

Chapter Twenty-Two

What else happened, and what is to be learned from this vision

Just as bees suck honey from flowers and spiders poison, good persons derive good from books and evil persons evil. Be a book ever so wicked, a pious person will be able to learn something good from it, and a book cannot be so godly that a perverse person will not be able to take something from it which to his mind is not suitable to confirm him in his perverseness. Do we not see this in heretics, who misuse Holy Scripture itself to defend their erring? But what is the case with books is also the case with other things, such as when one takes in bad histories or sees comedies performed, and the like, and what can be said of these things and learned from them can be much better said of, and learned from, this our conjured spectacle.

The companions for whose pleasure this vision had been presented as amusement and diversion derived the most amazement and the greatest joy from it in the following way: they said what great power was bestowed upon devils when they conducted their magicians and witches around in the air and now and again onto mountains and to isolated spots, arranged their dances and all sorts of jests and scrumptious banquets, and afterwards ruined the fruits of the earth, as they do here and there to those by whom they believe themselves to have been insulted by inflicting on them grave illness, by killing or enchanting all their children, their hired help, and their livestock, and by avenging themselves on them and, by all the magical means and aids of evil spirits, conjuring their property away from them and to themselves; but they gave the least thought to what terrible reward should be given them for this work either in this world or the next, by the most upright of all judges.

Many a person, on the other hand, were he to see this vision, would have likely discerned without effort, and to his spiritual edification, how noxious idleness, and with it all abominable vices and excesses, is born among people of the world as a result of the plente and sufficiency of God's rich blessing, which, in the sweet times of peace can be felt superabundantly and not only employed by men according to their needs but also profligately wasted, whereas, on the contrary, the godly pass by quite disinterestedly these delights and pleasures of the world which others so highly prize, and scarcely honor them with a glance, much less defile themselves with them, whereby the former excite and stimulate the righteous and inevitable wrath of God so that they are beset alike with war, famine and pestilence, in order to drive the prickling of flesh out of the lewd lascivious blood and the excited favorite jackass out of the sleepy soul, to spur the soul on to consider its salvation, and to punish at the same time both body and soul here in this world, and in the next eternally, should no improvement result, and to force it into the eternal kingdom as if on the crossroads of affliction.

Others might have been able to learn in detail from our spectacle how miserable and wretched the peasant is, of whom I know not whether he too is a little proud (as those who imagine themselves to be rich and intelligent are wont to be), or whether I should reckon him to the blind or the seeing, to humankind or the beasts. These ninnies I have oft heard lament and grumble whenever the superabundant blessings of the Almighty, which they call the sweat of their brow—I mean the fruits which they grow from the earth—are not covered with silver in accordance with their thinking and desire. Then they quite unashamedly crave those times in which their wine and corn was worth more, that the price of animals and lard rose, and so on; but they do not give the least thought to the fact that if an egg is to be worth three pence, the farmer in that district won't have a

single hen left to lay them. When they utter such Midas-wishes, they do not remember that an epidemic must strike their cattle before meat will become expensive, that if fruit is to go up in price, first a bad growing year must needs occur which puts little in their barns, and *in summa*, if all things are to increase in price in order to make their wares valuable, first a war must befall them which will nicely and neatly rob them of everything for which they hoped to get a high price. If Mars then comes and begins to clean out, or rather lay waste to, their chests, barns, stalls and farms, then they curse both the war and those who began it, and no longer give any thought to the fact that they wished it on themselves by word and have deserved it by deed. In such forgetfulness the peasant doesn't think of mending his ways either, but rather remains the same as he was before, till he either dies of want and hunger, or maintains his life, by the grace of God, wretchedly enough, till the sun of peace shines again, at which point he again begins to live as he had left off living before.

Garzoni employs harsh words when he says that it appears as if the peasant were cursed by God, but be that as it may, as our above-depicted vision shows, he must needs suffer first and most when a war breaks out, from which follows incontrovertibly that if war is in fact a punishment by God the peasantry deserves it most of all. But 'tis not proper for us to judge maliciously, for the peasant is not the only one punished by the war; rather, the outcomes of wars often demonstrate how Aesop's dog loses his piece of meat when he snaps at a shadow, especially since many a great lord who begins a war kills the goose that before was laying a golden egg for him every day.

Many a person might also have learned from our vision that many folk, if they do not receive as peasants and townsmen the reward for their sins and vices from Mars, afterwards they, as soldiers, are meted out their punishment under this god of war all the more cruelly, and particularly the misbegotten, ill-behaved breed which follows

not the advice of their parents but the mind of the calf-skin, among which fellows none are wont to be more wanton, vicious and godless than these very peasant lads who, from the time they start tending horses till they fill a ditch or otherwise waste away from disease and hunger behind a hedge or in an old building and are attached and eaten half alive by ravens and dogs, know less than nothing to say about their Christianity and what pertains to the salvation of their soul except abominable blasphemies and rather, from which one gathers, to be sure, that they are of the Christian sort but worse than heathens, since they do not even know and understand what they are cursing and swearing. And these are the same folk from whom the proverb arose: "If you wish to ruin a peasant, take a peasant along;" whereas among others, who likewise are also obliged to go to war, there is a little better discipline and humanity.

And so other people, according to their disposition, might have been able to comprehend and digest how to make profitable use of other precepts, both good and bad, from our vision and spectacle. For my part, what delighted me was when I saw how Mars plundered Ceres' horn and let his followers make a short feast from it. And 'twas high time too, for some of them had been living on their rations for a long time or had otherwise managed badly enough at John Rumblygut's table; and some in some places had become as worthless as goose-shit, so that dogs were well nigh loath to piss on them; moreover, the enemy country required of itself that it be purged of these rude fellows, especially since one cannot send them all to India, which one would have liked to do. I observed with heartfelt pleasure how they fleeced the peasant and then each other, so that they ruled in the entire country and everything was theirs that fell into their hands; and before I perceived how wretchedly most of these people finally perished, I felt such a desire to have myself inscribed in their guild that I was well nigh unable to wait till our apparitions

or vision were at an end. For the miserable groans and lamentations of the dying could not be heard for the screams of the living, who kept on strangling others; or the booming of the field pieces for the noise of the drums, trumpets and kettle-drums; moreover, the haze from so much exploded gunpowder obscured the hideous sight of the wounded, of men shot to pieces in many ways, together with the amount, the rivers, of spilled blood; and those who died and perished of hunger or in a thousand other ways were paid no heed at all by the survivors.

Then I saw, on the other hand, how great lords emptied the cash boxes, the taxes remained uncollected, and treasures vanished; how the merchants became impoverished and went bankrupt; how artisans sang the miserere and gnawed on famine cloth; and how the peasants were wheezing their last breath. There was no house in which there was no weeping, no family which did not suffer, no street which did not wail, no city which did not lament, and no village which misery did not oppress; there one saw no merriment anywhere save amongst the soldiers, and no one enjoying life a little save the warriors; from all the others who were not taking part in the war, there was naught but sighing, mourning, and weeping. All this increased my wish to become a soldier even more.

Our spectacle ended when we saw how villages here and there in the country were plundered and burned to the ground; how fortresses, castles and cities were blockaded, besieged, stormed, taken, robbed or set on fire; and how their inhabitants were oppressed or even chased off; for as we were about to see in how many different sorts of strange, sudden and horrible deaths soldiers perish, namely in water, through fire, in the earth, and in the air, look you, every thing disappeared, and we found ourselves alone again with one another in our room.

