

A GENERATION OF SERPENTS.

Their poison is like the poison of a serpent : like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear.—PSALM LVIII. 4.

THIS verse spends itself on a double comparison ; of persons and conditions.

The persons compared are men and serpents ; the conditions or qualities upon which the similitude stands are poison and deafness. The former whereof is indefinite : 'Their poison is as the poison of a serpent,' any serpent. The latter is restrictive : 'Their deafness is like the adder,' one kind of serpents.

I I will begin with the conditions ; for if the same qualities be found in men that are in serpents, there will follow fitly, too fitly, a comparison of their persons. The first quality here ascribed to the wicked by the Psalmist is—

POISON.—There is such a thing as poison ; but where to be found ? *Ubi cunque fuerit, in homine quis quæreret ?*—Wheresoever it is, in man who would look for it ! God made man's body of the dust ; he mingled no poison with it. He inspireth his soul from heaven ; he breathes no poison with it. He feeds him with bread ; he conveys no poison with it. *Unde venenum ?*—Whence is this poison ? Matt. xiii. 27, 'Didst not thou, O Lord, sow good seed in thy field ?' *Unde zizanix,*—'From whence then hath it tares ?' Whence ? *Hoc fecit inimicus,*—'The enemy hath done this.' We may perceive the devil in it. That great serpent, the red dragon, hath poured into wicked hearts this poison.

His own poison, *malitiam*, wickedness. *Cum infundit peccatum, infundit venenum,*—When he pours in sin, he pours in poison. Sin is poison. Original pravity is called corruption ; actual, poison. The violence and virulence of this venomous quality comes not at first. *Nemo fit repente pessimus,*—No man becomes worst at the first dash. We are born corrupt, we have made ourselves poisonous. There be three degrees, as it were so many ages, in sin :—*First*, Secret sin ; an ulcer lying in the bones, but skinned over with hypocrisy. *Secondly*, Open sin, bursting forth into manifest villainy. The former is corruption, the second eruption. *Thirdly*, Frequented and confirmed sin, and that is rank poison, envenoming soul and body.

When it is imposthumated to this ripeness and rankness, it impudently justifies wickedness for goodness ; *venenum pro nutrimento,*—poison for nutriment. It feeds on, swallows, digests sin, as if it were nourishment ; as

hemlock is good meat for goats, and spiders for monkeys. It despiseth all reproof, 'sitting in the scorner's chair,' Ps. i. 1; which, for the poison, is called by divines, *sedes pestilentia*,—the seat of pestilence. *Peccator cum in profundum venerit, contemnet*,—When a wicked man comes to the depth and worst of sin, he despiseth. Then the Hebrew will despise Moses, Exod. ii. 14, 'Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?' Then Ahab will quarrel with Micaiah, 1 Kings xxii. 18, because he doth not prophesy good unto him. Every child in Bethel will mock Elisha, 2 Kings ii. 23, and be bold to call him 'bald-pate.' Here is an original drop of venom swollen to a main ocean of poison: as one drop of some serpents' poison, lighting on the hand, gets into the veins, and so spreads itself over all the body, till it hath stifled the vital spirits.

In this poison there is a double pestilent effect—*inficit, interficit*.

It is to *themselves* death; to *others*, a contagious sickness.

1. *To themselves*.—It is an epidemical corruption, dispersing the venom over all parts of body and soul. It poisons the heart with falsehood, the head with lightness, the eyes with adultery, the tongue with blasphemy, the hands with oppression, the whole body with intemperance. It poisons beauty with wantonness, strength with violence, wit with wilfulness, learning with dissension, devotion with superstition, religion with treason. If they be greater gifts, it poisons them with pride, putting *cantharides* into the oil-pot. If meaner, it poisons them with hypocrisy, putting *coloquintida* into the porridge-pot. And where the *cantharides* of pride or *coloquintida* of hypocrisy are, there is *venenum et exitium*,—poison and death. This poison, faster than a gangrene, runs from joint to joint; as an enemy takes fort after fort till he hath won the whole country.

