

**THE GOD-DISHONOURING LIFE,
AND GOD-GLORIFYING**

Death of Anna Catherine Berks.

OUR attention has been particularly called to a little work entitled, “*Jesus Triumphant in the Conversion and Death of Anna Catherina Merks*, executed at Rotterdam, in Holland.” The work is published in London, by Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., and is one of the most powerful witnesses of the free, unmerited, super-abounding grace of God, that has fallen under our notice for a length of time. We are creditably informed that a very signal and effectual blessing has attended the publication of this work; and we are fully persuaded that testimonies of this description will be owned and honoured of God the Holy Ghost to many precious souls. We not only heartily recommend the work, but, knowing as we do, that many of our readers cannot afford to purchase it, we shall make such extracts from it, as will, in some measure, justify us in speaking so highly of it.

Before we enter upon the narrative, (lest it should be forgotten) we make one prefatory remark; and it is this: Ministers of the gospel especially should read this work. More faithful dealing, more wisdom manifested, we never read, than was exhibited by the minister whose office it was to converse with this poor prisoner. Certainly he proved himself to be a workman that needeth not to be ashamed; and most wonderful was the honour which God put upon his labours. He was indeed an *instrument* in the hands of God the Holy Ghost of plucking a brand from the burning, and of bringing a poor wretched sinner into the fulness of Christ’s pardoning love, and sin-atonement blood. Oh! ye heralds of salvation! read ye these tidings of love and mercy! and may the Almighty Spirit fire your souls with increased zeal; nerve you with fresh power; fill you with pure heavenly love, in the great work to

which ye are called, being assured your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

Anna Catherina Merks was executed in the city of Rotterdam, in Holland, when little more than twenty years of age. She was left an orphan, and cast upon the world at a very early age. After living some few years in service, she was seduced by a soldier, by whom she had children; and being forsaken of him, and left destitute, she commenced thieving, and went on from that sin to others, until she became a most vile and worthless character, and at length, we find her under sentence of death. Our first extract is descriptive of the first visit which the minister above referred to paid this wretched woman in the prison.

“Tuesday, the 5th of June, about five o’clock in the afternoon, a minister was ordered to visit a young woman in the prison, and placed there in the Mourning chamber, which woman he found unconcerned asleep. The Mourning Chamber is a place where no persons are confined but those whose crimes are found capital, to whom the first intelligence that they are to die, is given by a minister purposely sent to them by the court; the sentence of death is pronounced long after, and but a few minutes before the execution.

“He desired she should be awakened, saying, that his intention in coming there was to speak about matters of the utmost importance. Consequently she was awakened, when the minister desired to know her name, which she said was Anna Catherina Merks, her religion she said was the Roman Catholic. Upon being asked the question, Why he found her in so sad a place? She answered, she had committed such deeds as had brought her there.

“Upon this the minister told her that he was not at all

surprised at her answer, because it is always a bad omen when a minister is desired to visit a person in such a place; such persons indeed, said he, thus sent unto, can have no long expectation of life. Oh! (cried she aloud) must I then part with my young life? The minister gave her a few minutes time to weep, replying only, that she must part with that young life, because she had spent it so wickedly, inquiring at the same time in what manner she had got her living? Upon which she replied, that she had been a servant. Inquiring if she always had been a servant, she answered, if it had been so, she should not be now in such a place.

A long conversation here ensued concerning her previous manner of life. After this, the minister began to interrogate her, respecting her views of her present awful condition, preaching to her most solemnly the holy law of God, and the consequences following upon its violation. Her answers only proved her gross darkness and ignorance. The writer then says:—

“The minister beholding her great ignorance and being moved with compassion thereat, sought to know if she knew anything of the holy Scriptures. She declared she knew nothing of them, and her reason was, she could not read.

