

THE NATURE OF THE WORLD

CXXXV.

He that is now a prince, wants to be a king or an emperor. A man in love with a girl is ever casting about how he may come to marry her, and in his eyes there is none fairer than she; when he has got her, he is soon weary of her, and thinks another more fair, whom easily he might have had. The poor man thinks, had I but twenty pounds I should be rich enough; but when he has got that, he would have more. The heart is inconsistent in all things, as the heathen says: *Virtutem praesentem odimus, sublatam ex oculis quaerimus invidi.*

CXXXVI.

One knife cuts better than another; so, likewise, one that has learned languages and arts can better and more distinctly teach than another. But in that many of them, as Erasmus and others, are well versed in languages and arts, and yet err with great hurt, 'tis as with the greater sort of weapons, which are made to kill: we must distinguish the thing from the abuse.

CXXXVII.

The wickedness of the enemies of the Word is not human, but altogether devilish. A human creature is wicked according to the manner and nature of mankind, and according as he is spoiled through original sin; but when he is possessed and driven of the devil, then begins the most bitter and cruel combat between him and the woman's seed.

CXXXVIII.

The world will neither hold God for God, nor the devil for the devil. And if a man were left to himself, to do after his own kind and nature, he would willingly throw our Lord God out at the window; for the world regards God nothing at all, as the Psalm says: The wicked man saith in his heart, there is no God.

CXXXIX.

The god of the world is riches, pleasure, and pride, wherewith it abuses all the creatures and gifts of God.

CXL.

We have the nature and manner of all wild beasts in eating. The wolves eat sheep; we also. The foxes eat hens, geese, etc.; we also. The hawks and kites eat fowl and birds; we also. Pikes eat other fish; we also. With oxen, horse, and kine, we also eat salads, grass, etc.

CXLL.

I much wonder how the heathen could write such fair and excellent things about death, seeing it is so grisly and fearful! But when I remember the nature of the world, then I wonder nothing at all; for they saw great evil and wickedness flourishing among them, and in their rulers, which sorely grieved them, and they had nothing else to threaten and terrify their rulers with, but death. Now, if the heathen so little regarded death, nay, so highly and honorable esteemed it, how much more so ought we Christians? For they, poor people, knew less than nothing of the life eternal, while we know and are instructed in it; yet, when we only speak of death, we are all affrighted.

The cause hereof is our sins; we live worse than the heathen, and therefore cannot justly complain, for the greater our sins, the more fearful is death. See those who have rejected God's Word: when they are at the point of death, and are put in mind of the day of judgment, how fearfully do they tremble and shake.

CXLII.

Here, today, have I been pestered with the knaverises and lies of a baker, brought before me for using false weights, though such matters concern the magistrate rather than the divine. Yet if no one were to check the thefts of these bakers, we should have a fine state of things.

CXLIII.

There is not a more dangerous evil than a flattering, dissembling counsellor. While he talks, his advice has hands, and feet, but when it should be put in practice, it stands like a mule, which will not be spurred forward.

CXLIV.

There are three sorts of people: the first, the common sort, who live secure without remorse of conscience, acknowledging not their corrupt manners and natures, insensible of God's wrath, against their sins, and careless thereof. The second, those who through the law are scared, feel God's anger, and strive and wrestle with despair. The third, those that acknowledge their sins and God's merited wrath, feel themselves conceived and born in sin, and therefore deserving of perdition, but, notwithstanding, attentively hearken to the gospel, and believe that God, out of grace, for the sake of Jesus Christ, forgives sins, and so are justified before God, and afterwards show the fruits of their faith by all manner of good works.

CXLC.

That matrimony is matrimony, that the hand is a hand, that goods are goods, people well understand; but to believe that matrimony is God's creation and ordinance, that the hands, that the goods, as food and raiment, and other creatures we use, are given and presented unto us of God, `tis God's special work and grace when men believe it.

CXLVI.

The heart of a human creature is like quicksilver, now here, now there; this day so, to-morrow otherwise. Therefore vanity is a poor miserable thing, as Ecclesiasticus says. A man desires and longs after things that are uncertain and of doubtful result, but condemns that which is certain, done, and accomplished. Therefore what God gives us we will not have; for which cause Christ would not govern on earth, but gave it over to the devil, saying, "Rule thou." God is of another nature, manner, and mind. I, he says, am God, and therefore change not; I hold fast and keep sure my promises and threatenings.

CXLVII.

He must be of a high and great spirit that undertakes to serve the people in body and soul, for he must suffer the utmost danger and unthankfulness. Therefore Christ said to Peter, Simon, etc., "Lovest thou me?" repeating it three times together. Then he said: "Feed my sheep:" as if he would say, "Wilt thou be an upright minister, and a shepherd? then love must only do it, thy love to me; for how else could ye endure unthankfulness, and spend wealth and health, meeting only with persecution and ingratitude?"

CXLVIII.