(1.) It is in the *thought*: Gen. vi. 5, the imaginations are full of poison. Every evil thought is not thus poisonous. There is *malum innatum*, and *inseminatum*, saith Bernard,—an evil bred in us, and an evil sown in us. Sins, like weeds, will grow fast enough without sowing; but *qui seminaverit*,—'He that sows to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption,' Gal. vi. 8. He that shall sow this venomous seed, poisons his soul. Jer. iv. 14, 'Cleanse thy heart from iniquity, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?' *Lodge!* He doth not speak of transient, but permanent sins: such as 'meditate mischief,' Mic. ii. 1; study to be naught; whose imaginations suck poison out of every object, yea, though it be good, as the spider sucks poison from the sweetest flower.

Vanishing thoughts, that pass through a good man without approbation, not without suppression, are properly *non mors, sed morbus animæ, sed deformitas*,—the disease, not death of the soul, but the deformity. They are *immissæ*, Satan's darts shot through us: *in corde, non de corde*, in the heart, not of the heart. Which the godly *sentiunt, non consentiunt*,—feel, but give no liking to. They are our crosses, rather than our sins. Such a thought is but *morbus mentis*, the disease of the mind; the other *morbus serpentis*, the wound or poison of the serpent. The allowed filthy cogitation is the poison. Thus are the thoughts poisoned.

(2.) From thence it runs to the *senses*, and sets open those windows to let in the poisonous air of wickedness. The five senses are the *Cinque Ports*, where all the great traffic of the devil is taken in. They are the pores where-by Satan conveys in the stinking breath of temptation.

The *ear* is set wide open to receive in the poison of scurrilous songs, obscene jests, seditious libels. It is not only an Athenian ear, *novitatis avida*, greedy of news; but a Cretian ear, *pravitatis avida*, greedy of evil. It

listens to hear of civil wars, uncivil treasons. It would fain have heard the great thunder-clap which the gunpowder should have made at the blowing up of the Parliament-house. Here is an ear for the devil. Such ears have the Jesuits: they would fain hear of the ruin of kingdoms. What would make others' ears tingle, 1 Sam. iii. 11, makes their ears tickle. *Aures illæ in se sentiant, quod audire de aliis cupiunt*,—Let such ears feel that woe themselves which they desire so earnestly to hear of others.

The *eyelid* is set open with the gags of lust and envy. A libidinous eye draws in much poison. There be 'eyes full of adultery,' saith the Apostle. They fetch in seeds of poison from the theatre; yea,—I tremble to speak it,—from the church of God. It beholds beauty, (God's rare workmanship on a piece of clay,) not to bless the Creator, but to draw a curse on the creature. Like a melancholy distracted man, that drowns himself in a clear crystal river. To such, chaste beauty is like the bellows; though its own breath be cold, it makes them burn.

There is another kind of eye that derives poison to the heart: the envious eye, that is vexed at the richer furniture, fatter estate, or higher honour of another; thinking his own not good, because his neighbour hath better. Any man's advancement is so capital an offence to his malice, that he could shoot out his own eyes, so they might be balls of wild-fire to consume him. But his malice sucks up the greatest part of his own venom, and therewith poisons himself, rather than others. A man that sees him would say he is poisoned; for his blood looks of a yellowish colour, like those that are bitten with vipers. His gall flows as thick in him as if he had a poisoned stomach. If he had, as Seneca wished to the envious, eyes in every place, his uncontainable poison would soon burst him. As he is, he would be another's enemy, but is his own mischief.