“The minister then desired the goalkeeper¹ to let him have a Bible, out of which he read to her deliberately the whole law of God, questioning her, and commenting on each section of the same. The whole law thus being read to her, and she having declared herself to be guilty on every commandment thereof, the minister told her, that she being found guilty on the whole law of God, she must know that the breach of one

¹ Custodian, warden.

single commandment deserves temporal and eternal death; how much the more in her case, she being found guilty on all. Instructing her out of the third chapter of the Galatians, and in the tenth verse, that she lay under the curse, which curse consisted, **1st**—In a separation from God, and remaining so without hope of being saved, and without communion with, or part in God, but must be banished from his face everlastingly miserable. **2nd**—In an alienation from the promises and covenant, that she could not now, or hereafter, expect to have the least part in any of the promises promised in God's word, and without a covenant with God, through all the ages of eternity, should be and remain, the property of him with whom she was in covenant. **3rd**—As you are dead in trespasses and sins, consequently you never can enjoy eternal life, for nothing unclean can enter heaven. **4th**—You are a child of God's wrath, which wrath of the most high and dreadful majesty, everlastingly will be poured out upon you, you being separated from the face of the Almighty. Do you think, said he, as you are dead, all will be dead? No, said she, I believe not; but, proceeded he, do you know the difference betwixt men and beasts? And she answered, no. Which question he cleared up to her; and she believed, she said, that after death there remains a soul of us, which he showed her further out of Matthew x. 28. Pray, said he, tell me if you can, how many ways there be after death? She answered, eternal glory, but spoke nothing (which was very remarkable) of a purgatory.

“There is (replied the minister, in answer to his own proposed question) not only an eternal glory, but a hell, a place eternally burning of unquenchable fire, wherein all the damned are cast. Pray, said he, look now upon the life you

have led, and tell me which of those two places you think will be your portion.

“I have hope, said she, because God is merciful: that he will forgive my sins for my youth’s sake.

“Will your temporal judge, replied, the minister, pardon you for your youth’s sake? She answered, no. How much less, replied he, the Judge of heaven and earth, God, the righteous God himself! You can have no hope at all upon this foundation: it is certain God is merciful and willing to forgive, but he is righteous also, and neither can nor will let sin escape unpunished; the ungodly shall surely see no life, and if you die in this condition, there is no hope for you, nor other expectation, but to be cast and kept in the flames of hell, with the devil and all the damned.

From this, in a most consistent and cautious manner, he went on to preach to her the only way of salvation by Jesus Christ, and left her with fervent prayer. On another occasion the minister opened to her the falseness of that empty and deceitful form of prayer to which she seemed to be clinging. The first manifestation of deep conviction is thus expressed:—

“The minister again visited her, and desired to know how she did. I am, said she, in great distress; I am afraid I shall be lost forever! and concluded, she was certain she should die very shortly, and if I die, I shall be miserable everlastingly; you and that other gentleman’s words lay as a heavy burden upon my heart, and I see clearly I have sinned against all God’s commandments exceedingly, and every time I prayed I did surely mock the Lord, and now I know I cannot pray, because I am a sinner, and my very prayer must be a sin to me. I do not know, proceeded she, from whence I shall obtain

pardon for my numerous sins, and without that pardon my damnation is sure; this is the cause of my distress; oh, I do not know where to fly for help!

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Thursday morning another gentleman coming to see her, asked her, if she rested well the last night. Oh no! said she; and the reason being demanded, she answered, O, sir, I have something else to do than to sleep! I lie under God's wrath, and under the curse! if I die, I am lost forever! oh, to die is nothing! but forever, forever to be lost is dreadful! She spoke those words in great earnestness; fear and anguish was visible in her countenance.

“The gentleman feigned not to believe that her concern and anguish proceeded from the fear of the second, but rather of the first, the temporal death. Does not, said he, the fear of death, and the shame that will attend it, force you to speak such words? She assured him that it was not that, but the fear of being eternally lost; this laid heavy on her heart. He desired to know if she had been in prayer? She answered, that one had been reading for her, and that she had been praying the Lord to give her a right sight of her sins: do you think, said he, there can be any possible deliverance for you? and her answer was, I don't know, I hope so; if I was only guilty, said she, before the world, my fear should not be great, nor my anxieties so many; I do clearly see myself to stand guilty of the breach of every commandment of God, and if I remain so, I am lost and undone for ever, and that to be lost forever, is too heavy for me.”

