

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

*From The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*¹

[THE ABSENT URANIA]

It was in the time that the earth begins to put on her new apparel against the approach of her lover, and that the sun, running a most even course, becomes an indifferent arbiter between the night and the day, when the hopeless shepherd Strephon was come to the sands which lie against the island of Cithera; where viewing the place with a heavy kind of delight, and sometimes casting his eyes to the isleward, he called his friendly rival, the pastor² Klaius, unto him; and setting first down in his darkened countenance a doleful copy of what he would speak,

“O my Klaius,” said he, “hither we are now come to pay the rent for which we are so called unto by over-busy remembrance—remembrance, restless remembrance, which claims not only this duty of us but for it will have us forget ourselves. I pray you, when we were amid our flock, and that of other shepherds some were running after their sheep strayed beyond their bounds, some delighting their eyes with seeing them nibble upon the short and sweet grass, some medicining their sick ewes, some setting a bell³ for an ensign of a sheepish squadron, some with more leisure inventing new games of exercising their bodies and sporting their wits; did remembrance grant us any holiday either for pastime or devotion—nay either for necessary food or natural rest—but that still it forced our thoughts to work upon this place where we last (alas, that the word *last* should so long last) did gaze our eyes upon her ever-flourishing beauty? Did it not still cry within us ‘Ah, you base-minded wretches,

1. These sections are from chapters 1, 2, and 3 of the New Arcadia. The opening section presents Strephon and Klaius, two Arcadian shepherds, lamenting the loss of Urania, a shepherdess whom both love and a figure of neoplatonic beauty. The next section portrays one of the two young heroes, the shipwrecked Musidorus, being led into the land of Arcadia by the shepherds (who are also the singers of the song *Ye Goat-herd Gods*). They lead him to the house of the wise and noble Kalandar, who introduces the central plot of Sidney's romance in the curious situation of King Basilius and his family.

2. Shepherd.

3. Tying a bell on the leader of the flock.

are your thoughts so deeply bemired in the trade or ordinary worldeings, as for respect of gain some paltry wool may yield you, to let so much time pass without knowing perfectly her estate, especially in so troublesome a season; to leave that shore unsaluted from whence you may see to the island where she dwelleth; to leave those steps unkissed wherein Urania printed the farewell of all beauty?’

“Well, then, remembrance commanded; we obeyed, and here we find that as our remembrance came ever clothed unto us in the form of this place, so this place gives new heat to the fever of our languishing remembrance. * * *

[*Klaius*] “Hath not the only love⁴ of her made us, being silly ignorant shepherds, raise up our thoughts above the ordinary level of the world, so as great clerks⁵ do not disdain our conference? Hath not the desire to seem worthy in her eyes made us, when others were sleeping, to sit viewing the course of the heavens; when others were running at Base,⁶ to run over learned writings; when others mark their sheep, we mark ourselves? Hath not she thrown reason upon our desires and, as it were, given eyes unto Cupid?⁷ Hath in any but in her, love-fellowship maintained friendship between rivals, and beauty taught the beholders chastity?”

[THE COUNTRY OF ARCADIA]

* * * The third day after, in the time that the morning did strew roses and violets in the heavenly floor against the coming of the sun, the nightingales (striving one with the other which could in most dainty variety recount their wrong-caused sorrow)⁸ made them put off their sleep, and rising from under a tree (which that night had been their pavilion) they went on their journey, which by and by welcomed Musidorus’ eyes, wearied with the wasted soil of Laconia,⁹ with delightful prospects.

There were hills which garnished their proud heights with stately trees; humble valleys whose base estate seemed comforted with refreshing of silver rivers; meadows enamelled¹ with all sorts of eye-pleasing flowers; thickets, which,

4. Love alone.

5. Scholars.

6. The country game of Prisoner’s Base.

7. Traditionally blind.

8. Sorrows caused by wrongs.

9. The ancient name of the southeastern district of the Greek Peloponnese, which includes Sparta; much of it is hilly, rugged, and barren.

1. Adorned with varied colors, like enamelwork.

being lined with most pleasant shade, were witnessed so to by the cheerful deposition² of many well-tuned birds; each pasture stored with sheep feeding with sober security, while the pretty lambs with bleating oratory craved the dams' comfort; here a shepherd's boy piping as though he should never be old; there a young shepherdess knitting and withal singing, and it seemed that her voice comforted her hands to work and her hands kept time to her voice's music. As for the houses of the country—for many houses came under their eye—they were all scattered, no two being one by the other, and yet not so far off as that it barred mutual succour: a show, as it were, of an accompanable solitariness and of a civil wildness.³

"I pray you," said Musidorus, then first unsealing his long silent lips, "what countries be these we pass through which are so divers in show, the one wanting no store, the other having no store but of want?"

"The country," answered Klaius, "where you were cast ashore and now are passed through is Laconia, not so poor by the barrenness of the soil (though in itself not passing fertile) as by a civil war, which being these two years within the bowels of that estate between the gentlemen and the peasants (by them named Helots)⁴ hath in this sort as it were disfigured the face of nature, and made it so unhospital⁵ as now you have found it: the towns neither of the one side nor the other willingly opening their gates to strangers, nor strangers willingly entering for fear of being mistaken.

"But this country where now you set your foot is Arcadia;⁶ and even hard by is the house of Kalander whither we lead you: this country being thus decked with peace and (the child of peace) good husbandry. These houses you see so scattered are of men as we two are that live upon the commodity of their sheep, and therefore in the division of the Arcadian estate are termed shepherds: a happy people, wanting little because they desire not much."