(3.) From the senses it runs to the *tongue*, and sets it a-swelling, a-swear-ing, that it infects the air, and poisons the very 'walls of the house,' Zech. v. 4. The excrements of the Jews, spat upon the face of our Saviour, were not so feculent. Their blasphemies strive to blast, not only the plants of the earth, but even the planets of heaven—the sun and stars; and, if it were possible, they would make new wounds in the side of Jesus Christ. If any swearer think I do his tongue wrong, let him read Rom. iii. 13, 'The poison of asps is under their lips.' If you would know what that pestilent poison is, the next verse expounds it: ver. 14, 'Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.' They carry worse poison *in ore*, in their mouth, than any serpent *in cauda*, in his tail. 'Their tongue is full of deadly poison,' James iii. 3. [1.] They have *poison*; [2.] not dead, but *deadly*; mortal poison; [3.] not a little, but saturity of it; *full* of deadly poison.

Poison hath thus got from their silent thoughts to their moving senses, and from thence to their loud and lewd-talking tongues. And this bewrays their venom, as the serpent's hissing betrays his malice. 'The heart of fools is in their mouth; but the mouth of the wise is in their heart,' Ecclesiast. xxi. 26. Cæsar said, he feared not Antony, whose heart was in his tongue, but Cassius, whose tongue was in his heart. A wicked man's tongue discovers him. A bell may have a crack, though invisible; take the clapper and strike, and you shall soon perceive it. The ungodly may conceal his wickedness by silence; but if the clapper strikes, if his tongue walks, you shall quickly perceive he is cracked. A poisoned tongue cannot forbear to sputter abroad his venom.

(4.) From the tongue this poison runs to the *hands*. Anaxagoras thought man the wisest of all creatures, because he hath hands: he might

have thought him the wickedest of all creatures, because he hath hands. No creature doth so much hurt with his teeth or talons as the wicked man with his poisoned hands. A man doth greatly express himself by his hands. Paul, by beckoning his hand, Acts xxi. 40, procured silence. Much is done *majestate manus*, as the poet,* by majesty of the hand. The wit seems to manifest itself in the hands: as the Italians say of the Dutchmen, that their wit dwells in their fingers' end. The power is seen in the hands. *An nescis longas regibus esse manus?* Yield the hand a principal instrument, yet *corruptio optimi pessima*. The evil hand doth not so much manifest man's wittiness as his wickedness. 'They devise iniquity, and practise it, because it is in the power of the hand,' Mic. ii. 1. The poison that was conceived in their thoughts dilates itself into their hands: *cogitant, agitant*.

God reproveth the Jews that they had *manus sanguinum*, bloody hands, Isa. i. 15. And the same prophet seems to liken it to a venomous infection, Isa. lix. 3, 'Your hands are defiled with blood.' And if the tongue can be possibly brought to smother the incherished poison, yet *manus manifestabit*, the hand will discover it: ver. 6, 'The act of violence is in their hands.' The Israelites soon suspected what a king Rehoboam would be, when he threatened *gravitatem manus*, to make his hand heavy; yea, his 'finger heavier than his father's loins.' Ahab quite disgraced himself for being thought religious, when he laid a violent hand on Naboth's vineyard. Jeroboam makes it plain that he bore no love to God's prophets, *cum extendit manum*, when he put forth his hand to strike one. Many landlords seem Christians, but they have Rehoboam's hand, a heavy hand on their tenants. Many usurers come to church, but they have Ahab's hand, to take the forfeit of the poor debtor's heritage. Many parishioners seem to love their prophets, but they have Jeroboam's hand, a hand that strikes them, if not in person, yet in estate, undoing them and their families. This is *venenata manus*, a poisoned hand.

(5.) Lastly, this poison having got possession of the thoughts, words, works, it must needs follow that it hath taken the *heart*. *Cor dolet*,—'The whole heart is sick,' Isa. i. 5. These corrupted symptoms prove that the heart is rotten. Job xx. 14, 16, 'The very meat in their bowels is turned to the gall of asps. They suck in the poison of asps.' If you ask why they feel it not, Paul says their sense is lost, 'they are past feeling,' Eph. vi. 19. Their whole self is changed into a disease. Their body is no longer *corpus*, but *morbus*. As Lucan, *Totum est pro vulnere corpus*,—Their whole body is as one wound or sickness. Neither can we say so properly of them that they are sick, as that they are dead. *Non cęgroti, sed defuncti*,—not diseased, but deceased.

