

*The NEWLANDERS CURE by William Vaughan: A review by Stephen Nolan*

The introduction to William Vaughan's *Newlanders Cure* gives the reader a significant clue as to what is to follow. The line, "I am married both to the Muses and Newfoundland," tells us this book is no ordinary one but a work written by someone who felt immensely passionate about his subject. *Newlanders Cure* is not just a book about a miraculous cure to bring the body to its full potential but also an epic poem that shows a path to physical and spiritual redemption. It is also somewhat a subliminal recruiting message for prospective colonists to Vaughan's colony in Newfoundland. The cure, which is a combination of isolation and deprivation, appears to fit the conditions that colonists would endure if they would come to Newfoundland. Vaughan may have hoped that by first opening up his book readers would take the next step and join him in the New World.

The central concept of Vaughan's cure is that in order to be truly healthy one must be a spiritual being. Life's true purpose is to serve the Lord and to live life in a wholesome manner so we can fully accept God's glorious redemption. We must be prepared for the Divine not only spiritually but physically. This is not a crusade but an individual challenge in which the enemy is us and our weak wills. To overcome this trial we have to put our faith in God and turn our backs to worldly pleasures. *Newlanders Cure* is the best way, according to Vaughan, to ensure that we win this struggle over our more beastly nature.

The litmus test for virtue, according to Vaughan, is a healthy body and this is made clear early on in the text. "The Holy Ghost cannot long reside in fat, foggy bodies," p. 19. Of course that leads us to imagine what might reside in the bodies of the unhealthy that have been abandoned by the Holy Spirit. The unanswered question of what Vaughn believes does reside in foggy, flabby bodies is a thought the modern reader should not dwell on if there is to be any benefit from the book.

Rather than play devil's advocate we should look at how intertwined religion was in Vaughan's world and time period. It was normal to have religion as a central part of everyday life, not just as a small portion of one's existence set aside from the rest. Religion and its influence were immersed in every part of European society during Vaughan's lifetime and this has to be accounted for in his work.

The author is not a twenty first century sham artist trying to convince the reader his world view is correct; one gets the feeling right from the beginning that Vaughan takes this for granted and goes on from there to reveal his cure. This viewpoint is far from unique. Many people during Vaughan's era believed that the favourable conditions of being respectable, healthy and wealthy was achieved by the grace of God.

The ideas of holistic medicine were thoroughly endorsed by Vaughan. In his view a person cannot be in good physical health without the spiritual aspect being in trim form as well. He engages us with this notion stating, "The great light of the body is the mind," p. 5. In order to understand the Creator the mind must be in full control of its faculties and for this to occur the body must be healthy. The mind must not be clouded by alcohol or riled up by lustful

imaginations which cause the soul to become unreceptive to the Holy Ghost. The mind must be focused and a cradle of reason so that we are in the correct state for eventual salvation.

So how does this convergence of mind, soul and body occur so that we are in perfect union? *Newlanders' Cure*, according to Vaughan, is the best way to achieve this lofty goal. The idea of moderation is strongly advised. To begin, a person must find an internal, natural balance and fight to get control over their eating habits. Many pages of the *Newlanders' Cure* are dedicated to this idea. Vaughan writes: "It is a shameful thing for an understanding man not to know the measure of his own belly," p. 10.

Gluttony is one of the Seven Deadly Sins he points out and writes that a balanced approach to eating is absolutely central to his diet. Vaughan tends to believe that "If you eat so much you cannot study you ate too much," p. 12. The notion of not eating until you are full but instead leave the table wanting a bit more is an idea ingrained in the Newfoundland conscience for centuries, one wonders if its origins might have a connection to Vaughan.

The motivation for this advice might not be as noble as one might first expect. Equating hardship, hunger and difficulty with spiritualism was not new in Vaughan's time and might be something of a lure to get people to go to his colony. Is the notion a spiritual idea alone or simply an artful way in which to try and control hunger? Does the feeling of hunger and spirituality go together and would it be especially appealing to a people who, as newcomers to Newfoundland, would have to know hardship and hunger?

