

A Counterblaste to Tobacco (circa 1605)

King James I of England

A Counterblaste to Tobacco

That the manifold abuses of this vile custome of *Tobacco* taking, may the better be espied, it is fit, that first you enter into consideration both of the first originall thereof, and likewise of the reasons of the first entry thereof into this Countrey. For certainly as such customes, that have their first institution either from a godly, necessary, or honorable ground, and are first brought in, by the meanes of some worthy, vertuous, and great Personage, are ever, and most justly, holden in great and reverent estimation and account, by all wise, vertuous, and temperate spirits: So should it by the contrary, justly bring a great disgrace into that sort of customes, which having their originall from base corruption and barbarity, doe in like sort, make their first entry into a Countrey, by an inconsiderate and childish affectation of Noveltie, as is the true case of the first invention of *Tobacco* taking, and of the first entry thereof among us. For *Tobacco* being a common herbe, which (though under divers names) growes almost every where, was first found out by some of the barbarous *Indians*, to be a Preservative, or Antidot against the Pockes, a filthy disease, whereunto these barbarous people are (as all men know) very much subject, what through the uncleanly and adust constitution of their bodies, and what through the intemperate heate of their Climat: so that as from them was first brought into Christendome, that most detestable disease, so from them likewise was brought this use of *Tobacco*, as a stinking and unsavorie Antidot, for so corrupted and execrable a Maladie, the stinking Suffumigation whereof they yet use against that disease, making so one canker or venime to eate out another.

And now good Countrey men let us (I pray you) consider, what honour or policie can moove us to imitate the barbarous and beastly maners of the wilde, godlesse, and slavish *Indians*, especially in so vile and stinking a custome? Shall wee that disdain to imitate the maners of our neighbour *France* (having the stile of the first Christian Kingdom) and that cannot endure the spirit of the Spaniards (their King being now comparable in largenes of Dominions, to the great Emperor of *Turkie*) Shall wee, I say, that have bene so long civill and wealthy in Peace, famous and invincible in Warre, fortunate in both, we that have bene ever able to aide any of our neighbours (but never deafed any of their eares with any of our supplications for assistance) shall we, I say, without blushing, abase our selves so farre, as to imitate these

bestly *Indians*, slaves to the *Spaniards*, refuse to the world, and as yet aliens from the holy Covenant of God? Why doe we not as well imitate them in walking naked as they doe? in preferring glasses, feathers, and such toyes, to golde and precious stones, as they do? yea why do we not denie God and adore the Devill, as they doe?

Now to the corrupted basenesse of the first use of this *Tobacco*, doeth very well agree the foolish and groundlesse first entry thereof into this Kingdome. It is not so long since the first entry of this abuse amongst us here, as this present age cannot yet very well remember, both the first Author, and the forme of the first introduction of it amongst us. It was neither brought in by King, great Conquerour, nor learned Doctor of Phisicke.

With the report of a great discovery for a Conquest, some two or three Savage men, were brought in, together with this Savage custome. But the pitie is, the poore wilde barbarous men died, but that vile barbarous custome is yet alive, yea in fresh vigor: so as it seemes a miracle to me, how a custome springing from so vile a ground, and brought in by a father so generally hated, should be welcomed upon so slender a warrant. For if they that first put it in practise heere, had remembred for what respect it was used by them from whence it came, I am sure they would have bene loath, to have taken so farre the imputation of that disease upon them as they did, by using the cure thereof. For *Sanis non est opus medico*, and counterpoisons are never used, but where poyson is thought to precede.

But since it is true, that divers customes slightly grounded, and with no better warrant entred in a Commonwealth, may yet in the use of them thereafter, prove both necessary and profitable; it is therefore next to be examined, if there be not a full Svmptie and true Proportion, betweene the base ground and foolish entrie, and the loathsome, and hurtfull use of this stinking Antidote.