And in all this observe the effect of this poison in themselves. For it doth not only annoy others, but mostly destroy themselves. And herein their poison is not only *tale* and *tantum*, such and so much as that of serpents; but *plus et perniciosius*, more and more dangerous. Seneca says, *Venenum quod serpentes in alienam perniciem proferunt, sine sua continent*,—The poison which serpents cast out to the damage of others, they retain without their own prejudice. But the poison of the wicked, *dum alios interficit, seipos interficit*, whilst it infects others, kills themselves. 'His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself,' Prov. v. 22.

Their own wickedness, like poison, hath in themselves these three direful effects:—It makes them, (1.) *swell*; (2.) *swill*; (3.) *burst*.

(1.) It makes them *swell* with pride, and blows up the heart as a bladder

* Pers. Satyr. iv.

with a quill. *Quis est David?*—‘Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse?’ 1 Sam. xxv. 10. Yea, *Quis est Dominus?*—‘Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him?’ Job xxi. 15. Thus the spider, a poisonous vermin, ‘climbs up to the roof of the king’s palace,’ Prov. xxx. 28. If he be in prosperity, nothing can hold him to a man. Be he but a ‘thistle,’ 2 Kings xiv. 9, he sends to the king of Lebanon for his daughter to be his son’s wife. Though he be but a dwarf in comparison, he would swell to a son of Anak. Sin hath puffed him up, and he forgets his Maker. Jer. v. 7, ‘The Lord hath fed him to the full,’ and he rebels against him. We have then good cause to pray with our church, ‘In the time of our wealth, good Lord, deliver us.’

(2.) It makes them *swill*; the poison of sin is such a burning heat within them, that they must still be drinking. And the devil, their physician, holds them to a diet-drink; they shall not have the water of the sanctuary, that would cool them, but the harsh, harish, and ill-brewed drink of corruption. They shall taste nothing but sin; more poison still. Which is so far from quenching their thirst that it inflames it.

‘Totis exquirat in agris,
Quas modo poscit aquas, sitiens in corde venenum.’*

So a man puts out the lamp by pouring in more oil, and extinguisheth the fire by laying on fuel. This may for a small time allay the heat, as cold drink to a burning fever. So Ahab’s fervour was a little delayed with a draught of wine out of Naboth’s vineyard. But Satan holds his guests to one kind of liquor, and that is rank poison, the mud of sin and wickedness. He allows them no other watering-place but this puddle-wharf.

(3.) It makes them *burst*. Here be the three sore effects of sin in the soul, as of poison in the body. First, it makes a man swell; then it makes him drink; lastly, it bursts him. Judas is hoven with covetousness, he drinks the money of treason, and then he bursts. *Rumpuntur viscera Judæ*, ‘he burst out,’ Acts i. 18. This is the catastrophe of a wicked life. ‘Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death,’ James i. 15.

2. *To others*.—You see how fatal the poison of the wicked is to themselves. It doth not only *rumpere se*, but *corrumpere alios*, burst themselves, but corrupt others. It deprives them of their own good, it depraves others’ good. The hurt it doth to others consists *in correptione et corruptione*, in outward harming, in inward defiling them.

