

A portrait of Desiderius Erasmus, a Dutch humanist, scholar, and writer. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a black cap and a dark, fur-trimmed robe. He is seated at a desk, with his hands resting on an open book. The background features a wooden cabinet with ornate carvings and a shelf with books and a vase. The text "THE COMPLAINT OF PEACE" is overlaid in a large, black, serif font.

THE COMPLAINT OF PEACE

DESIDERIUS
ERASMUS

The Complaint of Peace

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THE COMPLAINT OF PEACE

(Peace speaks in her own person.)

THOUGH I certainly deserve no ill treatment from mortals, yet if the insults and repulses I receive were attended with any advantage to them, I would content myself with lamenting in silence my own unmerited indignities and man's injustice. But since, in driving me away from them, they remove the source of all human blessings, and let in a deluge of calamities on themselves, I am more inclined to bewail their misfortune, than complain of ill usage to myself; and I am reduced to the necessity of weeping over and commiserating those whom I wished to view rather as objects of indignation than of pity.

For though rudely to reject one who loves them as I do, may appear to be savage cruelty; to feel an aversion for one who has deserved so well of them, base ingratitude; to trample on one who has nursed and fostered them with all a parent's care, an unnatural want of filial affection; yet voluntarily to renounce so many and so great advantages as I always bring in my train, to go in quest of evils infinite in number and shocking in nature, how can I account for such perverse conduct, but by attributing it to downright madness? We may be angry with the wicked, but we can only pity the insane. What can I do but weep over them? And I weep over them the more bitterly, because they weep not for themselves. No part of their misfortune is more deplorable than their insensibility to it. It is one great step to convalescence to know the extent and inveteracy of a disease.

Now, if I, whose name is Peace, am a personage glorified by the united praise of God and man, as the fountain, the parent, the nurse, the patroness, the guardian of every

blessing which either heaven or earth can bestow; if without me nothing is flourishing, nothing safe, nothing pure or holy, nothing pleasant to mortals, or grateful to the Supreme Being; if, on the contrary, war is one vast ocean, rushing on mankind, of all the united plagues and pestilences in nature; if, at its deadly approach, every blossom of happiness is instantly blasted, every thing that was improving gradually degenerates and dwindles away to nothing, every thing that was firmly supported totters on its foundation, every thing that was formed for long duration comes to a speedy end, and every thing that was sweet by nature is turned into bitterness; if war is so unhallowed that it becomes the deadliest bane of piety and religion; if there is nothing more calamitous to mortals, and more detestable to heaven, I ask, how in the name of God, can I believe those beings to be rational creatures; how can I believe them to be otherwise than stark mad; who, with such a waste of treasure, with so ardent a zeal, with so great an effort, with so many arts, so much anxiety, and so much danger, endeavour to drive me away from them, and purchase endless misery and mischief at a price so high?

If they were wild beasts who thus despised and rejected me, I could bear it more patiently; because I should impute the affront to nature, who had implanted in them so savage a disposition. If I were an object of hatred to dumb creatures, I could overlook their ignorance, because the powers of mind necessary to perceive my excellence have been denied to them. But it is a circumstance equally shameful and marvellous, that though nature has formed one animal, and one alone, with powers of reason, and a mind participating of divinity; one animal, and one alone, capable of sentimental affection and social union; I can find admission among the wildest of wild beasts, and the most brutal of brutes, sooner than with this one animal; the rational, immortal animal called man.

Among the celestial bodies that are revolving over our heads, though the motions are not the same, and though the force is not equal, yet they move, and ever have moved, without clashing, and in perfect harmony. The very elements themselves, though repugnant in their nature, yet, by a happy equilibrium, preserve eternal peace; and amid the discordancy of their constituent principles, cherish, by a friendly intercourse and coalition, an uninterrupted concord.

In living bodies, how all the various limbs harmonize, and mutually combine, for common defence against injury! What can be more heterogeneous, and unlike, than the body and the soul? and yet with what strong bonds nature has united them, is evident from the pang of separation. As life itself is nothing else but the concordant union of body and soul, so is health the harmonious cooperation of all the parts and functions of the body.

Animals destitute of reason live with their own kind in a state of social amity. Elephants herd together; sheep and swine feed in flocks; cranes and crows take their flight in troops; storks have their public meetings to consult previously to their emigration, and feed their parents when unable to feed themselves; dolphins defend each other by mutual assistance; and everybody knows, that both ants and bees have respectively established by general agreement, a little friendly community.

But I need dwell no longer on animals, which, though they want reason, are evidently furnished with sense. In trees and plants one may trace the vestiges of amity and love. Many of them are barren, unless the male plant is placed on their vicinity. The vine embraces the elm, and other plants cling to the vine. So that things which have no powers of sense to perceive any thing else, seem strongly to feel the advantages of union.

But plants, though they have not powers of perception, yet, as they have life, certainly approach very nearly to