

ON SICKNESSES, AND OF THE CAUSES THEREOF

DCCXXXIV.

When young children cry lustily, they grow well and rapidly, for through crying, the members and veins are stretched out, which have no other exercise.

DCCXXXV.

A question was put to Luther: How these two sentences in Scripture might be reconciled together; first, concerning the sick of the palsy, where Christ says: "Son be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee." Where Christ intimates that sin was the cause of the palsy, and of every sickness. Second, touching him that was born blind, where John says: "That neither he nor his parents had sinned." Luther answered: In these words Christ testifies that the blind had not sinned, and sin is not the cause of blindness, for only active sins, which one commits personally, are the cause of sicknesses and plagues, not original sin; therefore the sins which the sick of the palsy himself committed were the cause of the palsy, whereas original sin was not the cause of the blindness of him that was born blind, or all people must be born blind, or be sick of the palsy.

DCCXXXVI.

Experience has proved the toad to be endowed with valuable qualities. If you run a stick through three toads, and, after having dried them in the sun, apply them to any pestilent tumor, they draw out all the poison, and the malady will disappear.

DCCXXXVII.

The cramp is the lightest sickness, and I believe the falling sickness a piece of the cramp, the one in the head, the other in the feet and legs; when the person feeling either moves quickly, or runs, it vanishes.

DCCXXXVIII.

Sleep is a most useful and most salutary operation of nature. Scarcely any minor annoyance angers me more than the being suddenly awakened out of a pleasant slumber. I understand that in Italy they torture poor people by depriving them of sleep. Its a torture that cannot long be endured.

DCCXXXIX.

The physicians in sickness consider only of what natural causes the malady proceeds, and this they cure, or not, with their physic. But they see not that often the devil casts a sickness upon one without any natural causes. A higher physic must be required to resist the devil's diseases; namely, faith and prayer, which physic may be fetched out of God's Word. The 31st Psalm is good thereunto, where David says: "Into Thine hand I commit my spirit." This passage I learned, in my sickness, to correct; in the first translation, I applied it only to the hour of death; but it should be said: My health, my happiness, my life, misfortune, sickness, death, etc., stand all in thy hands. Experience testifies this; for when we think, now we will be joyful and merry, easy and healthy, God soon sends what makes us quite the contrary.

When I was ill at Schmalcalden, the physicians made me take as much medicine as though I had been a great bull. Alack for him that depends upon the aid of physic. I do not deny that medicine is a gift of God, nor do I refuse to acknowledge science in the skill of many physicians; but, take the best of them, how far are they from perfection? A sound regimen produces excellent effects. When I feel indisposed, by observing a strict diet and going to bed early, I generally manage to get round again, that is, if I can keep my mind tolerably at rest. I have no objection to the doctors acting upon certain theories, but, at the same time, they must not expect us to be the slaves of their fancies. We find Avicenna and Galen, living in other times and in other countries, prescribing wholly different remedies for the same disorders. I won't pin my faith to any of them, ancient or modern. On the other hand, nothing can well be more deplorable than the proceeding of those fellows, ignorant as they are complaisant, who let their patients follow exactly their own fancies; 'tis these wretches who more especially people the graveyards. Able, cautious, and experienced physicians, are gifts of God. They are the ministers of nature, to whom human life is confided; but a moment's negligence may ruin every thing. No physician should take a single step, but in humility and the fear of God; they who are without the fear of God are mere homicides. I expect that exercise and change of air do more good than all their purgings and bleedings; but when we do employ medical remedies, we should be careful to do so under the advice of a judicious physician. See what happened to Peter Lupinus, who died from taking internally a mixture designed for external application. I remember hearing of a great lawsuit, arising out of a dose of appium being given instead of a dose of opium.

Its a curious thing that certain remedies, which, applied by princes and great lords, are efficacious and curative, are wholly powerless when administered by a physician. I have heard that the electors of Saxony, John and Frederick, have a water, which cures diseases of the eye, when they themselves apply it, whether the disorder arise from heat or from cold; but its quite useless when administered by a physician. So in spiritual matters, a preacher has more unction, and produces more effect upon the conscience than can a layman.

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