

Of Death

MEN fear death, as children fear to go in the dark; and as that natural fear in children, is increased with tales, so is the other. Certainly, the contemplation of death, as the wages of sin, and passage to another world, is holy and religious; but the fear of it, as a tribute due unto nature, is weak. Yet in religious meditations, there is sometimes mixture of vanity, and of superstition. You shall read, in some of the friars' books of mortification, that a man should think with himself, what the pain is, if he have but his finger's end pressed, or tortured, and thereby imagine, what the pains of death are, when the whole body is corrupted, and dissolved; when many times death passeth, with less pain than the torture of a limb; for the most vital parts, are not the quickest of sense. And by him that spake only as a philosopher, and natural man, it was well said, *Pompa mortis magis terret, quam mors ipsa*. Groans, and convulsions, and a discolored face, and friends weeping, and blacks, and obsequies, and the like, show death terrible. It is worthy the observing, that there is no passion in the mind of man, so weak, but it mates, and masters, the fear of death; and therefore, death is no such terrible enemy, when a man hath so many attendants about him, that can win the combat of him. Revenge triumphs over death; love slights it; honor aspireth to it; grief flieth to it; fear preoccupateth it; nay, we read, after Otho the emperor had slain himself, pity (which is the tenderest of affections) provoked many to die, out of mere compassion to their sovereign, and as the truest sort of followers. Nay, Seneca adds niceness and satiety: *Cogita quamdiu eadem feceris; mori velle, non tantum fortis aut miser, sed etiam fastidiosus potest*. A man would die, though he were neither valiant, nor miserable, only upon a weariness to do the same thing so oft, over and over. It is no less worthy, to observe, how little alteration in good spirits, the approaches of death make; for they appear to be the same men, till the last instant. Augustus Caesar died in a compliment; *Livia, conjugii nostri memor, vive et vale*. Tiberius in dissimulation; as Tacitus saith of him, *Jam Tiberium vires et corpus, non dissimulatio, deserebant*. Vespasian in a jest, sitting upon the stool; *Ut puto deus fio*. Galba with a sentence; *Feri, si ex re sit populi Romani*; holding forth his neck. Septimius Severus in despatch; *Adeste si quid mihi restat agendum*. And the like. Certainly the Stoics bestowed too much cost upon death, and by their great preparations, made it appear more fearful. Better saith he, *qui finem vitae extremum inter munera ponat naturae*. It is as natural to die, as to be born; and to a little infant, perhaps, the one is as painful, as the other. He that dies in an earnest pursuit, is like one that is wounded in hot blood; who, for the time, scarce feels the hurt; and therefore a mind fixed, and bent upon somewhat that is good, doth avert the dolours of death. But, above all, believe it, the sweetest canticle is', *Nunc dimittis*; when a man hath obtained worthy ends, and expectations. Death hath this also; that it openeth the gate to good fame, and extinguisheth envy.—*Extinctus amabitur idem*.

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