

## The Primeval Dilemma: Ethical Conflict in *Portnoy's Complaint* and *Doctor Faustus*

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The fiction of Philip Roth basically deals with the universal problem of man's moral dilemma in his society which demands conformity and normalcy and, moreover, puts limitations over individual aspirations. *Portnoy's Complaint*, published in 1969, is by far the most popular and most widely-read book written by him and gained him much money, fame and even notoriety. The novel evoked a sharp reaction among the general public, and more particularly, his own Jewish community. Philip Roth was charged with anti-Semitism and obscenity. Not surprisingly, in the wake of such biased and unwarranted emphasis on the ethnic dimensions of the novel its artistic worth was grossly underrated. But now that critical dust has settled, the general opinion about the merit of the book is well-established. Barring some exceptions it is now agreed that the basic issues in *Portnoy's Complaint* are too universal to be confined to any narrow ethnic boundaries.

*Doctor Faustus*, written in 1592, is the most famous play by Christopher Marlowe. It portrays the tragedy of the Renaissance hero Faustus. Undoubtedly, the most appealing element of the play right from its beginning is the inner conflict of Faustus, dangling precariously between good and evil, heaven and hell. Far-fetched and irrelevant though the comparison may seem, the ethical conflict in the soul of Portnoy and Faustus is strikingly similar. Though the two literary works are widely separated from each other as far as literary age and genre is concerned, the main theme of both is the agitating and painful conflict between the inherent tendencies of good and evil in human soul. Whereas *Portnoy's Complaint* is generally acknowledged as a comic masterpiece of Roth in late-twentieth-century, *Doctor Faustus* is unanimously regarded as a great tragedy of Elizabethan era.

Some critics of Roth are of the view that Portnoy is a comic figure, a typical *schlemiel* found frequently in the twentieth-century Jewish-American fiction and no more beyond that. This view appears to be rather superficial and falls short of a total and comprehensive picture of a complex character. On a deeper level Portnoy's dilemma demonstrates a tragic intensity like that of Faustus' who while seeing the glimpses of heaven plunges into hell due to his own deeds. George J. Searles rightly asserts that Portnoy 'is intended as a tragic figure'. (1985:14) As far as the temporal gap between the two works is concerned it is of little significance when they are examined with main focus on their core issue of ethical dilemma which has a universal appeal and import. It is a matter of mere dramatic technicality that Marlowe dramatises the conflict in the form of various characters like the Good Angel, the Bad Angel and the Old Man in the tradition of morality plays. A study of ethical dilemma of Portnoy in comparison with that of Faustus will be worthwhile inasmuch as it would shed new light on the nature of conflict in *Portnoy's Complaint* and highlight the relevance and desirability of a moral order in a highly materialistic and rather cynical post-modern age.

Over the years, the novel has been studied from different points of view. John N. McDaniel has examined Portnoy's predicament in his social and ethnic context. Tony Tanner is of the opinion that in *Portnoy's Complaint* 'Roth's interest in the social scene and his feeling for the obsessed self coalesced in the writing'. (1971: 313) The main focus of Judith Paterson Jones and Guinevera A. Nance has been on the different kinds of conflicts the novel embodies, particularly between parents and children. Hermione Lee tries to link the struggle of the individual self in the novel to the European tradition of Franz Kafka and Nikolai Gogol. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. analyses the process of assimilation of Jewish characters in the American society in Roth's fiction and concludes that *Portnoy's Complaint* is very much in the native American tradition. Murray Baumgarten and Barbara Gottfried in their comprehensive study of Roth's fiction come to the conclusion that '*Portnoy's Complaint* sets the terms by which Philip Roth explores what it means to be Jewish and male in late-twentieth-century America (1990: 83) Jay L. Halio in his incisive study of Roth's fiction undertakes to demonstrate his capabilities and achievements as a 'specifically comic writer'. (1992: 5) He observes that in *Portnoy's Complaint* 'life and death, comedy and tragedy blend into each other' (1992: 82). Bruno

Bettelheim has tried to analyse the novel in psychological terms ascribing Portnoy's fixations to Oedipal complex. According to him, Portnoy chooses *shiksas* for sexual pleasure owing to his ethnic prejudices. Broadly speaking, the critical thrust has been on the comic and ethnic dimensions of Portnoy's condition and the narrative is largely seen as the ludicrous, fantastical and morbid 'complaints' of a sensitive son feeling suffocated in a Jewish family amidst the Gentile majority in twentieth-century America. Thus the turbulent drama of opposing impulses and tendencies in the soul of a conscientious individual needs further study with a view to examine the serious ethical issues involved.