Outwardly.—Their poison breaks forth in the injuries of all about them. They spare neither foreigner nor neighbour. There be little snakes in Babylon, that bite only foreigners, and not inhabitants. Pliny writes of scorpions in the hill Caria, that when they sting only wound the natural-born people of the country; but *extraneos leviter mordere*, but bite strangers gently or not at all. These, like fools, not only strike them that are nearest, but betwixt their poison *in ruinam omnium*, to the overthrow of all. Such a one cannot sleep except he have done mischief; nay, he dies, if others do not die by him. *Et si non aliqua nocuisset, mortuus esset*. A man’s land cannot escape the poison of the depopulator, nor his estate the poison of the usurer, nor his children the ravisher, nor his peace the contender, nor his name the slanderer. If their poison cannot prevail *ad interitum hominis*, they will spend it *ad interitum nominis*. If they cannot murder, they will murmur. They are the devil’s ban-dogs, as one calls parsons the Pope’s Cerberus. If

* Lucan.

they cannot come to bite, they will bark. If their sting cannot reach, their mouth shall sputter out their venom.

Yea, some of them do not only this mischief whilst they live, but *etiam mortui*, even dead. As Herod, that caused the noble sons of the Jews to be slain *post mortem suam*, after his death. They write of some serpents, that their poison can do no hurt except it be shot from the live bodies of them; but these leave behind them a still evil working poison. As we say of a charitable man, that he doeth good after he is dead; his alms maintain many poor souls on earth when his soul is in heaven,—*quamvis ipse sepultus, alit*: so these wicked sin perpetually even dead. The encloser of commons sinneth after he is dead, even so long as the poor are deprived of that benefit. He that hath robbed the church of a tenth, and so leaves it to his heir, sins after he is dead, even so long as God is made to lose his right. *Moriante serpente, moritur venenum*; but here, *Moriante homine, vivit peccatum*. As one said of a lawyer, that, resolving not to be forgotten, he made his will so full of intricate quirks, that his executors, if for nothing else, yet for very vexation of law, might have cause to remember him. Jeroboam's sin of idolatry outlived him. The unjust decrees of a partial judge may outlive him, even so long as the adjudged inheritance remains with the wrongful possessor. The decrees of divers Popes, as in abusing the sacrament, forbidding marriage, &c., are their still living sins, though themselves be dead and rotten.

Inwardly.—Their poison doth most hurt by infection; their company is as dangerous as the plague; a man cannot come near them but he shall be contaminated. Like the weed called gosses, they make the ground barren wheresoever they grow. Their poison is got, (1.) *per contactum*, (2.) *contractum*, (3.) *compactum*, (4.) *conspectum*.

(1.) By *touching*. He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled. It is dangerous to sport and dally with them: *Dum ludunt, ludunt*. Prov. xxvi. 18, 'He casteth firebrands, and arrows, and death; and saith, Am I not in sport?' As Solomon saith, 'Their very mercies are cruel;' so their very jest is killing earnest.

(2.) By *companying* with them. They hurt by sporting, but worse by sorting. Prov. i. 14, 'Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse.' They that will quarter themselves with the wicked must drink of their poison. If you ask how haps it that their infection is not smelt, Bernard answers: *Ubi omnes sordent, unus minime sentitur*.—One is not smelt, where all stink.

(3.) By *confederacy*; which is yet a higher degree of receiving their poison. The first was a light dallying with their humours, the next a society with them in some drunken riots and disorders; but this third is a conspiracy with them in their pernicious and deadly plots. Thus a Seminary comes from Rome, and whistles together a number of traitors: he brought poison with him in a bull's horn, and they all must drink it; as they report, that once one scabbed sheep from Spain rotted all the sheep of England.

In this manner is this poison of adultery spread from a harlot. In selling her flesh, she sells *pretium peccati*, and takes *premium peccati*. Either *pretium pacti* or *premium facti*, she hath her price, and gives her male his reward. This is a damnable combination: he that goeth after her poisons himself *per compactum*, he bargains for his own destruction.

(4.) By *sight*. As those that look on ill-affected eyes attract some of the anguish by a kind of reflection, so the very beholding of their wicked example derives corruption to the heart by resaultance. Many sins had been

unknown if they had not been learned by precedent. Great men graceless are the devil's special factors; they have their new tricks of vanity to teach others. And they often broach these new fashions of damnation, not so much out of affection to the thing itself, as to be talked of. As Alcibiades cut off his dog's tail, that all the people might talk of his curtail. Oh the unspeakable deal of poison that is thus conveyed into men's hearts, and the innumerable souls that go to hell by pattern! Thus they hurt others.

