

## OF PRINCES AND POTENTATES.

### DCCXI.

Government is a sign of the divine grace, of the mercy of God, who has no pleasure in murdering, killing, and strangling. If God left all things to go which they would, as among the Turks and other nations, without good government, we should quickly dispatch one another out of this world.

### DCCXII.

Parents keep their children with greater diligence and care than rulers and governors keep their subjects. Fathers and mothers are masters naturally and willingly; it is a self-grown dominion; but rulers and magistrates have a compulsory mastery; they act by force, with a prepared dominion; when father and mother can rule no more, the public police must take the matter in hand. Rulers and magistrates must watch over the sixth commandment.

### DCCXIII.

The temporal magistrate is even like a fish net, set before the fish in a pond or a lake, but God is the plunger, who drives the fish into it. For when a thief, robber, adulterer, murderer, is ripe, he hunts him into the net, that is, causes him to be taken by the magistrate, and punished; for it is written: "God is judge upon earth." Therefore repent, or thou must be punished.

### DCCXIV.

Princes and rulers should maintain the laws and statutes, or they will be condemned. They should, above all, hold the Gospel in honour, and bear it ever in their hands, for it aids and preserves them, and ennobles the state and office of magistracy, so that they know where their vocation and calling is, and that with good and safe conscience they may execute the works of their office. At Rome, the executioner always craved pardon of the condemned malefactor, when he was to execute his office, as though he were doing wrong, or sinning in executing the criminal; whereas 'tis his proper office, which God has set.

St Paul says: "He beareth not the sword in vain;" he is God's minister, a revenger, to execute wrath upon him that does evil. When the magistrate punishes, God himself punishes.

### DCCXV.

It is impossible that where a prince or potentate is ungodly, his counsellors should not be ungodly. As is the master, such are also his servants. This follows necessarily and certainly. Solomon says: "A master that hath pleasure in lying, his servants are ungodly;" it never fails.

### **DCCXVI.**

The magistracy is a necessary state in the world, and to be held in honour; therefore we ought to pray for magistrates, who may easily be corrupted and spoiled. *Honoures mutant mores, numquam in meliores*: Honours alter a man's manners, and seldom for the better. The prince who governs without laws, according to his own brain, is a monster, worse than a wild beast; but he who governs according to the prescribed laws and rights, is like unto God, who is an erector and founder of laws and rights.

### **DCCXVII.**

Governors should be wise, of a courageous spirit, and should know how to rule alone without their counsellors.

### **DCCXVIII.**

Temporal government is preserved not only by laws and rights, but by divine authority; 'tis God maintains governments, otherwise the greatest sins in the world would remain unpunished. Our Lord God, in the law, shows what his will is, and how the evil should be punished. And forasmuch as the law punishes not a potentate, prince, or ruler, therefore our Lord God, one day, will call him to an account and punish him. In this life, governors and rulers catch but only gnats and little flies with their laws, but the wasps and great humble bees tear through, as through a cobweb; that is, the small offences and offenders are punished, but the abominable extortioners and oppressors who grind the faces of the poor, the fatherless and widows, go scotfree, and are held in high honour.

### **DCCXIX.**

To the business of government appertain, not common, illiterate people, or servants, but champions; understanding, wise, and courageous men, who are to be trusted, and who aim at the common good and prosperity, not seeking their own gain and profit, or following their own desires, pleasures, and delights; but how few governors and rulers think hereon? They make a trade and traffic of government; they cannot govern themselves: how, then, should they govern great territories and multitudes of people. Solomon says: "A man that can rule and curb his mind, is better than he that assaulteth and overcometh cities." etc..

I could well wish that Scipio, that much-honoured champion, were in heaven; he was able to govern and overcome himself, and to curb his mind, the highest and most laudable victory. Frederick, prince elector of Saxony, was another such prince; he could curb himself, though by nature of an angry mood. In the song of Solomon, it is said: "My vineyard which is mine, is before me;" that is, God has taken the government to himself, to the end no man may brag and

boast thereof. God will be the king and ruler; he will be minister and pastor; he will be master in the house; he alone will be governor; *pastor, episcopus, Caesar, rex, vir et uxor errant, sed non Deus.*

### **DCCXX.**

Potentates and princes, nowadays, when they take in hand an enterprise, do not pray before they begin, but set to work calculating: three time three makes nine, twice seven are fourteen - so and so will do so and so - in this manner will the business surely take effect - but our Lord God says unto them: For whom, then, do ye hold me? for a cypher? Do I sit here above in vain, and to no purpose? You shall know, that I will twist your accounts about finely, and make the mall false reckonings.

### **DCCXXI.**

Pilate was a more honest and just man than any papist prince of the empire. I could name many of these, who are in no degree comparable with Pilate; for he kept strictly to the Roman laws. He would not that the innocent should be executed and slain without hearing, and he availed himself of all just means whereby to release Christ; but when they threatened him with the emperor's disfavor, he was dazzled, and forsook the imperial laws, thinking, it is but the loss of one man, who is both poor and condemned; no man takes his part; what hurt can I receive by his death? Better it is that one man die, than that the whole nation be against me.