My intention in the present paper is to show that the lasting appeal of *Portnoy's Complaint* and *Doctor Faustus* is essentially in the conflict between good and evil in human soul which is of universal significance. For this purpose, I would try to trace the parallel elements in the experience of Portnoy and Faustus, focusing specially on the later parts of the books where they are at the dead end of their voluptuous journey. Though there is much valuable criticism on both these works, it would be a worthwhile exercise to compare these two characters in the light of textual evidences. In both the books the conflict is primeval in nature, which has manifested itself in human soul since the beginning of civilisation. This is beyond the scope of this paper to study the moral stance of the characters in the perspective of abstract metaphysical arguments. For my purpose, it would be proper to use the words 'good' and 'evil' in their broader sense. Good or right is what gives maximum benefits, satisfaction and happiness to self and others. Evil or wrong is what causes maximum harm and pain to self and others. Self is important since good or evil has as much to do with moral norms of society as to human psyche or soul. The values which are deemed proper and acceptable such as love, brotherhood, kindness, justice, duty, and so on are presumed to be good or right while pride, hypocrisy, cruelty, and so on are considered to be bad or evil. It goes without saying that the standards of morality are drastically different in the two books. In Elizabethan times the sensual pleasures which Faustus enjoys or wishes to enjoy were considered to be beyond the accepted moral spectrum as is evident by the inclusion of Lechery in the spectacle of Seven Deadly Sins. In modern western society promiscuous sexual relationships have become a part of the prevalent popular culture and are not supposed to be such a hideous sin. This is one of the reasons that the contemporary reader fails to realise the

full intensity and tragedy of Portnoy's dilemma and is rather lost in the rollicking fun of his sexual antics. There are glaring instances in the texts of the two books which suggest that the central conflict between god and evil is similar in nature.

Faustus and Portnoy are highly distinguished persons in their respective social groups. Portnoy, having an IQ of 158 points, is Assistant Commissioner of Human Opportunity for the City of New York. Faustus is a renowned scholar in Wittenberg and scholars throng him for intellectual discussion and enlightenment. In the beginning of their career they enjoy the company of other characters who occupy an important place in their life—Portnoy with his parents, sisters, friends and, moreover, with his *shikses*, and Faustus with his scholar friends, Wagner and, moreover, with the devils (significantly, neither of them has wife or children). But at the end of each book they are found utterly alone, completely cut off from all vital social and human forces. Sin and the resultant feelings of guilt and self-loathing cause this loneliness and isolation as they warp the personality. Portnoy is obsessed with sexual lust; in childhood and adolescence it expresses itself in excessive masturbation while in youth in heterosexual pleasures with his *shikses*. Paradoxically, he himself attributes it to his being Jewish in a majority Gentile society of America. In Faustus' case, though the primary aim is apparently the acquisition of knowledge which he thinks is a means of absolute power, there are clear indications as to what ends he intends to use this power. He wishes to achieve a world of profit and delight of power, of honour, of omnipotence. (Marlowe 1976 Scene 1: 52-53, Subsequent references to this book are indicated by scene and line numbers only). Valdes evokes before him a vision of sensuality when the magical spirits will serve them in various ways:

Sometimes like women or unwedded maids,  
Shadowing more beauty in their airy brows  
Than in the white breasts of the queen of love. (Scene 1:126-28).

As early as in his opening monologue he proclaims: "Sweet Analytics, 'tis thou hast *ravish'd* me!" [emphasis added] (Scene 1:6). The use of the word "*ravish'd*" seems to be deliberate suggesting the innate desire of the ambitious scholar. Soon after the signing the bond with Lucifer, he demands a woman:

But, leaving this, let me have a wife, the fairest maid in Germany, for I am wanton and *lascivious* [emphasis added]. (Scene 5:141-42)

And before signing of the profane agreement with Lucifer he dictates its terms to Mephostophilis:

So he will spare him four-and-twenty years, Letting him live in all *voluptuousness* [emphasis added]. (Scene 3:93-94).

Finally, he meets his damnation beyond redemption when he commits the sin of demoniality and indulges in sexual intercourse with Helen who is actually a devil in disguise. Portnoy tries to seduce a beautiful lieutenant in Israel but fails miserably to have an erection. Eventually, he meets his nemesis in Naomi, the sturdy Jewish girl who contemptuously rejects his offer of sexual intercourse with her.

