



The Anatomy of Melancholy, Vol. 1 of 2: What It Is, With All the Kinds, Causes, Symptoms, Prognostics, and Several Cures of It (Classic Reprint)

Robert Burton

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The work now restored to public notice has had an extraordinary fate. At the time of its original publication it obtained a great celebrity, which continued more than half a century. During that period few books were more read, or more deservedly applauded. It was the delight of the learned, the solace of the indolent, and the refuge of the uninformed. It past through at least eight editions, by which the bookseller, as Wood records, got an estate; and, notwithstanding the objections sometimes opposed against it, of a quaint style, and too great an accumulation of authorities, the fascination of its wit, fancy, and sterling sense, have borne down all censures, and extorted praise from the first writers in the English language. The great Johnson has praised it in the warmest terms, and the ludicrous Sterne has interwoven many parts of it into his own popular performance. Milton did not disdain to build two of his finest poems on it; and a host of inferior writers have embellished their works with beauties not their own, culled from a performance which they had not the justice even to mention. Change of times, and the frivolity of fashion, suspended in some degree, that fame which had lasted near a century; and the succeeding generation affected indifference towards an author, who at length was only looked into by the plunderers of literature, the poachers in obscure volumes. The plagiarisms of Tristram Shandy, so successfully brought to light by Dr. Ferriar, at length drew the attention of the public towards a writer, who, though then little known, might without impeachment of modesty lay claim to every mark of respect; and inquiry proved, beyond a doubt, that the calls of justice had been little attended to by others, as well as the facetious Yorick. Wood observed, more than a century ago, that several authors had unmercifully stolen matter from Burton without any acknowledgement. The time, however, at length arrived, when the merits of the "Anatomy of Melancholy" were to receive their due praise.

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