"What cause then," said Musidorus, "made you venture to leave this sweet life and put yourself in yonder unpleasant and dangerous realm?"

"Guarded with poverty," answered Strephon, "and guided with love."

2. Testimony.

3. "Accompanable [i.e., sociable] solitariness" and "civil [i.e., civilized] wildness" are oxymorons, figures of flat contradiction.

4. The original inhabitants of Laconia, enslaved by the Spartans.

5. Inhospitable.

6. A country in the middle of the Peloponnese, surrounded by mountains and very fertile; the Arcadians were regarded as the most ancient people of Greece.

[KALANDER TELLS ABOUT BASILIUS]

Which Kalander perceiving, “Well,” said he, “my dear guest, I know your mind and I will satisfy it. Neither will I do it like a niggardly answerer, going no further than the bounds of the question; but I will discover⁷ unto you as well that wherein my knowledge is common with others as that which by extraordinary means is delivered unto me, knowing so much in you (though not long acquainted) that I shall find your ears faithful treasurers.” So then sitting down in two chairs and sometimes casting his eye to the picture,⁸ he thus spake:

“This country Arcadia among all the provinces of Greece hath ever been had in singular reputation; partly for the sweetness of the air and other natural benefits, but principally for the well-tempered minds of the people who (finding that the shining title of glory, so much affected by other nations, doth indeed help little to the happiness of life) are the only people which, as by their justice and providence give neither cause nor hope to their neighbours to annoy them, so are they not stirred with false praise to trouble others’ quiet, thinking it a small reward for the wasting of their own lives in ravening⁹ that their posterity should long after say they had done so. Even the Muses¹ seem to approve their good determination by choosing this country for their chief repairing place, and by bestowing their perfections so largely here that the very shepherds have their fancies lifted to so high conceits that the learned of other nations are content both to borrow their names and imitate their cunning.

“Here dwelleth and reigneth this prince (whose picture you see) by name Basilius;² a prince of sufficient skill to govern so quiet a country, where the good minds of the former princes had set down good laws, and the well-bringing up of the people did serve as a most sure bond to hold them. But to be plain with you, he excels in nothing so much as in the zealous love of his people, wherein he doth not only pass all his own foregoers but, as I think, all the princes living. Whereof the cause is that though he exceed not in the virtues which get admiration, as depth of wisdom, height of courage and largeness of magnificence, yet is he notable in those which stir affection, as truth of word, meekness, courtesy, mercifulness and liberality.

7. Disclose, reveal.

8. The picture of Basilius, as we learn below.

9. Plundering.

1. The nine divinities who preside over the different kinds of poetry and the several arts and sciences.

2. The Greek word for “king.”

“He, being already well stricken in years, married a young princess named Gynecia,³ daughter to the king of Cyprus, of notable beauty as by her picture you see: a woman of great wit, and in truth of more princely virtues than her husband; of most unspotted chastity, but of so working a mind and so vehement spirits as a man may say it was happy she took a good course, for otherwise it would have been terrible.

“Of these two are brought into the world two daughters, so beyond measure excellent in all the gifts allotted to reasonable creatures that we may think they were born to show that nature is no stepmother to that sex, how much soever some men, sharp-witted only in evil speaking, have sought to disgrace them. The elder is named Pamela, by many men not deemed inferior to her sister. For my part, when I marked them both, methought there was (if at least such perfections may receive the word of more) more sweetness in Philoclea but more majesty in Pamela: methought love played in Philoclea's eyes and threatened in Pamela's; methought Philoclea's beauty only persuaded, but so persuaded as all hearts must yield; Pamela's beauty used violence, and such violence as no heart could resist. And it seems that such proportion is between their minds: Philoclea so bashful, as though her excellencies had stolen into her before she was aware; so humble, that she will put all pride out of countenance; in sum, such proceeding as will stir hope but teach hope good manners. Pamela of high thoughts, who avoids not pride with not knowing her excellencies, but by making that one of her excellencies to be void of pride; her mother's wisdom, greatness, nobility, but—if I can guess aright—knit with a more constant temper. Now then, our Basilius—being so publicly happy as to be a prince, and so happy in that happiness as to be a beloved prince, and so in his private blessed as to have so excellent a wife and so over-excellent children—hath of late taken a course which yet makes him more spoken of than all these blessings. For, having made a journey to Delphos⁴ and safely returned, within short space he brake up his court and retired himself, his wife and children, into a certain forest hereby which he calleth his desert; wherein, besides a house appointed for stables and lodgings for certain persons of mean calling who do all household services, he hath builded two fine lodges. In the one of them himself remains with his younger daughter Philoclea—which was the cause they three were matched together in this picture—without having any other creature living in that lodge with him.

3. The Greek word for “woman.”

4. To consult the famous oracle of Apollo there.

“Which though it be strange, yet not strange as the course he hath taken with the princess Pamela whom he hath placed in the other lodge; but how think you accompanied? Truly with none other but one Dametas, the most arrant doltish clown that I think ever was without the privilege of a bauble,⁵ with his wife Miso and daughter Mopsa, in whom no wit can devise anything wherein they may pleasure her but to exercise her patience and to serve for a foil of her perfections.”

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1593

5. Jester's baton (which would explain and excuse his folly).