Several pages are occupied in a lengthened detail of the slow but certain work which was carried on in her soul, in bringing her to a deep and painful acquaintance of her condition as a

guilty sinner in the sight of God. The following sentences which we extract from the mass, are sufficient to give the reader some idea of her sufferings. So sure it is, that God *kills* before he makes *alive*,

“Saturday morning the gentleman coming to her, desired to know how she did. Oh, said she, I am most miserable; I lie under the wrath of God, and under the curse! I shall be lost forever! But, replied he, what may be the reason thereof? Oh, said she, I have no redeemer! The following Lord’s day, the other gentleman came to visit her in the morning, inquiring how she did, and if she had a good night’s rest? Night’s rest! said she; can I sleep when I see myself to be so guilty and damnable before God? Oh, I had work the whole night betwixt God and my soul, more important than sleeping! The gentleman seeing her labour under the guilt that lay on her conscience, endeavoured to arrest her thereby. He found she had lost a deal of bodily strength that night, and the persons that attended her declared, she was the last night, at least ten times in prayer. On another occasion, after conversation with her, she began bitterly to weep and to bemoan herself, crying out *that eternity*, and therein to be lost, brought a distress upon her which she was not able to bear; and falling down on her knees prayed earnestly, crying out, being all in tears, O God, convert me! O God, convert me! repeating that several times.

Thus she continued, until one Monday morning, the gentleman asked her—

“How do you do? said he, as he entered the room. I am very well, sir, replied she. Wherein consists, said he, your being very well? I will tell you, sir, said she; last night, after the other gentleman departed from me, I fell upon my knees (the people who attended her that night declared she was three quarters of an hour upon her knees) praying God to be pleased

to give me a right sight of my sins, and God gave me to see my sins; the sin wherein I was born, and all my sins through the whole course of my life; the places where, the manner how, and the people with whom I committed them; it was just as if they were written and hung up before mine eyes; I felt my sins, and the smart thereof caused me to be inwardly so heavy that I could not bear them; it was as if the wrath of God should have consumed me; still I cried unto the Lord: O God, here lieth a great sinner, with a multitude of sin and guilt which I cannot bear! and oh! if thou wilt punish me for my sins, there can be no punishment in eternal damnation which I have not deserved! By this I was brought into darkness; it was as if I was blinded, and I was afraid I should have sunk away in that darkness; but still I cried unto God, O pardon! pardon! and execute not thy judgment against me!

“Here came into my heart, as a voice, ‘The Redeemer liveth.’ O God, said I, should there live a Redeemer for such a one as I am, who is then that Redeemer? And now it was as if a voice said in my heart, ‘That Redeemer is none else but the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour who hath shed his blood upon the cross, that your sins should be forgiven thee.’ I said therein, Oh! wilt thou then redeem me? and thereon came as a voice inwardly in my heart, ‘I am yours, and thou art mine.’ It was as if the Redeemer stepped in for me at the bar of God’s righteousness, and that all my guilt and sin was laid in one scale or balance, and Jesus’ righteousness in the other; but that Jesus’ righteousness was far the heaviest, even more than all my sins. Then came I out of darkness, and the light broke in upon me, and the Redeemer took away from me all my sins, and my heart melted into ardent love, and my whole soul was drawn out to the Redeemer.

“The gentleman being amazed, said to her, but Catherina, are

you not afraid that you deceive yourself? I can scarcely believe what you now have told me.

“Oh no, sir, said she, because the Redeemer will not reveal deceitful things to me? besides, I did not know there was a Redeemer. He recommended her to pray to the Lord for discerning light, in order, if she had deceived herself, not to venture her soul upon eternity on any imagination; do it, said he, continually; if your experience is genuine, the Lord will lead you further, and clear you up in what he has done already. And after he had prayed to the Lord for that purpose, he departed. When the minister repaired unto her in the evening, the first thing he observed in her was, she never before looked a person in the face that spoke to her, but now she straightly fixed her eyes upon him, and appeared outwardly as one in a serene and calm frame of mind.”

So great and marvelous a change excited much jealousy in the breasts of the minister, and those concerned for her eternal welfare; and by various ways did they try to shake her faith; and she was not without seasons of severe conflicts; but so glorious and abundant was the mercy manifested unto her, that nothing could effectually daunt or drive her back into despondency. We subjoin a few of her expressions after pardon was sealed home on her conscience.