The highest wisdom of the world is to busy itself with temporal, earthly, and ephemeral things; and when these go ill, it says, Who would have thought it? But faith is a certain and sure expectation of that which a man hopes for, making no doubt of that which yet he sees not. A true Christian does not say: I had not thought it, but is most certain that the beloved cross is near at hand; and thus is not afraid when it goes ill with him, and he is tormented. But the world, and those who live secure in it, cannot bear misfortune; they go on continually dancing in pleasure and delight, like the rich glutton in the gospel. He could not spare the scraps to poor Lazarus; but Lazarus belongs to Christ, and will take his part with him.

CXLIX.

The world seems to me like a decayed house, David and the prophets being the spars, and Christ the main pillar in the midst, that supports all.

CL.

As all people feel they must die, each seeks immortality here on earth, that he may be had in everlasting remembrance. Some great princes and kings seek it by raising great columns of stone, and high pyramids, great churches, costly and glorious palaces, castles, etc. Soldiers hunt after praise and honor, by obtaining famous victories. The learned seek an everlasting name by writing books. With these, and such like things, people think to be immortal. But as to the true, everlasting, and incorruptible honor and eternity of God, no man thinks or looks after it. Ah! we are poor, silly, miserable people!

CLI.

To live openly among the people is best; Christ so lived and walked, openly and publicly, here on earth, amongst the people, and told his disciples to do the like. `Tis in cells and corners that the wicked wretches, the monks and nuns, lead shameful lives. But openly, and among people, a man must live decently and honestly.

CLII.

To comfort a sorrowful conscience is much better than to possess many kingdoms; yet the world regards it not; nay, condemns it, calling us rebels, disturbers of the peace, and blasphemers of God, turning and altering religion. They will be their own prophets, and prophesy to themselves; but this is to us a great grief of heart. The Jews said of Christ: If we suffer him to go on in this manner, the Romans will come and take from us land and people. After they had slain Christ, did the Romans come or not? Yes, they came, and slew a hundred thousand of them, and destroyed their city. Even so the condemners and enemies of the Word will disturb the peace, and turn Germany upside down. We bring evil upon ourselves, for we willfully oppose the truth.

CLIII.

If Moses had continued to work his miracles in Egypt but two or three years, the people would have become accustomed thereto, and heedless, as we who are accustomed to the sun and moon, hold them in no esteem.

CLIV.

Abraham was held in no honor among the Canaanites, for all the wells he had dug the neighbors filled up, or took away by force, and said to him: "Wilt thou not suffer it? then pack thee hence and be gone, for thou art with us a stranger and a new comer." In like manner Isaac was despised. The faith possessed by the beloved patriarchs, I am not able sufficiently to admire. How firmly and constantly did they believe that God was gracious unto them, though they suffered such exceeding trouble and adversity.

CLV.

If the great pains and labor I take sprang not from the love, and for the sake of him that died for me, the world could not give me money enough to write only one book, or to translate the Bible. I desire not to be rewarded and paid of the world for my books; the world is too poor to give me satisfaction; I have not asked the value of one penny of my master the Prince Elector of Saxony, since I have been here. The world is nothing but a reversed Decalogue, or the ten commandments backwards, a mask and picture of the devil, all condemners of God, all blasphemers, all disobedient; harlotry, pride, theft, murder, etc., are not almost ripe for the slaughter.

CLVI.

Dr. Luther's wife complaining to him of the indocility and untrustworthiness of servants, he said: A faithful and good servant is a real God-send, but, truly, 'tis a rare bird in the land. We find every one complaining of the idleness and profigacy of this class of people; we must govern them, Turkish fashion, so much work, so much victuals, as Pharaoh dealt with the Israelites in Egypt.

CLVII.

The philosophers, and learned among the heathen, had innumerable speculations as to God, the soul, and the life everlasting, all uncertain and doubtful, they being without God's Word; while to us God has given his most sweet and saving Word, pure and incorrupt; yet we condemn it. It is naught, says the buyer. When we have a thing, how good soever, we are soon weary of it, and regard it not. The world remains the world, which neither loves nor endures righteousness, but it is ruled by a certain few, even as a little boy of twelve years old, rules, governs, and keeps a hundred great and strong oxen upon a pasture.

CLVIII.

Whoso rules on his money prospers not. The richest monarchs have had ill fortune, have been destroyed and slain in the wars; while men with but small store of money have had great fortune and victory; as the emperor Maximilian overcame the Venetians, and continued warring ten years with them, though they were exceedingly rich and powerful. Therefore we ought not to trust in money or wealth, or depend thereon. I hear that the prince elector, George, begins to be covetous, which is a sign of his death very shortly. When I saw Dr. Gode begin to tell his puddings hanging in the chimney, I told him he would not live long, and so it fell out; and when I begin to trouble myself about brewing, malting, cooking, etc., then shall I soon die.

CLIX.