But I have been too copious in discovery of their poison. I should come to their deafness: but I am loath to speak of deafness till the end of the sermon.

II. Their poison being thus compared with the poison of serpents, let us now compare their *persons*.

They are here said to be *sicut serpentes*, like serpents. But, Matt. xxiii. 33, Christ calls the Pharisees very serpents; and John Baptist, Matt. iii. 7, a 'generation of vipers.' And God tells Ezekiel that he did 'dwell among scorpions,' chap. ii. 6. In these places the *sicut* is left out, and the wicked are called very serpents. Not that the frame and form of their bodily constitution was serpentine.

It was a foolish opinion among the heathen that there were *Ophiogenes*, or *Anquigenæ*. They write of Ophion, the companion of Cadmus, and builder of Thebes, that he was made by Pallas of a dragon's tooth. So Ephesus was once called Colubraxia, and the people thereof Ophiussæ.

I have read of one Exagon, an ambassador to Rome, being at the consul's command cast into a tun of snakes; that they licked him with their tongues, and did him no harm. But to conclude hereon that these were of serpents' brood, we might as well say Daniel was born of lions because they did not hurt him.

They are mystical serpents I mean. And if wicked men think scorn to be called serpents, let them abhor the qualities of serpents. Sin is of that power that it can work metamorphoses, and transform men into beasts and serpents.* Let us now see what serpents we have among us.

I. We have the *salamander*, the troublesome and litigious neighbour, who ever loves and lives in the fire of contention. Whatsoever they talk that the salamander is nourished by the fire, yet Galen and Dioscorides affirm that if it tarry long in it it will be burned, when the humidity is wasted. Whatsoever a man gets by the fire of vexation, at last his humour will be wasted, his wealth spent, and himself consumed in his own flames. Let no man think to get by his troublesomeness, as if he could be fed with fire. They talk of a net at Rome, wherein Christ's napkin is preserved, that it is washed in nothing but fire. And Paulus Venetus speaks of a kind of carth in Tartaria, which being spun into a thread, and woven into cloth, is only purged from all spots by washing it in the fire. But if ever any man grow happy by his contentiousness, I will believe that fire is nourishment.

Some make the emblem of strife the snake. Alecto sent a snake to move contention in the family of Amata.

'Unum de crinibus anguem
Conjicit, inque sinum, præcordia ad intima, subdit.' †

Let the unquiet man, that is still vexing his neighbours with suits and quarrels, here take his choice, whether he will be a snake or a salamander.

2. We have the *dart*, and that is the angry man. This is the serpent that is thought to leap on Paul's hand, Acts xxviii. : *Jaculum vocat Africa*. It

* I refer you for this doctrine to my sermon upon Matt. x. 16. † Æneid, vii.

gathers itself into a heap on the top of a tree, and so flies at a man, *tanquam sagitta*, as a dart. Such a serpent is the hasty, furious man; he flies upon another with a sudden blow. Some conjecture, I know not how probably, that these were the fiery serpents in the desert.

3. There is the *dipsas*, the drunkard. This serpent lives altogether in moorish places: the serpent in the fens, the man at the ale-house. Ovid writes of an old drunken woman, *Est quedam nomine Dipsas anus: ex re nomen habet*. Her name did agree with her nature. It is ever dry, saith Lucan: *Mediis sibiabant Dipsades undis*. If this serpent wound a man, it turns all his blood into poison: so the drunkard turns his blood to water, his bread to drink, his reason to poison, his very soul to froth.