“You must know, replied the minister, the heart of man is very deceitful, and the devil is very subtle; he knoweth a great deal of the Bible, and is acquainted with the phrases thereof; he has used the same frequently in old times, and to this very day he is the prince of darkness, and it is easy for him to deceive men, and lead them (under God’s permission) to

eternal destruction; can it not be, think you, that he has deceived you, in order to make you careless, and to drag you to hell with an imagination?

“The devil, said she, never taught me anything but wickedness; I was brought up in the Roman religion; the sins are my own sins, but God hath over-ruled it so, that I must come into this prison to be instructed in the way of salvation, and to have the Redeemer revealed unto me.

“Have you, said he, an inclination to call upon the Lord? She answered, yes; and being upon her knees before, she began prayer, and praised God, saying, O God! I thank thee that thou hast been pleased to grant such great mercy to me such a great sinner, and have revealed to me the Lord Jesus Christ, who has shed his blood upon the cross for the forgiveness of my sins, and has stepped in for me at the bar of thy righteousness, and hast paid all my debts: but if I deceive myself, and if my way is not right in thy sight, let me not go out in blindness, but give me a right sight of my sins. After prayer, she said, when I pray the Lord, in case I deceive myself, to give me a right, sight of my sins, the Lord stops me therein.

“Tuesday morning the minister coming to her, inquired how it had been with her since last night; did anything particular, said he, happen to you; did you rest well in the night? Pretty well, sir, said she; I slept very well, but not long. How can it be, said he, that you can sleep sound? Because, said she, I had an inward peace, and as I awaked, sweet communion with the Redeemer, and it was even as if I saw him. But, said he, the Redeemer revealeth himself not in that manner, that we can see him bodily. Oh no, sir, said she, I don't mean with my bodily eyes, but inwardly, and it was as if the Redeemer said to me, ‘You in me, and I in you.’ But, replied the minister,

what must I understand by those words?

“With these words, ‘You in me, and I in you,’ said she, the Redeemer meant, you shall not be lost. Oh, it was as if the Redeemer called to me, ‘Fear not death, and the punishment you shall suffer, neither the devil, nor everlasting damnation; I have delivered you from all.’ Those words, said she, dropped so sweet in my soul, that through the same an inward joy arose in my heart; I was constrained to rise from my bedstead to praise my Redeemer for it.

“Tuesday morning being the day of execution, about nine o’clock, both gentlemen came to visit her: finding her upon her knees in prayer, as soon as she arose they desired to know how it was with her; and her answer was, *very well; I am glad my time is at hand*; I have been rendering thanks unto God, because he hath enlightened me again. I don’t fear death at all! be not afraid concerning me; and if you see me weep, don’t imagine it is out of sorrow, but of joy and gladness, because death shall not be death to me, but an entry into eternal life, to be forever with Jesus, my most precious Redeemer, who bought me freely with his godly blood, and has paid for all my sins!

“The minister said to her, Catherina, in three hours’ time you shall be in that fathomless eternity! Yes, said she, that is true; I know not yet what great mercy God hath given me; but then I shall know it perfectly. I am full of joy inwardly, because there comes an eternity to glorify and praise God in, with all the blessed angels, in an everlasting blessedness. I cannot rightly do it here below, and if I lived ever so long, I could not perform it as I wish.

“The other gentleman said, what is the ground of your confidence upon which you believe that? Because, said she, I

have an interest in Jesus, the Redeemer of sinners and of me, who calleth now at present inwardly in my soul, ‘Fear not, I have redeemed thee; thou art mine.’

“The gentleman told her, they would let her alone a few minutes by herself, but they should soon return to her again; she declared her desire was to be alone with the Lord, the few minutes she had to live. Both the gentlemen went again to the prisoner, and found her in the same blessed situation as before; and after they had been for the last time with her in prayer, they stayed a few minutes with her; and the minister said, have you still anything to say to us, because we do not know if we shall have any opportunity to speak with you? She said, she hoped to have an opportunity to speak to them till the very last moment, concerning the ground on which she stood, and on which she hoped to enter eternity. But both the gentlemen pressed her strongly, if she had anything to say, to do it presently. She answered, sirs, I thank you for all the love and labour bestowed on me, such an unworthy one. The Lord God shall reward you! The minister said to her, Catherina, we desire no reward; our reward will be great, if we have been the means, in the hands of God, of plucking you, as a brand out of the fire of eternal destruction.

