his head,
Through wine a wise man comes to prate
And set a fool's cap on his pate;
When Israelites were drunk with wine
And gluttled full like silly swine,
They gamboled then in highest glee
And had to dance in revelry.
To Aaron's sons did God decree
That abstinent and chaste they be
And that to wine they should not turn,
But this decree the priests would spurn.
King Holofernes too when drunk,
He had his head cut off his trunk;
To feasts Tomyris had recourse
When old King Cyrus she would force;
Wine caused the fall of Ben-hadad,
Deprives was he of all he had;
When Alexander played the sot
His honor, virtue he forgot
And practiced deeds in drunkenness
That presently brought sad distress.
The rich man reveled once so well
That on the morn he ate in hell.
Man would not be a slave, in fine,
If he disowned the demon wine:
Are wine and sumptuous food your itch?
You'll not be happy, not get rich.
Woe's him and woe's his father too,
He'll have misfortunes not a few

Who always gorges like a beast
Proposing toasts at every feast,
And would with others glasses clink;
The man whose joy is endless drink
Is like a man who falls asleep
Defenseless in the ocean deep;
Thus they who drink are e'er are gay,
Carousing, topping night and day:
If he's their friend, the generous host
Brings veal galore, a cow almost,
And gives them almonds, figs, and rice,
The bill, alas, is writ on ice.
Some men would be intelligent
From wine if wisdom e'er it lent,
Who cool their throats with rich libation.
Friend drinks to friend without cessation:
"I drink to you." "Here's happy days!"
"This cup for you." "This yours!" he says;
"I'll toast you till we both are filled!"
Thus speak the men of folly's guild.
Upset the glass, the drinker too,
A rope around his neck would do
Him better far than wild carousing
And naught but foolishness arousing,
That ancient Seneca did flay
In books that still are read today,
Which say one pays a drunken man
More heed than many a sober man,
And how an honor high 'tis rated
By wine to be intoxicated;
I censure those who tipple beer,
A keg of it per man, I hear,
Becoming so inebriate
That with them one could open a gate.
A fool shows no consideration,
A wise man drinks with moderation,
Feels better, illness too defies,
That one imbibing bucketwise.
The wine, 'tis true, our thirst will slake
But later stabs one like a snake,
And poison through the veins will pour,
As Basiliscus found of yore.

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