4. There is the *crocodile*, the hypocrite. He will sob, and sigh, and weep, to get a man into his clutches. If his hypocrisy can get him into a good house, he will devour the patron that breeds him, the maintainer that feeds him: he undoes the family where he once sets a foot into their doors, or puts a finger into their purses. Pliny saith, the crocodile is so delighted with the sunshine, that it lies on the earth immoveable, as if it were stark dead. Let the hypocrite be franked up with prosperity, and he sleeps as securely as if earth had lost all winds and heaven the thunder. His pampered body grows so fat that his soul lies soft in it, at great ease, and is loath to rise.

5. The *cockatrice*, that is said to kill with the eyes. *Illius auditos expectant nulla susurros.** The reason why it kills by sight is thus given, because the beams of a cockatrice's eye corrupt the visible spirits of a man; which corrupted, corrupt the other spirits coming from the brain, and life of the heart. Our common phrase hath found out creatures to match this kind of serpents—whores, usually called cockatrices. I would to God they were believed as dangerous as they are, and are named.

The cockatrice is a very hot creature, and therefore made with spiraments and breathing places all over the body, lest the compage and juncture of the whole composition should be dissolved. The intemperate heat of harlots is worse, and in some kind a very reflection from the fire of hell. There is an old tale, that England was once so pestered with cockatrices, that a certain man found out one only trick to destroy them; which was by walking up and down in glass before them, whereby their own shapes were so reflected upon their own faces that they died. But it is idle, for it is more likely that the man should die by the corruption of the air from the cockatrice, than the cockatrice by the resulance of its own similitude from the glass; as the harlot will sooner pervert a man than he shall convert the harlot. Indeed they say, if they first see us, they kill us; if we first see them, they die. So if we first see the damnation of a courtesan, we save ourselves; if they first see and wound us, we die of it.

6. There is the *caterpillar*: you all know this to be the covetous. I confess that other serpents are also fit emblems of the covetous; as the *toad*, that eats sparingly of the very earth, for fear it should be all wasted, and no food left for her. The German painters, to signify covetousness, do picture an old woman sitting upon a toad. Or the *earth-worm*: these worms eat up the fat of the earth, toads eat up those worms, and dragons eat up those toads. So lightly petty usurers eat up the fat of the country, great oppressors devour those little extortioners, and at last the great red dragon swallows those oppressors.

But here I especially liken them to caterpillars. Pliny saith, that little worms, bred in the green leaves of plants, prove in three days caterpillars,

* Nicand.

and eat up those plants. The country breeds these covetous wretches, and they devour her. He writes also that caterpillars are bred by a dew, incrasated and thicked by the heat of the sun; it is the warmth of prosperity that breeds and feeds our usurers. Others say, that they come of butterflies' eggs, which the heat of the sun hatcheth, working so fit a passive matter to the form of a caterpillar; so commonly your usurer hatcheth his riches out of the butterflies' eggs laid abroad by prodigal young gallants. The Scripture calls them great devourers, Joel i. 4. *Erucam vix pascit hortus unam*,*—A whole country will not content one avarous caterpillar. At last the caterpillars perish of themselves, as ours do wilfully, through famine, and are transformed into a bare and empty bag or case. If they perish in summer, out of their rind, being broken, comes forth a butterfly. Just as we see often from the ruins of a dead usurer, that was a caterpillar, springs a prodigal heir, that is a painted butterfly.

7. We have also the *asp*, that is the traitorous Seminary. Lucan writes that the original of asps was Africa, and that merchants translated them into Europe.

'Sed quis erit nobis lucri pudor! Inde petuntur
Huc Lybicæ mortes, et fecimus aspida merces;'

But what is our gain? saith he. We have made the asps a merchandise. So these our asps are bred in Italy, and shipped over into England as a precious merchandise. They speak themselves so gentle, that 'a sucking child may play at the holes of these asps,' Isa. xi. 8; but we have found their burrows the holes of treason, and their vaults the vaults of gunpowder. There is feud betwixt the ichneumon and the asp: they oft fight. If the asp bite first, the ichneumon dies; if the ichneumon first, the asp dies. Let us strike them with punishment, lest they strike us with death. These asps kill many souls in our land.