Dr. Mathesius and Pomer debated this question, why Pilate scourged Christ, and asked: What is truth? The former argued that Pilate did it out of compassion; but the other, that it was done out of tyranny and contempt. Whereupon Luther said: Pilate scourged Christ out of compassion, to the end he might still thereby, the insatiable wrath and raging of the Jews. And in that he said to Christ: What is truth: he meant: Why wilt thou dispute concerning truth in these wicked times? Truth is here of no value. Thou must think of some other plan; adopt some lawyer's quiddity, and then, perchance, thou mayest be released.

### **DCCXXII.**

Philip Melancthon and myself have justly deserved at God's hands, as much riches in this world as any one cardinal possesses; for we have done more in his business than a hundred cardinals. But God says unto us: Be contented that ye have me. When we have him, then have we also the purse; for although we had the purse and had not God, so had we nothing.

God said to Ezekiel: "Thou son of man, Nebuchadnezzar caused his army to serve a great service against Tyre, yet he had no wages; what shall I give him? I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar, that shall be his wages." So plays God with great kingdoms, taking them from one, and giving them to another.

### **DCCXXIII.**

At the imperial diet, at Augsburg, certain princes there spoke in praise of the riches and advantages of their respective principalities. The prince elector of Saxony said: He had, in his country, store of silver mines, which brought him great revenues. The prince elector palatine extolled his vineyards on the Rhine. When it became the turn of Eberhard, prince of Wirtemberg, he said: "I am, indeed, but a poor prince, and not to be compared with either of you; yet, nevertheless, I have also in my country a rich and precious jewel; namely, that if at any time I should ride astray in my country, and were left all alone in the fields, yet I could safely and securely sleep in the bosom of any one of my subjects, who all, for my service, are ready to venture body, goods, and blood." And, indeed, his people esteemed him as a *pater patrice*. When the other two princes heard this, they confessed that, in truth, his was the most rich and precious jewel.

#### **DCCXXIV.**

I invited to dinner, at my house at Wittenberg, prince Ernest of Luneburg, and prince William of Mecklenburg, who much complained of the immeasurable swilling and drinking kind of life at courts; and yet they will all be good Christians. I said: The potentates and princes ought to look into this. Then prince Ernest said: Ah! sir, we that are princes do even so ourselves, otherwise `twould have gone down long since; confessing that the intemperance of princes caused the intemperance of the people. And truly, when the abbot throws the dice, the whole convent will play. The example of governors greatly influences the subjects.

#### **DCXXV.**

Some one asked, whether Sir Thomas More was executed for the Gospel's sake or no? I answered: No, in no wise; he was a cruel tyrant; he was the king's chief counsellor; a very learned and wise man, doubtless, but he shed the blood of many innocent Christians that confessed the Gospel; he tormented them with strange instruments, like a hangman; first, he personally examined them under a green tree, and then cruelly tortured them in prison. At last, he opposed the edict of the king and kingdom. He was disobedient, and was punished.

#### **DCCXXVI.**

We have this advantage; no council has condemned us for heretics; the laws of the empire define a heretic to be one who obstinately maintains errors, which we have never done, but have shown and produced witnesses out of God's Word, and the Holy Scriptures; we willingly hear the opinions of others, but we will not endure the pope to be judge; we make him a party.

#### **DCCXXVII.**

The emperor Maximilian in his campaigns was very superstitious. In times of danger, he would make a vow to offer up as sacrifice what first met him. One of his captains had taken captive a very fair virgin of an ancient family in Germany, and of the protestant religion, whom he loved exceedingly; but he was forced by the emperor to kill her with his own hands. We Christians

have a great advantage in war against our enemies, that of faith in prayer, whereas the infidels know nothing of faith or prayer.

### **DCCXXVIII.**

Not long since king Ferdinand came into a monastery where I was, and going over it was attracted by these letters, written in large characters on a wall: "M.N.M.G.M.M.M.M" After reflecting for some time on their meaning, he turned to his secretary, and asked him what he thought they signified: the secretary replied: "No, truly," said the king. "Well, then," returned the secretary, I expound the letters thus: M.N. Mentitur Nausea (the archbishop of Vienna); M.G. Mentitur Gallus (the court preacher); M.M.M.M. Mentiuntur Majores (the Franciscans); Minores, (the Carmelites); Minotaurii (monks of the Alps); all are liars." The king hit his lips, and passed on. `Twas a very ingenious explanation of Mr. Secretary's.

### **DCCXXIX.**

Princes, nowadays, have no order in the administration of their household. Four imperial towns spend more in luxuries and junkettings in one day, than Solomon spent, throughout all his kingdom, in a month. They are poor creatures, these princes, well entitled to our compassion.

### **DCCXXX.**

God deals with great potentates, kings, and princes, even as children with playing cards. While they have good cards, they hold them in their hands; when they had bad, they get weary of them, and throw them under the chair; just so does God with great potentates; while they are governing well, he holds them for good; but so soon as they exceed, and govern ill, he throws them down from their seat, and there he lets them lie.

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