We should always be ready when God knocks, prepared to take our leave of this world like Christians. For even as the small beast kills the stag, leaping upon his head, and sitting between his horns, and eating out his brains, or catches him fast by the throat, and gnaws it asunder, even so the devil, when he possesses a human creature, is not soon or easily pulled from him, but leads him into despair, and hurts him both in soul and body; as St Peter says "He goeth about like a roaring lion."

CLX.

Before Noah's flood the world was highly learned, by reason men lived a long time, and so attained great experience and wisdom; now, ere we begin rightly to come to the true knowledge of a thing, we lie down and die. God will not have that we should attain a higher knowledge of things.

CLXI.

Mammon has two properties; it makes us secure, first, when it goes well with us, and then we live without fear of God at all; secondly, when it goes ill with us, then we tempt God, fly from him, and seek after another God.

CLXII.

I saw a dog, at Lintz in Austria, that was taught to go with a hand-basket to the butchers shambles for meat; when other dogs came about him, and sought to take the meat out of the basket, he set it down, and fought lustily with them; but when he saw they were too strong for him, he himself would snatch out the first piece of meat, lest he should lose all. Even so does now our emperor Charles; who, after having long protected spiritual benefices, seeing that every prince takes possession of monasteries, himself takes possession of bishoprics, as just now he has seized upon those of Utrecht and Liege.

CLXIII.

A covetous farmer, well known at Erfurt, carried his corn to sell there in the market, but selling it at too dear a rate, no man would buy of him, or give him his price. He being thereby moved to anger, said: "I will not sell it cheaper, but rather carry it home again, and give it to the mice." When he had come home with it, an infinity of mice and rats flocked into his house, and devoured up all his corn. And, next day, going out to see his grounds, which were newly sown, he found that all the seed was eaten up, while no hurt at all was done to the grounds of his neighbors. This certainly was a just punishment from God, a merited token of his wrath. Three rich farmers have lately, God be praised, hanged themselves: these wretches that rob the whole country, deserve such punishments; for the dearth at this time is a willful

dearth. God has given enough, but the devil has possessed such wicked cormorants to withhold it. They are thieves and murderers of their poor neighbors. Christ will say unto them at the last day: *"I was hungry, and ye have not fed me."* Do not think, thou that sellest thy corn so dear, that thou shalt escape punishment, for thou art an occasion of the deaths and famishing of the poor; the devil will fetch thee away. They that fear God and trust in him, pray for their daily bread, and against such robbers as thou, that either thou mayest be put to shame, or be reformed.

CLXIV.

A man that depends on the riches and honors of this world, forgetting God and the welfare of his soul, is like a little child that holds a fair apple in the hand, of agreeable exterior, promising goodness, but within `tis rotten and full of worms.

CLXV.

Where great wealth is, there are also all manner of sins; for through wealth comes pride, through pride dissension, through dissension, wars, poverty; through poverty, great distress and misery. Therefore, they that are rich, must yield a strict and great account; for to whom much is given, of him much will be required.

CLXVI.

Riches, understanding, beauty, are fair gifts of God, but we abuse them shamefully. Yet worldly wisdom and wit are evils, when the cause engaged in is evil, for no man will yield his own particular conceit; every one will be right. Much better is it that one be of a fair and comely complexion in the face, for the hard lesson, sickness, may come and take that away; but the self-conceited mind is not so soon brought to reason.

CLXVII.

Wealth is the smallest thing on earth, the least gift that God has bestowed on mankind. What is it in comparison with God's Word - what, in comparison with corporal gifts, as beauty, health, etc.? - nay, what is it to the gifts of the mind, as understanding, wisdom, etc.? Yet are men so eager after it, that no labor, pains, or risk is regarded in the acquisition of riches. Wealth has in it neither material, format, efficient, nor final cause, nor anything else that is good; therefore our Lord God commonly gives riches to those from whom he withholds spiritual good.

CLXVIII.

St John says: *"He that hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"* And Christ: *"He that desireth of thee, give to him" –*

that is, to him that needs and is in want; not to idle, lazy, wasteful fellows, who are commonly the greatest beggars, and who, though we give them much and often are nothing helped thereby. Yet when one is truly poor, to him I will give with all my heart, according to my ability." And no man should forget the Scripture: "He that hath two coats, let him part with one;" meaning all manner of apparel that one has need of, according to his state and calling, as well for credit as for necessary." As also, by "the daily bread," is understood all maintenance necessary for the body.

CLXIX.

Lendest thou aught? so gettest thou it not again. Even if it be restored, it is not so soon as it ought to be restored, nor so well and good, and thou lovest a friend thereby.

CLXX.

Before I translated the New Testament out of the Greek, all longed after it; when it was done, their longing lasted scarce four weeks. Then they desired the Books of Moses; when I had translated these, they had enough thereof in a short time. After that, they would have the Psalms; of these they were soon weary, and desired other books. So will it be with the Book of Ecclesiasticus, which they now long for, and about which I have taken great pains. All is acceptable until our giddy brains be satisfied; afterwards we let things lie, and seek after new.

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