

Letters on Familiar Matters (paraphrased from the original)

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In the horrible year 1348, we are losing not only of our friends but people throughout the world.

If anyone escaped, the following year **mowed down** (killed) others. . . Has what happened in these years never been read about: empty houses, decaying cities, ruined estates, fields strewn with **cadavers** (dead bodies), a horrible and vast silence encompassing the whole world? Consult historians, they are silent; ask **physicians** (doctors), they are **stupefied** (don't know the answer); seek the answer from philosophers, they shrug their shoulders, **furrow** (wrinkle) their brows, and with fingers pressed against their lips, ask you to be quiet. Will **posterity** (future generations) believe these things, when we who have seen it can scarcely believe it? O happy people of the next generation, who will not know these miseries and most probably will believe our testimony as a **fable** (myth, fictional story)!

I do not deny that we deserve these misfortunes and even worse; but our ancestors deserved them too, and the generations that follow ours will deserve them in turn. Therefore why is it, most **Just of judges** (God), why is it that the seething rage of Your **vengeance** (anger, punishment for wrongdoing) has fallen so particularly hard upon our times? Why is that that in times when guilt was not lacking, the lessons of punishment were withheld? While all have sinned alike, we alone bear the lash. . . For neither ignorance nor even the plague itself is more hateful than the nonsense and tall tales of certain men, who profess to know everything but in fact know nothing.

What if we are making **atonement** (payment for wrong doing, for sin) not just for our crimes, but also for those of our fathers? Or could it be perhaps that certain great truths are to be held suspect, that God does not care for mortal men? But let us drive these foolish thoughts from our minds. If God did not care for us, there would be nothing left to sustain us. For who will provide these necessities for us, if they are not attributed to God, but to nature; what feelings will be left to us, why give ourselves over to the quest for truth? . . . Surely You do care for us and our affairs, God. But there is some reason, hidden and unknown to us, why down through all the ages we, who are the most dignified of your creatures, seem to be the ones most severely

punished. . . . Therefore either we are truly the worst of all beings, which I would like to deny but dare not, or God is reserving us for some future good the most He is exercising and purging us from these present evils, or there is something there that we are altogether unable to conceive.

Once we were all together, now we are quite alone. We should make new friends, but where or with whom, when the human race is nearly extinct, and it is predicted that the end of the world is soon at hand? We are --- why pretend? --- truly alone...