I am now therefore heartily to pray you to consider, first upon what false and erroneous grounds you have first built the generall good liking thereof; and next, what sinnes towards God, and foolish vanities before the world you commit, in the detestable use of it.

As for these deceitfull grounds, that have specially mooved you to take a good and great conceit thereof, I shall content my selfe to examine here onely foure of the principals of them; two founded upon the Theoricke of a deceivable appearance of Reason, and two of them upon the mistaken Practicke of generall Experience.

First, it is thought by you a sure Aphorisme in the Physickes, That the braines of all men, beeing naturally colde and wet, all dry and hote things should be good for them; of which nature this stinking suffumigation is, and therefore of good use to them. Of

this Argument, both the Proposition and Assumption are false, and so the Conclusion cannot but be voyd of it selfe. For as to the Proposition, That because the braines are colde and moist, therefore things that are hote and drie are best for them, it is an inept consequence: For man beeing compounded of the foure Complexions, (whose fathers are the foure Elements) although there be a mixture of them all in all the parts of his body, yet must the divers parts of our *Microcosme* or little world within our selves, be diversly more inclined, some to one, some to another complexion, according to the diversitie of their uses, that of these discords a petfect harmonie may bee made up for the maintenance of the whole body.

The application then of a thing of a contrary nature, to any of these parts, is to interrupt them of their due function, and by consequence hurtfull to the health of the whole body. As if a man, because the Liver is hote (as the fountaine of blood) and as it were an oven to the stomacke, would therefore apply and weare close upon his Liver and stomacke a cake of lead; he might within a very short time (I hope) be sustained very good cheape at an Ordinarie, beside the cleering of his conscience from that deadly sinne of gluttonie. And as if, because the Heart is full of vitall spirits, and in perpetuall motion, a man would therefore lay a heavy pound stone on his breast, for staying and holding downe that wanton palpitation, I doubt not but his breast would bee more bruised with the weight thereof, then the heart would be comforted with such a disagreeable and contrarious cure. And even so is it with the Braines. For if a man, because the Braines are colde and humide, would therefore use inwardly by smells, or outwardly by application, things of hot and drie qualitie, all the gaine that he could make thereof, would onely be to put himselfe in a great forwardnesse for running mad, by over-watching him selfe, the coldnesse and moistnesse of is our braine beeing the onely ordinarie meanes that procure our sleepe and rest. Indeed I do not denie, but when it falls out that any of these, or any part of our bodie growes to be distempered, and to tend to ail extremitie, beyond the compasse of Natures temperate mixture, that in that case cures of contrary qualities, to the intemperate inclination of that part, being wisely prepared and discretely ministered, may be both necessarie and helpfull for strengtbnig and assisting Nature in the expulsion of her enemies: for this is the true definition of all profitable Physicke.

But first these Cures ought not to bee used, but where there is neede of them, the contrarie whereof, is daily practised in this generall use of *Tobacco* by all sorts and complexions of people.

And next, I deny the Minor of this argument, as I have already said, in regard that this *Tobacco*, is not simply of a dry and hot qualitie; but rather hath a certaine venomous facultie joyned with the heate thereof, which makes it have an Antipathie against nature, as by the hatefull smell thereof doeth well appeare. For the Nose being the proper Organ and convoy of the sense of smelling to the braines, which are the

onely fountaine of that sense, doeth ever serve us for an infallible witnesse, whether that Odour which we smell, be healthfull or hurtfull to the braine (except when it fals out that the sense it selfe is corrupted and abused through some infirmitie, and distemper in the braine.) And that the suffumigation thereof cannot have a drying qualitie, it needes no further probation, then that it is a smoake, all smoake and vapour, being of it selfe humide, as drawing neere to the nature of the ayre, and easie to be resolved againe into water, whereof there needes no other prooffe but the Meteors, which being bred of nothing else but of the vapours and exhalations sucked up by the Sunne out of the earth, the Sea, and waters yet are the sarne smoakie vapours turned, and transformed into Raynes, Snowes, Deawes, hoare Frostes, and such like waterie Meteors, as by the contrarie the raynie cloudes are often transformed and evaporated in blustering winds.