Indulgence in forbidden carnal gratifications provides momentary ecstasy but eventually leads to despair. For Faustus and Portnoy, the most effective means to conquer despair is to indulge in more pleasures and thus they are caught in a vicious circle of guilt, despondency and sexual orgies.

Faustus mournfully says that he would have committed suicide a long time ago 'had not sweet pleasure conquer'd deep despair'. (Scene 6: 25) Portnoy's sexual feats are also followed by fits of self-pity and despair though he always attributes them either to his Jewishness or his suppression by his parents. Despite intentions, suggestions, and exhortations to the contrary both persevere in their pleasures thus obliterating all chances of repentance and reformation. Just before his apostrophe to Helen, the Old Man advises Faustus to return to the path of virtue:

Though thou hast now offended like a man,  
Do not persevere in it like a devil. (Scene 18:41-42)

Portnoy, despite being reprehended by Naomi, tries to rape her in desperation. Both are overpowered by evil tendencies and face horrifying and tragic consequences as a result of their orientation towards evil ignoring the call of virtue emanating from their conscience. In accordance with the social, moral and religious tenets of the Elizabethan era Faustus, the sinner, cannot be penalised with less than eternal damnation in hell for his evil deeds as the 'reward of sin is death'. (Scene 1: 40) In Portnoy's case, however, the punishment is meted out in a different form. In the twentieth-century materialistic society of America, death as a punishment for sexual transgression, is considered to be a remote possibility (in many western countries death sentence is banned literally). After his

figurative and fantastical conviction by the judge, his painful howling on the couch of a cold, commercial psychoanalyst is nothing short of death. A sensitive person working as Assistant Commissioner of Human Opportunity for the City of New York at the age of thirty three cannot be wailing before the psychiatrist for nothing. On Elizabethan stage the hero's death had to be nothing but spectacular while Portnoy faces a metaphorical death. Even when he narrates the woes of his childhood days, they are painful to him though they look funny to us. That his 'complaints' appear childish to others does not in the least abate the intensity of his torments. Though he is lamenting about his Jewishness throughout the narrative (most of the critics are of the opinion that the basic cause of Portnoy's anguish is his Jewishness), Portnoy is seen masturbating on page ten of the book and, as a matter of fact, he starts his life story from the very beginning.

Roth observes in *Reading Myself and Others* that in *Portnoy's Complaint*, the comedy is 'the means by which the character synthesized and articulated his sense of himself and his predicament'. (1975: 75) Here Roth has organically assimilated the elements of humour and pain in accordance with his idea of the unique ethnic obsession of the protagonist. He says: 'Sheer Playfulness and Deadly Seriousness are my closest friends. (ibidem: 111) In a characteristic manner, the pangs of anguish are made to co-exist with uproarious laughter in the narrative. Portnoy recognises the comic aspect of his condition even as he struggles to free himself from it. He painstakingly attributes his jokes to his Jewish background and upbringing though it may just be a coincident that he is gifted with a specific sense of humour. Before the doctor, he gives vent to his mental turmoil: 'This is my life, my only life, and I'm living it in the middle of a Jewish joke! I am the son in the Jewish joke—*only it ain't no joke!*'. (Roth 1969:36-37, Subsequent references to this book are indicated by page numbers only). The wide gap between his high ethical ideals and his present condition evokes an awkward kind of laughter which might be the result of his psychological strategy to offset the pain or to tolerate it with more ease. In *Dr. Faustus* the gravity of the tragic scenes is offset by comic relief provided by intermittent episodes involving Wagner, the Clown, the Devils and even Faustus himself. Faustus' comic achievements in the Pope's and Emperor's courts are but an attempt on his part to allay the gnawing feelings of pain and fear of his approaching end as his discourse with Mephostophilis and his own monologues amply show. The dread of catching syphilis

from Bubbles Girardi conjures before Portnoy the ghastly and funny sight of his penis lying on the floor. In *Dr. Faustus*, the horse dealer pulls Faustus's leg and it comes off clean from his body. In fact, our laughter over the sexual gimmicks of Portnoy is similar in nature to that over Faustus' fooleries with the Devils, Clowns, and other characters like Benholio, the Horse courser etcetera.

