

OF DEATH

DCCXLI.

To die for the sake of Christ's word, is esteemed precious and glorious before God. We are mortal, and must die for the sake of our sins, but when we die for the sake of Christ and his Word, and freely confess them, we die an honourable death; we are thereby made altogether holy relics, and have sold our hides dear enough. But when we Christians pray for peace and long life, `tis not for our sake, to whom death is merely gain, but for the sake of the church, and of posterity. The fear of death is merely death itself; he who abolishes that fear from the heart, neither tastes nor feels death. A human creature lying asleep is very like one that is dead; whence the ancients said, sleep is the brother of death. In like manner, life and death are pictured to us in the day and night, and in the change and alteration of the seasons.

The dream I had lately, will be made true; it was that I was dead, and stood by my grave, covered with rags. Thus am I long since condemned to die, and yet I live.

DCCXLII.

"Whoso keepeth my saying shall never see death." Luther expounded this passage of St John thus: We must die and suffer death, but whoso holds on God's Word, shall not feel death, but depart as in a sleep, and concerning him it shall not be said: "I die, but I am forced to sleep." On the other hand, whoso finds not himself furnished with God's Word, must die in anguish; therefore, when thou comest to die, make no dispute at all, but from thy heart say: I believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God; I ask no more.

DCCXLIII.

One's thirty eighth year is an evil and dangerous year, bringing many heavy and great sicknesses; naturally, by reason perhaps, of the comets and conjunctions of Saturn and of Mars, but spiritually, by reason of the innumerable sins of the people.

DCCXLIV.

Pliny, the heathen writer, says, book xx. cap. 1: The best physic for a human creature is, soon to die; Julius Caesar condemned death, and was careless of danger; he said: `Tis better to die once than continually to be afraid of dying; this was well enough for a heathen, yet we ought not to tempt God, but to use the means which he gives, and then commit ourselves to his mercy.

It were a light and easy matter for a Christian to overcome death, if he knew it was not God's wrath; that quality makes death bitter to us. But a heathen dies securely; he neither sees nor feels

that it is God's wrath, but thinks it is merely the end of nature. The epicurean says: 'Tis but to endure one evil hour.

DCCXLV.

When I hear that a good and godly man is dead, I am affrighted, and fear that God hates the world, and is taking away the upright and good, to the end he may fall upon and punish the wicked. Though I die, it makes no great matter; for I am in the pope's curse and excommunication; I am his devil, therefore he hates and persecutes me. At Coburg, I went about, and sought me out a place for my grave; I thought to have beel laid in the chancel under the table, but now I am of another mind. I know I have not long to live, for my head is like a knife, from which the steel is wholly whetted away, and which is become mere iron; the iron will cut no more, even so it is with my head. Now, loving Lord God, I hope my time is not for hence; God help me, and give me a happy hour; I desire to live no longer.

DCCXLVI.

We read of St Vincent, that, about to die, and seeing death at his feet, he said: Death! what wilt thou? Thinkest thou to gain anything of a Christian? Knowest thou not that I am a Christian? Even so should we learn to condemn, scorn, and deride death. Likewise, it is written in the history of St Martin, that being near his death, he saw the devil standing at his bed's feet, and boldly said: Why standest thou there, thou horrible beast? thou hast nothing to do with me. These were right words of faith. Such and the like ought we to cull out of the legends of the saints, wholly omitting the fooleries that the papists have stuffed therein.

DCCXLVII.

Luther, at Wittenberg, seeing a very melancholy man, said to him: Ah! human creature, what dost thou? Hast thou nothing else in hand but to think of thy sins, on death, and damnation? Turn thine eyes quickly away, and look hither to this man Christ, of whom it is written; "He was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered, died, buried, descended into hell, the third day arose again from the dead, and ascended up into heaven," etc. Dost think all this was done to no end? Comfort thyself against death, and sin; be not afraid nor faint, for thou hast no cause; Christ suffered death for thee, and prevailed for thy comfort and defence, and for that cause he sits at the right hand of God, his heavenly Father, to deliver thee.

DCCXLVIII.

So many members as we have, so many deaths have we. Death peeps out at every limb. The devil, a causer and lord of death, is our adversary, and hunts after our life; he has sworn our death, and we have deserved it; but the devil will not gain much by strangling the godly; he will crack a hollow nut. Let us die, that so the devil may be at rest. I have deserved death twofold; first, in that I have sinned against God, for which I am heartily sorry; secondly, I have deserved death at the devil's hands, whose kingdom of lying and murdering, through God's assistance, grace, and mercy, I have destroyed; therefore he justly wishes my death.

DCCXLIX.

"There shall arise false prophets, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." This sentence was fulfilled, in the fathers; as in Jerome, Augustine, Gregory, Bernard, and others; they were seduced into errors, but remained not therein. St Bernard wrote many evil and ungodly things, especially concerning the Virgin Mary; but when he was near his death, he said: "I have lived wickedly. Thou, loving Lord Jesus Christ, hast a twofold right to the kingdom of heaven; first, it is thine inheritance, for thou art the only begotten Son of the Father; this affords me no comfort or hope of heaven. But, secondly, thou hast purchased the same with thy suffering and death; thou hast stilled the Father's wrath, hast unlocked heaven, and presented the same unto me as thy purchased good; of this have I joy and comfort." Therefore he died well and happy. Likewise when St Augustine was to die, he prayed the seven penitential Psalms. When these fathers were in health, they thought not on this doctrine; but when they were upon their death beds, they found in their hearts what they were to trust to; they felt it high time to abandon human fopperies, and to betake themselves only to Christ, and to rely upon his rich and precious merits.

DCCL.

Almighty, everlasting God, merciful heavenly Father - Father of our loving Lord Jesus Christ, I know assuredly, that everything which thou hast said, thou wilt and canst perform, for thou canst not lie; thy Word is upright and true. In the beginning, thou didst promise unto me thy loving and only begotten Son Jesus Christ; the same has come, and has delivered me from the devil, from death, hell, and sin. Out of his gracious will he has presented unto me the sacraments, which I have used in faith, and have depended on thy Word; wherefore I make no doubt at all, but that I am well secured, and settled in peace; therefore if this be my hour, and thy divine will, so am I willing to depart hence with joy.

DCCLI.

The school of faith is said to go about with death. Death is swallowed up in victory. If death, then sin. If death, then all diseases. If death, then all misery. If death, then all the power of the devil. If death, then all the fury of the world.

But these things do not appear, but rather the contrary; therefore there is need of faith; for an open manifestation of things follow faith in due time, when the things, now invisible, will be seen.

DCCLII.

When Adam lived, that is, when he sinned, death devoured life; when Christ died, that is, was justified, then life, which is Christ, swallowed up and devoured death; therefore God be praised, that Christ died, and has got the victory.

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