Vaughan continues that eating less meat is a good and healthy thing. Once again newcomers to his Newfoundland colony would not have a steady supply of meat, instead relying on fish to supplement the meagre supply of meat in their diet. Was Vaughan subconsciously steering his diet to suit the conditions of his settlers in Newfoundland or did his observances of his colony and their level of fitness lead him to this conclusion? What came first for Vaughan, the mutton or the fish?

The body is understood as merely a vessel for the soul and that too must be beaten into shape. For Vaughan fitness in body equals fitness in spirit. "The Holy Ghost cannot long reside in fat, foggy bodies. Men cannot be good Christians and make a god of their bellies," p. 19. False idols are the meats and delicacies on the table and to engage in eating these continuously will take you away from your true calling, to serve the Lord and not yourself. Serving up greedy, full helpings of luxurious food takes away from the dignity of man and confuses his mind. Rather than feast on the pleasures of the flesh you should strive to hunger for the grace of God and only by proportioning your habits to a reasonable size will you be able resist temptation.

This talk of spiritual cleansing and how a good diet will lead to a healthy and more enlightened life goes on for the first two sections of Part One of *Newlanders Cure*. The book is full of descriptive language that does its utmost to convince that this cure will succeed not only in bringing you to the pinnacle of health but also much closer to the Divine. Only by reading the text can one gain a comprehensive understanding of Vaughan's wonderfully descriptive language on health and spirituality.

The third section or chapter deals with the many health benefits that *Newlanders Cure* will affect. The brain becomes clear, it gets rid of lust and you will live to old age. The next few sections deals with examples from the lives of saints who got through on the simplest of meals and had gone on to extreme old age. Vaughan also talks about the benefits of a solitary existence and how saintly it is to be alone and closer to the spirit and nature.

The benefits continue until there can be no doubt that this cure is absolutely amazing as it cures almost everything that might afflict a human being.

For a temperate diet makes the body light, pure, healthful, preserves it from diseases and stinking corruption. It prolongs life until extreme old age. It makes one sleep quietly and pleasantly. It makes one's meat taste the more acceptable. It brings soundness to the senses, quickness to the memory, clear judgement to the wit, it assuages the rage of unruly passions, beats down and breaks the fury of unlawful lust and drives away anger and sorrow.

To conclude it cements together the soul and body with such a harmonically admired temper that with a quiet conscience apostolic all patience and with a magnanimous sparkling spirit partaking equally of mirth and gratuity he shall soon perceive himself metamorphosed and changed of a sensual creature to be a man of reason, of a dark besotted apprehension now suddenly become one of the hopeful Children of God, illuminated with understanding to ponder and discuss of celestial matters touching the mysteries of our salvation of faith, grace, the resurrection and the difference betwixt human and divine policy betwixt saint Michael the Archangel and the spiritual dragon. Lastly, he shall be able to apprehend how sin and the Prince of the Air are linked in one, to confirm men's hardened hearts in their own accursed courses, p. 52-53.

If there ever was written a better pitch for a diet, I have never seen it!

The seventh section of Part One gets into the idea that the body must be tempered if the soul is to rise to Heaven like a steel sword is forged by white hot flame.

Purification must go before glorification. For before a man can assume a glorified immortal body in Heaven, it is necessary the whole man be purified here on Earth, the soul by faith and the body by abstinence," p. 54.

A person has to hold back from an overdose of food and drink in order to ensure they are worthy of heaven. Vaughan states, "It is the quantity of meats or drinks and not the quality that I reprove," p. 56. He wrote as if he had an intimate understanding of these other worldly matters and it must have been with this great certainty that his faith led him towards his worldly endeavours. It is as if he yearns to get the knowledge out there that the way of salvation can be taken by his methods and that the cure can heal the mind, body and soul.

Halfway into the book Vaughan leaves the more spiritual and philosophical thoughts and finally gets to some specific Newfoundland talk. He gave some good advice to Lord

Baltimore on the location of his colony in Ferryland, him that he should have settled his people two miles further inland to avoid the harshness of the coastal winter months and thus avoid the calamities that befell them. *Newlanders Cure* reconnects us through the passionate voice of William Vaughan to the early settlement period in a direct and tangible way.