'Aspidis et morsu læsum dormire fatentur
In mortem, antidotum nec valuisse ferunt;'

If the bewitched people once receive their poison, they sleep to death; and no hope prevails, for they will not come to the church to be cured.

8. There is also the *lizard*, the emblem of the slothful; as is also the *slow-worm*, or the serpentine *tortoise*. They write of the lizard, that having laid eggs, she forgets the very place where she laid them. She will lie still till you cut her in pieces; and then the fore-part runs away upon two legs, and the hinder part on other two, living apart till they meet again, and then are naturally conjoined. If the lazy will follow the qualities, let them take the name of lizards.

9. There is also the *sea-serpent*, and that is the pirate; a thief cross to all kind of thieves: for other thieves first fall to robbery, and then are cast into prison; but he first casts himself into a prison, and then falls to robbery. In a little vessel, a very jail, with a large grave round about it, he does all mischief. At last, when he grows great, he ruins himself. They write of a sea-dragon that grows to a huge vastness; but then the winds take him up into the air, and by a violent agitation shake his body to pieces. A notable part of God's providence, to tame that himself which his creatures cannot.

10. There is the *stellion*, and that is the extortioner. Extortion and cozenage is proverbially called *crimen stellionatus*, the sin of *stellature*. When the *stellion* hath cast his skin, he greedily devours it again; which, saith Theophrastus, he doth in envy, because he understands that it is a

* Martial.

noble remedy against the falling sickness. So in malice it lines the guts with that covered the back; and eats that in summer wherewith it was clothed in winter. It destroys the honey of bees. *Stellio saepe fayos ignotus ademit.** So the extortioner spoils the hives, and devours all the honey of poor men's gathering. It is a beast full of spots.

*Aptumque colori,
Nomen habet, variis stellatus corpore guttis.†

The spots that stick upon an extortioner are more innumerable. It were well if such extortioners were served, as Budæus relates a history of two tribunes, *qui per stellaturas militibus multum abstulissent*,—whom the emperor commanded to be stoned to death.

11. The last is the great serpent of all, *draco*, the devil; who is called the 'great red dragon,' Rev. xii. 3. In idolatrous times and places dragons have been worshipped. The common distinction is, *anguis aquarum, serpentes terrarum, dracones templorum*,—snakes of the water, serpents of the earth, dragons of the temple. There are too many wicked worldlings that still worship this god of the world, the red dragon. The dragons haunt principally trees of frankincense. Satan loves to have men sacrifice to him; he tempted the Son of God to fall down and worship him. Nothing but the smoke of styrax can drive away dragons; not holy water, not crossings, but only faith in the Lord Jesus can put the devil to flight. *Serpens serpentem devorando fit draco*,—The devil at first was but a serpent; now, by devouring many millions of these serpents, the wicked, he is become a dragon.

I should here shew you two things:—

1. The remedy to draw out this poison, and to cure the soul; which is only *sanguis medici*, the blood of our physician. John iii. 14, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,' so was Christ lifted up as a serpent, that what eye of faith soever looks on him, he may be healed of the sting of those fiery serpents, and have the damnable poison of sin drawn out.

2. That our next course is repentance for our sins; that as the oil of scorpions is the best remedy for them that are stung with scorpions, so repentance for sin is the best remedy within us to expel the poison of sin. Think of the wise man's counsel, Ecclesiast. xxi. 2, 'Fly from sin as from the face of a serpent: if thou comest too near it, it will bite thee.'

Their deafness remains to be spoken, and must remain unspoken. How should they be cured that are deaf to the counsel of their physician? Though there be poison in us, even the poison of dragons, yet God bless us from the deafness of the adder! Let us hear our remedy, and embrace it; pray to God for it, and receive it; and 'the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all our sins,' 1 John i. 7. To this Saviour let all that are saved give praise and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

* Virg.

† Ovid.