The critics who have been praising *Portnoy's Complaint* only for its humour to the exclusion of its vital and serious issues are oblivious to the real intentions of the writer. McDaniel is of the opinion that 'a central concern of the novel is the absurd state of helplessness, crippledness and victimization in which Portnoy finds himself'. (1974:143) In the manner of the great masters of guilt and persecution, Kafka and Dostoevsky, he presents his protagonist in the suffocating labyrinth of guilt, despair and fear of retribution searching desperately for any redeeming light. Instead of finding any solace or possibility of salvation he plunges into the mire of sexual excesses which further enhances his despondency. He tries to assert his manliness in masturbation which brings about in him a horrifying dread of revelation and retribution. He confesses: 'I am the Raskolnikov of jerking off'. (20) For him, family as a source of fear in his childhood is a microcosm of the larger society which terrifies him in his youth. For instance, he imagines morbidly 'the headlines in the newspaper about his sexual adventures with different girls: 'ASST HUMAN OPP'Y COMMISH FLOGS DUMMY, Also Lives in Sin, Reports Old School Chum. The headlines. Always the headlines revealing my filthy secrets to a shocked and disapproving world.' (175)

Towards the close of the books the predicament of both the protagonists is strikingly similar. The intense pain of guilt-ridden Portnoy is effectively portrayed in Roth's characteristic verbal dexterity. And Marlowe's 'mighty lines' evoke in glittering terms the image of the famous conjuror writhing in pain and horror as the moment of his damnation draws nearer. Aspiring to be a 'demi-god' (Scene 1: 61) in the beginning of his career, the scholar would fain be changed 'unto some brutish beast' to save his soul from eternal perdition. (Scene 19:176) Disgusted with his profligacy, Portnoy also wishes to be converted into an animal: 'May be the wisest solution for me is to live on all fours!' (270) In the last hour of his voluptuous life Faustus finds himself in a blind alley leading only to the fires of hell. Out of sheer hopelessness and horror of damnation of his soul, he wishes for annihilation:

O soul, be chang'd into little water drops,  
And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found. (Scene 19:185-86)

Tortured by his utter humiliation and condemnation at the hands of Naomi in Israel, Portnoy too longs for extinction: "*Yes, I could disappear, I think, change my name and never be heard from again.*" (244) Their licentiousness leads to deep despair and perdition. The implicit warning of Portnoy's father seems ironical when he offers sane advice to his son in the manner of the Good Angel in *Doctor Faustus*: "ONLY YOU MUST BE CAREFUL WITH YOUR LIFE! YOU MUST NOT PLUNGE YOURSELF INTO A LIVING HELL!" (188) On being asked by Faustus about hell, Mephostophilis replies:

where we are is hell,  
And where hell is, there must we ever be; (Scene 5: 123-24)

From the very beginning Faustus and Portnoy suffer spiritual misery in their self-created hell followed by intermittent ecstasies of carnal enjoyments.

In both these characters, the root cause of affliction and tragic feeling is the sense of wide gap between their potentialities and actual achievements. In the Epilogue, the Chorus comments on the fall of Faustus:

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight. (Epilogue)

Portnoy, too, is constantly haunted by the scorching sense of loss over the unrealised possibilities of his life. He is sore over the fact that he could not marry any nice Jewish girl, settle down and provide grandchildren to his parents. Even Naomi seems to echo the voice of his own conscience: 'And you are a highly intelligent man—that is what makes it even more disagreeable. The contribution you could make! Such stupid self-deprecation!' (265) Out of exasperation he blames his parents for his predicament: 'Who filled these parents of mine with such a fearful sense of life?' (35) Faustus goes even further and accuses his parents for his very birth: 'Curs'd be the parents that engender'd me!' (Scene 19: 180)

One of the manifestations of the central dilemma in the two books is the incongruity between the private life and the public role of the protagonists. In fact, these two aspects of their personality closely correspond to pleasure principle of the self and the reality principle of the surrounding human society respectively. Emphasising the



social aspect of Portnoy's predicament, McDaniel rightly points out that he is 'torn between conflicting loyalties to the public self and the private self'. (1974: 133) Notwithstanding his acute sufferings he never confides them to any person till the point when he cannot tolerate it any more and approaches the psychoanalyst for help and guidance. Faustus hides from his friends the fact of his bond with the Devil throughout his career and reveals the truth to them only in the end when there seems to be no escape from damnation which is just at hand. He literally asks Mephostophilis to make him invisible in the court of the Pope. When the protagonist is deviating from the norms of morality set up by the collective wisdom of human society, he is afraid of the outer guardians of that morality. But he fails to realise that his conscience is also a replica of those social forces and it will incessantly castigate him generating finally the piercing conflict in his psyche.