He then gets into some specifics with regard to curing scurvy and reminds us Baltimore's colony suffered greatly from this affliction. Vaughan goes on to say that he advised Lord Baltimore to start his colony not in Ferryland but at Aquafort or in the westerly part of Placentia. Baltimore was evidently dissuaded from this action by those who had more experience in the fishing trade and so Vaughan's advice was not taken. In hindsight, we know now that Baltimore should have been more heedful of Vaughan's warning of hardships ahead.

Baltimore settlers' misfortune is not the only example of how calamity follows people who do not heed the cure. Vaughan proves himself not to be a friend of physicians (although he was trained and practiced the medicine of the times) and apothecaries as he suggested they are in the business not so much for the satisfaction of helping ailing people as in profiting from their illnesses. If they only espoused the goodness of the cure their business would diminish greatly. Divulging a cure for scurvy for example, according to Vaughan, is why the medical community would not take to his overall remedy.

Vaughan's rather complex cure for scurvy is to first change the suffering person's clothing to clean linen, second, to sleep in dry, boarded rooms that would have little or no draft. Third, beat and burn one acre of land round the dwelling, fourth, eat only meats which are tender, light of digestion and would not be soon corrupted. Fifth, eat lots of prunes, raisins and currants. Six, drams of rhubarbs with cinnamon and sugar to take five times a day to purge the system and finally to have baths of brimstone once a week whereby the vapours of the body may be easier to exhale. He covered most of the basics of good health in the specific but the true, serendipitous magic lies hidden at the end.

In Newfoundland, Vaughan says, his colonists boiled the leaves of turnips or radishes, rich source of vitamins C and A. Another Newfoundland dietary habit still extant in the spring of which the popular sales of rape seed greens (a turnip tops substitute) and dandelion greens are indicative.

To cure violent vomiting from seasickness Vaughan recommends drinking wormwood wine or the salt of wormwood in beer or wine. Vaughan goes on to write about other natural medicines effective for certain ills. Today medical professionals gloss over traditional or herbal cures and Vaughan fought this professional prejudice in his own time.

The Second Part of *Newlanders Cure* is a poem rather than traditional text. It has little to do with health and a great deal to do with religion. Vaughan was a very religious man and expressed his views on religion in a unique, poetic and expressive language. He is not a fan of Roman Catholicism and considered the Roman Catholic Church influenced by Satan which, considering the era, may be reconciled with the politics of England and Wales at the time.

Within the poem there is one suggestion that Newfoundland might be a remedy for those who are not happy with their lot in England. "How many thousands pine at home, though Newfoundland yields elbow room." P. 99, again seeking recruits.

*Newlanders Cure* itself is not a concoction of herbs and spices the infirm would ingest to make them feel better; it is no huckster's snake oil. The cure goes back to Plato and his views on moderation. It is simple; it will never go out of style, and it might just make you feel better. Giving up on alcohol, reducing the intake of meat and never over-indulging will improve your health. This practice has been proven for hundreds of years and spans the globe.

The spiritual side of the cure might be a bit of a leap of faith for those who are not spiritually active. Yet, while Christianity might not be the root to health for some of today's readers, there is a great deal of evidence that a spiritual existence will lead to a better overall healthy lifestyle. If one is content in their spirituality, it can only benefit the person as a whole being. Religious readers will understand a bit better how Vaughan can relate healing to spirituality. Those who are not so religiously inclined can take heart knowing that even if no deity controls their diet, their peace of mind can certainly lower their heart rate and blood pressure. Peace of mind is the antithesis of stress.

The question remains, is *Newlanders Cure* an important part of Newfoundland history medical science? The answer is a resounding yes to both. There are enough historical nuggets for anyone to find within the text to make this book worth a good look. It is human nature to try and relieve pain and suffering and William Vaughan tries to do just that by suggesting his remedies. The poetic way in which he writes strengthens the book, not diminishes it, and readers will find that a turn clever of phrase can sometimes be the best medicine.

The reviewer read *The Newlanders Cure, Sabin Americana: Print Editions 1500 – 1926*, Gale, Sabin Americana, 2012.

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