“You are, said she, clean of my blood.

“ The gentlemen pressed her again, if she had anything to say, to do it now before they departed. I hope, said she, opportunity will be given to me to speak to you; but if not, I wish you a good night till eternity comes; and then I hope to dwell with you both in everlasting glory to praise our God, and to speak of Jesus, and his glorious redemption! She spoke these words with a great deal of affection, and with a flood of tears. Whereupon the minister answered, if these things are

so, and God hath mercifully given unto you so great a salvation, we wish you also a good night till eternity cometh; and then you shall be our crown and rejoicing in the day of Jesus Christ, when he shall appear. The other gentleman spake to the same purpose, and so departed from her, greatly affected.

“She was fetched up directly, to hear her sentence pronounced at the bar; and both the gentlemen went into the antechamber to wait for her. When sentence was pronounced, she was led to the gentlemen by two officers; she stood in a blessed and perfectly serene frame of mind before them. The other gentleman spoke first to her, saying, Do you stand fast in the expectation that your end will be peace? Yes, said she; now are the moments that I stay here tedious to me! O now I see Jesus, with arms stretched out, waiting for me!

“The minister replied to her, Catherina, the sentence of death will be executed on you this moment, for all your trespasses against the law of your country: rest therein. But this moment, you shall stand before a God who is of spotless holiness, and of majestic righteousness, before whom nothing can stand that is unclean; do you think to stand before him? Yes, said she, because that God hath given to me his Son, and he hath paid righteousness for me at the bar of his holy justice. The question being put to her, if she saw no sin in herself? She said, I believe, sir, I shall sin as long as I stay here, but Jesus has covered the same.

“Now she was led to the place where, according to custom, public prayer was to be made for her. The other gentleman was in the antechamber, being so much affected; and it is very remarkable, that she told him the Monday morning before, that she believed he should not attend her to the end. The

minister followed her, and when she kneeled down, public prayer was made for her.

“When she arose from her knees, the minister desired to know if she had anything more to say. Yes, said she, I have a desire to speak a word to the spectators: and it being permitted her to do it in that place, she said, O good people, take example from me! and fly from the sins I committed; that you may not come under such punishment; but my sins are forgiven me, and my trespasses are blotted out.

“Now she was led to the scaffold, erected against the back front of the mansion house, and having communication therewith: the minister looking behind him, saw the executioner lay hold on her, tying her hands together, which she suffered with the utmost quietness, laying her hands together of her own accord; and walking on after the minister, she said, Now am I going to my salvation! One of the officers that led her, reported afterwards that she said to him, you lead me away, but I am happier than you.

“Coming upon the scaffold (there being a multitude of several thousands of spectators) she lifted up her hands, speaking the same words as she spoke before; O good people, take example from me, &c. As soon as she came to the stake on which she was to be strangled, she beheld the place with a wonderful quietness of mind; then turning herself towards the judges there present, she made a gentle compliment with her body, and stepping with a surprising freeness of mind upon the footstool, placed herself against the stake as one that prepared herself to die.

“The minister feeling himself mightily strengthened, said to her, Catherina, I take now heaven and earth to witness, that we set before you the blessing and the curse, death and life;

what is now your choice? and she answered, Life. Upon what ground? said he; and her answer was, Only upon the perfect righteousness of Jesus, who hath paid for all my sins.

“The minister replied, is this then the only ground upon which you shall enter eternity this moment? and her answer was, Yes, sir. Whereupon the minister, under great affection of mind, said to her, Now, then, Catherina, depart in peace, and the God of peace be everlastingly the God of your wonder and rejoicing; and sing before the throne the song of the Lamb, ‘Thou hast redeemed me to God by thy blood!’ Catherina being now no more able to speak, the cord being tied, bowed as it were twice, nodding with her head, as a sign that she understood what he said, and as with an Amen, answered.

“How gloriously shineth then the grace of God in the person of Anna Catherina Merks! Most evidently is this truth manifested in her, that God is no respecter of persons, but that he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy.”

PRINTED BY

MOUNTZION PRIMITIVE BAPTIST CHURCH

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