The last part of both books is characteristically similar in substance, though the medium is different. Whereas the tone in *Doctor Faustus* is typically tragic, Roth chooses a mock heroic style according to his idea of treating the theme of guilt in comic form: 'It was all so funny, he says in *Reading Myself and Others*, this morbid preoccupation with punishment and guilt. Hideous, but funny.' (Roth 1975: 22) This is noteworthy that *Portnoy's Complaint* appeared after such serious novels of Roth as *Letting Go* and *When She Was Good*. The police have arrived to arrest Portnoy for his sins against society. The underlying fears of Portnoy are garbed in mock epic warnings of the police: 'This is the police speaking. You're surrounded, Portnoy. You better come on out and pay your debt to society.' (273-74) In the last hour Faustus is expecting the arrival of Lucifer, Mephostophilis and Beelzebub for the purpose of arresting his soul. The novel ends with terrible howls of Portnoy like those of Faustus in his last moments. He is metaphorically dead, living in a state of limbo like the characters in Dante's hell albeit some critics see a glimpse of hope in the punch line of Dr. Spielvogel. Halio seems to be right when he says that 'Portnoy's manifold conflicts at the end of the novel remain unresolved'. (1992:82) The punch line of the doctor, however, may well be assumed to be rather a stylistic device used by the author to reinforce the semblance of a patient on the couch of his psychoanalyst. The ending is, in fact, in keeping with the specific narrative technique called by Roth 'the psychoanalytic monologue'. (1975: 41) The whole point of the central conflict in the novel is conveyed in Portnoy's rhetorical

question, 'Why, why can I not have some pleasure without the retribution following behind like a caboose!' (271) Faustus, in despair, confides to his scholar friends that for the vain pleasure of four-and-twenty years hath Faustus lost eternal joy and felicity. (Scene 19: 65-66)

Both are in desperate search for their radical innocence. Portnoy wants to turn over a new leaf: 'Why don't I marry her and stay? Why don't I go up to that mountain and start a new life?' (259) Faustus bemoans his attainment of education and knowledge:

O, would I had never seen Wittenberg, never read book!  
(Scene 19: 45-46).

As during their journey of sensuality, at its end also they think of repentance and reformation. Faustus longs his last hour to be stretched to

A year, a month, a week, a natural day,  
That Faustus may repent and save his soul. (Scene 19: 140-41)

Portnoy pays no heed to his father's warning that 'life is boundaries and restrictions'. (79) He transgresses these boundaries and, consequently, meets his tragic end. Faustus also attempts 'to practice more than heavenly power permits' and is damned eternally in hell. (Epilogue: 8) The Bad Angel rightly comments on his fate: 'He that loves pleasure must for pleasure fall.' (Scene 19: 130)

In *Portnoy's Complaint*, Roth explores the idea of goodness from different perspectives. The genesis of Portnoy's problems can be traced to his early childhood when his parents, especially his mother exert their authority to inculcate in him the good traits of character traditionally, and perhaps erroneously associated with the Jewish culture; in other words, to make him a 'nice Jewish boy'. (120) Portnoy feels guilty about their sacrifices for him: 'What *have* they done for me all their lives, but sacrifice?' (25). Faustus also comes from 'parents base of stock' and attains knowledge in various disciplines like Law, Medicine, and Divinity which could be beneficial to larger humanity. (Prologue: 11) In his opening monologue he brags about his knowledge put to philanthropic use:

Are not thy bills hung up as monuments,  
Whereby whole cities have escap'd the plague  
And thousand desperate maladies been cur'd? (Scene 1: 20-22).