The second Argument grounded on a show of reason is, That this filthie smoake, aswell through the heat and strength thereof, as by a naturall force and qualitie, is able and fit to purge both the head and stomacke of Rhewmes and distillations, as experience teacheth, by the spitting and avoyding fleame, immediatly after the taking of it. But the fallacie of this Argument may easily appeare, by my late preceding description of the Meteors. For even as the smoakie vapours sucked up by the Sunne, and staid in the lowest and colde Region of the ayre, are there contracted into cloudes and turned into raine and such other watery Meteors: So this stinking smoake being sucked up by the Nose, and imprisoned in the colde and moyst braines, is by their colde and wett facultie, turned and cast foorth againe in waterie distillations, and so are you made free and purged of nothing, but that wherewith you wilfully burdened your selves: and therefore are you no wiser in taking Tobacco for purging you of distillations, then if for preventing the Cholike you would take all kinde of windie meates and drinkes, and for preventing of the Stone, you would take all kinde of meates and drinkes that would breede gravell in the Kidneyes, and then when you were forced to avoyde much winde out of your stomacke, and much gravell in your Urine, that you should attribute the thanke thereof to such nourishments as bred those within you, that behoved either to be expelled by the force of Nature, or you to have *burst at the broadside*, as the Proverbe is.

As for the other two reasons founded upon experience, the first of which is, That the whole people would not have taken so generall a good liking thereof, if they had not by experience found it verie soveraigne and good for them: For answeare thereunto how easily the mindes of any people, wherewith God hath replenished this world, may be drawn to the foolish affectation of any noveltie, I leave it to the discreet judgement of any man that is reasonable.

Doe we not dayly see, that a man can no sooner bring over from beyond the Seas any new forme of apparell, but that hee can not bee thought a man of spirit, that would not

presently imitate the same? And so from hand to hand it spreades, till it be practised by all, not for any commoditie that is in it, but only because it is come to be the fashion. For such is the force of that naturall Selfe-love in every one of us, and such is the corruption of envie bred in the brest of every one, as we cannot be content unlesse we imitate every thing that our fellowes doe, and so proove our selves capable of every thing whereof they are capable, like Apes, counterfeiting the maners of others, to our owne destruction. For let one or two of the greatest Masters of Mathematickes in any of the two famous Universities, but constantly affirme any cleare day, that they see some strange apparition in the skies: they will I warrant you be seconded by the greatest part of the Students in that profession: So loath will they be, to bee thought inferiour to their fellowes, either in depth of knowledge or sharpnesse of sight: And therefore the generall good liking and imbracing of this foolish custome, doeth but onely proceede from that affectation of noveltie, and popular error, whereof I have already spoken.

The other argument drawn from a mistaken experience, is but the more particular probation of this generall, because it is alleaged to be found true by prooffe, that by the taking of *Tobacco* divers and very many doe finde themselves cured of divers diseases as on the other part, no man ever received harme thereby. In this argument there is first a great mistaking and next a monstrous absurditie. For is it not a very great mistaking, to take *Non causam pro causa*, as they say in the Logicks? because peradventure when a sicke man hath had his disease at the height, hee hath at that instant taken *Tobacco*, and afterward his disease taking the naturall course of declining, and consequently the patient of recovering his health, O then the *Tobacco* forsooth, was the worker of that miracle. Beside that, it is a thing well knoweil to all Phisicians, that the apprehension and conceit of the patient hath by wakening and uniting the vitall spirits, and so strengthening nature, a great power and vertue, to cure divers diseases. For an evident prooffe of mistaking in the like case, I pray you what foolish boy, what sillie wench, what olde doting wife, or ignorant country clowne, is not a Phisician for the toothach, for the cholicke, and divers such common diseases? Yea, will not every man you meete withal, teach you a sundry cure for the same, and swear by that meane either himselfe, or some of his nearest kinsmen and friends was cured? And yet I hope no man is so foolish as to beleieve them. And al these toyes do only proceed from the mistaking *Non causam pro causa*, as I have already sayd, and so if a man chance to recover one of any disease, after he hath taken *Tobacco*, that must have the thankes of all. But by the contrary, if a man smoke himselfe to death with it (and many have done) O then some other disease must beare the blame for that fault. So doe olde harlots thanke their harlotrie for their many yeeres, that custome being healthfull (say they) *ad purgandos Renes*, but never have minde how many die of the Pockes in the flower of their youth. And so doe olde