Also, in announcing the hyperbolic goals of his feats of magic he

reveals his altruistic and nationalistic intentions:

I'll have them fill the public schools with silk  
 Wherewith the students shall be bravely clad;  
 I'll levy soldiers with the coin they bring  
 And chase the Prince of Parma from our land. (Scene 1: 89-92)

But due to his ambitions for personal pursuits, he selects magic of all the branches of learning. It is obvious that both these heroes cross the boundaries of social morality, which is the root cause of their tragedy. Portnoy's parents always remind him of these social and moral boundaries. In fact, the exact reason of his guilt and the resultant mental agony is his high ethical ideals. In the tragedy of Portnoy the tragic flaw is his conviction of the desirability of good and his pathetic failure to achieve it. The temptation of hedonistic pleasure is too much for him, and he invariably succumbs to the yearnings of the flesh. He is torn by the conflict between his ethical impulses and libidinous desires, to use the psychological jargon, between ego and super ego. Roth observes in *Reading Myself and Others*: 'In Portnoy the disapproving moralist who says "I am horrified" will not disappear when the libidinous slob shows up screaming "I want!"' (1975: 243) Portnoy himself pinpoints his malaise when he confesses that he is 'torn by desires that are repugnant to my conscience, and a conscience repugnant to my desires'. (132)

Portnoy's predicament transcends the narrow notion of ethnicity and assumes a universal dimension. His cry of pain at his helplessness is genuine and intense: 'How have I come to be such an enemy and flayer of myself? And so alone! *Oh*, so alone! Nothing but *self*! Locked up in *me*!...What has become of my purposes, those decent and worthwhile goals? Home? I have none. Family? No!' (248) Faustus is also found to be all alone at the end of his turbulent career at the expiry of the stipulated period of sensual enjoyments which now 'must be sauc'd with pain'. (Scene 19: 16) In his last hour he really experiences the pain and horror of his life:

Mountains and hills, come, come, and fall on me,  
 And hide me from the heavy wrath of God.  
 No, no:  
 Then will I headlong run into the earth.  
 Earth, gape! O, no, it will not harbour me. (Scene 9:152-56)

Through their desires and sufferings Portnoy and Faustus are actually

enacting the drama of aspirations and frustrations of the commonman. Eventually, Portnoy's idealistic and humanitarian instincts dominate and overpower his baser and carnal cravings, and that is precisely the reason that to regain wholesomeness and spiritual vigour he is on the couch of Dr. Spielvogel. His earnest and passionate entreaties testify his wish to be emancipated: 'Oh my secrets, my shame, my palpitations, my flushes, my sweats! The way I respond to the simple vicissitudes of human life! Doctor, I can't stand any more being frightened like this over nothing! Bless me with manhood! Make me brave! Make me strong! Make me *whole!*' (37)

He wishes for strength so that he can overcome his temptations for sensual lust and lead a virtuous life in accordance with his ethical ideals. There is a dualism in Portnoy's attitude towards his condition whether it is viewed from psychological, social or moral perspective (In *Doctor Faustus*, this dualism is expressed explicitly from the very beginning). But it is a Herculean task for him to wriggle out of his torturing conflict. His aim is to be good but he wants to enjoy his baseness. Roth's comment on Portnoy's conflict is pertinent:

Speaking broadly, it's the struggle to accommodate warring (or, at least, contending impulses and desires, to negotiate some kind of inner peace or balance of power, or perhaps just to maintain hostilities at a low destructive level, between the ethical and social yearnings and the implacable, singular lusts for the flesh and its pleasures. The measured self vs. the insatiable self. The accommodating self vs. the ravenous self. (70)

The irony of the situation, however, is that apparently both these tendencies are mutually exclusive as the gratifications of sexual lust in ways not approved by society invariably leads to the feelings of guilt and despair. After all, the origin of evil lies in not controlling the innate bestial instincts. And the desire and art to harness them by the conscience is imbibed from the whole past collective wisdom and experience. Hence, the genesis of feelings of guilt and self-hatred.

Both the books delineate the inherent dangers of man's ambitions for the pleasures outside the boundary set up by the powers beyond his control, and which have undoubtedly been understood and disapproved by the social conscience in the past and present. This is paradoxical, however, that despite this knowledge in all ages and societies some people do not refrain from cherishing such ambitions and suffer the painful conflict consequent thereupon.

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The first part of the history is a general account of the  
 country, its situation, extent, and the nature of the soil.  
 It is divided into three parts, the first of which  
 describes the country as it was in the time of the  
 Romans, the second as it was in the time of the  
 Saxons, and the third as it was in the time of the  
 Normans. The second part is a particular account  
 of the different parts of the country, and the third  
 is a general account of the manners and customs of  
 the people. The history is written in a plain and  
 simple style, and is full of interesting particulars.  
 The author has been very diligent in his researches,  
 and has collected a great number of curious  
 anecdotes and facts, which he has related in a  
 clear and concise manner. The history is a  
 valuable work, and is well worth perusal.

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