drunkards thinke they prolong their dayes, by their swinelike diet, but never remember howe many die drowned in drinke before they be halfe olde.

And what greater absurditie can there bee, then to say that one cure shall serve for divers, nay, contrarious sortes of diseases? It is all undoubted ground among all Phisicians, that there is almost no sort either of nourishment or medicine, that hath not some thing in it disagreeable to some part of mans bodie, because, as I have already sayd, the nature of the temperature of every part, is so different from another, that according to the olde proverbe, That which is good for the head, is evill for the necke and the shoulders. For even as a strong enemie, that invades a towne or fortresse, although in his siege thereof, he do belaiie and compasse it round about, yet he makes his breach and entrie, at some one or few special parts thereof, which hee hath tried and found to bee weakest and least able to resist; so sicknesse doth make her particular assault, upon such part or parts of our bodie, as are weakest and easiest to be overcome by that sort of disease, which then doth assaile us, although all the rest of the body by Sympathie feele it selfe, to be as it were belaiied, and besieged by the affliction of that special part, the grieffe and smart thereof being by the sence of feeling dispersed through all the rest of our members. And therefore the skilfull Phisician presses by such cures, to purge and strengthen that part which is afflicted, as are only fit for that sort of disease, and doe best agree with the nature of that infirme part; which being abused to a disease of another nature, would proove as hurtfull for the one, as helpfull for the other. Yea, not only will a skilfull. and warie Phisician bee carefull to use no cure but that which is fit for that sort of disease, but he wil also consider all other circumstances, and make the remedies sutable thereunto: as the temperature of the clime where the Patient is, the constitution of the Planets, the time of the Moone, the season of the yere, the age and complexion of the Patient, and the present state of his body, in strength or weaknesse. For one cure must not ever be used for the self-same disease, but according to the varying of any of the foresaid circumstances, that sort of remedie must be used which is fittest for the same. Whear by the contrarie in this case, such is the miraculous omnipotencie of our strong tasted *Tobacco*, as it cures all sorts of diseases (which never any drugge could do before) in all persons, and at all times. It cures all manner of distillations, either in the head or stomacke (if you beleeve their Axiomes) although in very deede it doe both corrupt the braine, and by causing over quicke digestion, fill the stomacke full of crudities. It cures the Gowt in the feet, and (which is miraculous) in that very instant when the smoke thereof, as light, flies up into the head, the vertue thereof, as heavie, runs downe to the little toe. It helps all sorts of Agues. It makes a man sober that was drunke. It refreshes a weary man, and yet makes a man hungry. Being taken when they goe to bed, it makes one sleepe soundly, and yet being taken when a man is sleepe and drowsie, it will, as they say, awake his braine, and quicken his understanding. As for curing of the Pockes, it serves for that use but among the pockie

Indian slaves. Here in *England* it is refined, and will not deigne to cure heere any other then cleanly and gentlemanly diseases. O omnipotent power of *Tobacco*! And if it could by the smoke thereof chace out devils, as the smoke of *Tobias* fish did (which I am sure could smel no stronglier) it would serve for a precious Relicke, both for the superstitious Priests, and the insolent Puritanes, to cast out devils withall.

Admitting then, and not confessing that the use thereof were healthfull for some sortes of diseases; should it be used for all sicknesses? should it be used by all men? should it be used at al times? yea should it be used by able, yong, strong, healthful men? Medicine hath that vertue, that it never leaveth a man in that state wherin it findeth him: it makes a sicke man whole, but a whole man sicke. And as Medicine helps nature being taken at times of necessitie, so being ever and continually used, it doth but weaken, wearie, and weare nature. What speake I of Medicine? Nay let a man every houre of the day, or as oft as many in this countrey use to take *Tobacco*, let a man I say, but take as oft the best sorts of nourishments in meate and drinke that can bee devised, hee shall with the continuall use thereof weaken both his head and his stomacke: all his members shall become feeble, his spirits dull, and in the end, as a drowsie lazie belly-god, he shall evanish in a Lethargie.

And from this weaknesse it proceeds, that many in this kingdome have had such a continuall use of taking this uusavorie smoke, as now they are not able to forbear the same, no more then an olde drunkard can abide to be long sober, without falling into an incurable weaknesse and evill constitution: for their continuall custome hath made to them, *habitum, alteram naturam*: so to those that from their birth have bene continually nourished upon poison and things venemous, wholesome meates are onely poisonable.

Thus having, as I truste, sufficiently answered the most principall arguments that are used in defence of this vile custome, it rests onely to informe you what sinnes and vanities you commit in the filthie abuse thereof. First, are you not guiltie of sinnefull and shamefull lust? (for lust may bee as well in any of the senses as in feeling) that although you bee troubled with no disease, but in perfect health, yet can you neither be merry at an Ordinarie, nor lascivious in the Stewes, if you lacke *Tobacco* to provoke your appetite to any of those sorts of recreation, lusting after it as the children of Israel did in the wilderness after Quales? Secondly it is, as you use or rather abuse it, a branche of the sinne of drunkennesse, which is the roote of all sinnes: for as the onely delight that drunkards take in Wine is in the strength of the taste, and the force of the fume thereof that mounts up to the braine: for no drunkards love any weake, or sweete drinke: so are not those (I meane the strong heate and the fume) the onely qualities that make *Tobacco* so delectable to all the lovers of it? And as no man likes strong headie drinke the first day (because *nemo repente fit turpissimus*) but by custome is piece and piece allured, while in the ende, a drunkard will have as great a

thirst to bee drunke, as a sober man to quench his thirst with a draught when hee hath need of it: So is not this the very case of all the great takers of *Tobacco*? which therefore they themselves do attribute to a bewitching qualitie in it. Thirdly, is it not the greatest sinne of all, that you the people of all sortes of this Kingdome, who are created and ordeined by God to bestowe both your persons and goods for the maintenance both of the honour and safetie of your King and Commonweath, should disable your selves in both? In your persons having by this continuall vile custome brought your selves to this shameful imbecilitie, that you are not able to ride or walke the journey of a Jewes Sabboth, but you must have a reekie cole brought you from the next Poore house to kindle your *Tobacco* with? whereas he cannot be thought able for any service in the warres, that cannot endure oftentimes the want of meate, drinke and sleepe, much more then must hee endure the want of *Tobacco*. In the times of the many glorious and victorious battailes fought by this Nation, there was no word of *Tobacco*. But now if it were time of warres, and that you were to make some sudden *Cavalcado* upon your enemies, if any of you should seeke leisure to stay behinde his fellowe for taking of *Tobacco*, for my part I should never bee sorie for any evill chance that might befall him. To take a custome in any thing that cannot bee left againe, is most harmefull to the people of any land. *Mollicies* and delicacie were the wracke and overthrow, first of the Persian, and next of the Romane Empire. And this very custome of taking *Tobacco* (whereof our present purpose is) is even at this day accounted so effeminate among the Indians themselves, as in the market they will offer no price for a slave to be sold, whome they finde to be a great *Tobacco* taker.

Now how you are by this custome disabled in your goods, let the Gentry of this land beare witnesse, some of them bestowing three, some foure hundred pounds a yeere upon this precious stinke, which I am sure might be bestowed upon many farre better uses. I read indeede of a knavish Courtier, who for abusing the favour of the Emperour *Alexander Severushis* Master by taking bribes to intercede, for sundry persons in his Masters eare (for whom he never once opened his mouth) was justly choked with smoke, with this doome, *Fumo pereat, qui fumum vendidit*: but of so many smoke-buyers, as are at this present in this kingdome, I never read nor heard.

And for the vanities committed in this filthie custome, is it not both great vanitie and uncleanesse, that at the table, a place of respect, of cleanlinesse, of modestie, men should not be ashamed, to sit tossing of *Tobacco pipes*, and puffing of the smoke of *Tobacco* one to another, making the filthy smoke and stinke thereof, to exhale athwart the dishes, and infect the aire, when very often, men that abhorre it are at their repast? Surely Smoke becomes a kitchin far better then a Dining chamber, and yet it makes a kitchin also oftentimes in the inward parts of men, soiling and infecting them, with an unctuous and oily kinde of Soote, as hath bene found in some great *Tobacco* takers, that after their death were opened. And not onely meate time,

but no other time nor action is exempted from the publike use of this uncivill tricke: so as if the wives of *Diepe* list to contest with this Nation for good maners their worst maners would in all reason be found at least not so dishonest (as ours are) in this point. The publike use whereof, at all times, and in all places, hath now so farre prevailed, as divers men very sound both in judgement, and complexion, have bene at last forced to take it also without desire, partly because they were ashanied to seeme singular, (like the two Philosophers that were forced to duck themselves in that raine water, and so become fooles aswell as the rest of the people) and partly, to be as one that was content to eate Garlicke (which hee did not love) that he might not be troubled with the smell of it, in the breath of his fellowes. And is it not a great vanitie, that a man cannot heartily welcome his friend now, but straight they must bee in hand with *Tobacco*? No it is become in place of a cure, a point of good fellowship, and he that will refuse to take a pipe of *Tobacco* among his fellowes, (though by his own election he would rather feele the savour of a Sinke) is accounted peevish and no good company, even as they doe with tippeling in the cold Easterne Countries. Yea the Mistresse cannot in a more manerly kinde, entertaine her servant, then by giving him out of her faire hand a pipe of *Tobacco*. But herein is not onely a great vanitie but a great contempt of Gods good giftes, that the sweetnesse of mans breath, being a good gift of God, should be willfully corrupted by this stinking smoke, wherein I must confesse, it hath too strong a vertue: and so that which is an ornament of nature, and can neither by any artifice be at the first acquired, nor once lost, be recovered againe, shall be filthily corrupted with an incurable stinke, which vile qualitie is as directly contrary to that wrong opinion which is holden of the wholesomnesse thereof, as the venime of putrifaction is contrary to the vertue Preservative.

Moreover, which is a great iniquitie, and against all humanitie, the husband shall not bee ashamed, to reduce thereby his delicate, wholesome, and cleane complexioned wife, to that extremitie, that either shee must also corrupt her sweete breath therewith, or else resolve to live in a perpetuall stinking torment.

Have you not reason then to bee ashamed, and to forbear this filthie noveltie, so basely grounded, so foolishly received and so grossely mistaken in the right use thereof? In your abuse thereof sinning against God, harming your selves both in persons and goods, and raking also thereby the markes and notes of vanitie upon you: by the custome thereof making your selves to be wondered at by all forraine civil Nations, and by all strangers that come among you, to be scorned and contemned. A custome lothsome to the eye, hatefull to the Nose, harmefull to the braine, dangerous to the Lungs, and in the blacke stinking fume thereof, nearest resembling the horrible Stigian smoke of the pit that is bottomelesse.