

THE BANQUET OF THE TEN VIRGINS OR CONCERNING CHASTITY

by Methodius

Methodius's early Christian dialogue celebrating virginity and chastity as spiritual virtues, featuring ten virgins discussing the nature of chastity and its path to spiritual perfection through Christ.

89 Chapters

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The Banquet Of The Ten Virgins Or Concerning Chastity

Introductory Notice to Methodius.

[a.d.260-312]. Considering the strong language in which Methodius is praised by ancient writers, as well as by the moderns, I feel that our learned translator has too hastily dismissed his name and works in the biographical introduction below. Epiphanius makes great use of him in his refutations of Origen; and Dupin's critical and historical notice of him is prolonged and highly discriminating, furnishing an abridgment of all his writings and of those vulgarly attributed to him heretofore. [2487] I have made into an elucidation some references which may be of use to the student. In like manner, I have thrown into the form of notes and elucidations what would be less pertinent and less useful in a preface. There are no facts to be added to what is here given by the translator; and remarks on the several works, which he has too sparingly annotated, will be more conveniently bestowed, perhaps, on the pages to which they immediately refer. The following is the translator's brief but useful Introduction. Methodius, who is also called Eubulius, [2488] was, first of all bishop, simultaneously of Olympus and Patara, in Lycia, as is testified by several ancient writers. [2489] He was afterwards removed, according to St. Jerome, to the episcopal See of Tyre in Phoenicia, and at the end of the latest of the great persecutions of the Church, about the year 312, he suffered martyrdom at Chalcis in Greece. Some consider that it was at Chalcis in Syria, and that St. Jerome's testimony ought to be thus understood, as Syria was more likely to be the scene of his martyrdom than Greece, as being nearer to his diocese. Others affirm that he suffered under Decius and Valerian; but this is incorrect, since he wrote not only against Origen long after the death of Adamantius, but also against Porphyry, whilst he was alive, in the reign of Diocletian. Methodius is known chiefly as the antagonist of Origen; although, as has been pointed out, he was himself influenced in no small degree by the method of Origen, as may be seen by his tendency to allegorical interpretations of Holy Scripture. The only complete work of this writer which has come down to us is his Banquet of the Ten Virgins, a dialogue of considerable power and grace, in praise of the virginal life. His antagonism to Origen, however, comes out less in this than in his works On the Resurrection, and On Things Created. The treatise On Free Will is, according to recent critics, of doubtful authorship, although the internal evidence must be said to confirm the ancient testimonies which assign it to Methodius. His writings against Porphyry, with the exception of some slight fragments, are lost, as are also his exegetical writings. [2490] Combefis published an edition of his works in 1644; but only so much of the Banquet as was contained in the Bibliotheca of Photius. In 1656 Leo Allatius published for the first time a complete edition of this work at Rome from the Vatican ms. Combefis in 1672 published an edition founded chiefly upon this; and his work has become the basis of all subsequent reprints. The following translation has been made almost entirely from the text of Migne, which is generally accurate, and the arrangement of which has been followed throughout. The edition of Jahn in some places rearranges the more fragmentary works, especially that On the Resurrection; but, although his text was occasionally found useful in amending the old readings, and in improving the punctuation, it was thought better to adhere in general to the text which is best known. A writer who was pronounced by St. Epiphanius [2491] to be "a learned man and a most valiant defender of the truth," and by St. Jerome, disertissimus martyr, [2492] who elsewhere speaks of him as one who

nitidi compositique sermonis libros confecit, [2493] cannot be altogether unworthy the attention of the nineteenth century.

Persons of the Dialogue:

Euboulios, [2495] Gregorion, Arete; Marcella, Theophila, Thaleia, Theopatra, Thallousa, Agathe, Procilla, Thekla, Tusiane, Domnina. Introduction. -- Plan of the Work; Way to Paradise; Description and Personification of Virtue; The Agnos a Symbol of Chastity; Marcella, the Eldest and Foremost Among the Virgins of Christ. Euboulios. You have arrived most seasonably, Gregorion, for I have just been looking for you, wanting to hear of the meeting of Marcella and Theopatra, and of the other virgins who were present at the banquet, and of the nature of their discourses on the subject of chastity; for it is said that they argued with such ability and power that there was nothing lacking to the full consideration of the subject. If, therefore, you have come here for any other purpose, put that off to another time, and do not delay to give us a complete and connected account of the matter of which we are inquiring. Gregorion. [2496] I seem to be disappointed of my hope, as some one else has given you intelligence beforehand on the subject respecting which you ask me. For I thought that you had heard nothing of what had happened, and I was flattering myself greatly with the idea that I should be the first to tell you of it. And for this reason I made all haste to come here to you, fearing the very thing which has happened, that some one might anticipate me. Euboulios. Be comforted, my excellent friend, for we have had no precise information respecting anything which happened; since the person who brought us the intelligence had nothing to tell us, except that there had been dialogues; but when he was asked what they were, and to what purpose, he did not know. Gregorion. Well then, as I came here for this reason, do you want to hear all that was said from the beginning; or shall I pass by parts of it, and recall only those points which I consider worthy of mention? Euboulios. By no means the latter; but first, Gregorion, relate to us from the very beginning where the meeting was, and about the setting forth of the viands, and about yourself, how you poured out the wine "They in golden cups Each other pledged, while towards broad heaven they looked." [2497] Gregorion. You are always skilful in discussions, and excessively powerful in argument -- thoroughly confuting all your adversaries. Euboulios. It is not worth while, Gregorion, to contend about these things at present; but do oblige us by simply telling us what happened from the beginning. Gregorion. Well, I will try. But first answer me this: You know, I presume, Arete, [2498] the daughter of Philosophia? Euboulios. Why do you ask? Gregorion. "We went by invitation to a garden of hers with an eastern aspect, to enjoy the fruits of the season, myself, and Procilla, and Tusiane." I am repeating the words of Theopatra, for it was of her I obtained the information. "We went, Gregorion, by a very rough, steep, and arduous path: when we drew near to the place," said Theopatra, "we were met by a tall and beautiful woman walking along quietly and gracefully, clothed in a shining robe as white as snow. Her beauty was something altogether inconceivable and divine. Modesty, blended with majesty, bloomed on her countenance. It was a face," she said, "such as I know not that I had ever seen, awe-inspiring, yet tempered with gentleness and mirth; for it was wholly unadorned by art, and had nothing counterfeit. She came up to us, and, like a mother who sees her daughters after a long separation, she embraced and kissed each one of us with great joy, saying, O, my daughters, you have come with toil and pain to me who am earnestly longing to conduct you to the pasture of immortality; toilsomely have you come by a way

abounding with many frightful reptiles; for, as I looked, I saw you often stepping aside, and I was fearing lest you should turn back and slip over the precipices. But thanks to the Bridegroom to whom I have espoused [2499] you, my children, for having granted an effectual answer to all our prayers.' And, while she is thus speaking," said Theopatra, "we arrive at the enclosure, the doors not being shut as yet, and as we enter we come upon Thekla and Agathe and Marcella preparing to sup. And Arete immediately said, Do you also come hither, and sit down here in your place along with these your fellows.' Now," said she to me, "we who were there as guests were altogether, I think, ten in number; and the place was marvellously beautiful, and abounding in the means of recreation. The air was diffused in soft and regular currents, mingled with pure beams of light, and a stream flowing as gently as oil through the very middle of the garden, threw up a most delicious drink; and the water flowing from it, transparent and pure, formed itself into fountains, and these, overflowing like rivers, watered all the garden with their abundant streams; and there were different kinds of trees there, full of fresh fruits, and the fruits that hung joyfully from their branches were of equal beauty; and there were ever-blooming meadows strewn with variegated and sweet-scented flowers, from which came a gentle breeze laden with sweetest odour. And the agnos [2500] grew near, a lofty tree, under which we reposed, from its being exceedingly wide-spreading and shady."Euboulios. You seem to me, my good friend, to be making a revelation of a second paradise. [2501]Gregorion. You speak truly and wisely. "When there," she said, "we had all kinds of food and a variety of festivities, so that no delight was wanting. After this Arete, [2502] entering, gave utterance to these words: -- "Young maidens, the glory of my greatness, beautiful virgins, who tend the undefiled meadows of Christ with unwedded hands, we have now had enough of food and feasting, for all things are abundant and plentiful with us. [2503] What is there, then, besides which I wish and expect? That each of you shall pronounce a discourse in praise of virginity. Let Marcella begin, since she sits in the highest place, and is at the same time the eldest. I shall be ashamed of myself if I do not make the successful disputant an object of envy, binding her with the unfading flowers of wisdom."And then," I think she said, "Marcella immediately began to speak as follows."

Chapter I.--The Difficulty and Excellence of Virginit; The Study of

Doctrine Necessary for Virgins. Virginit; is something supernaturally great, wonderful, and glorious; and, to speak plainly and in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, this best and noblest manner of life alone is the root [2504] of immortality, and also its flower and first-fruits; and for this reason the Lord promises that those shall enter into the kingdom of heaven who have made themselves eunuchs, in that passage [2505] of the Gospels in which He lays down the various reasons for which men have made themselves eunuchs. Chastity with men is a very rare thing, and difficult of attainment, and in proportion to its supreme excellence and magnificence is the greatness of its dangers. [2506] For this reason, it requires strong and generous natures, such as, vaulting over the stream of pleasure, direct the chariot of the soul upwards from the earth, not turning aside from their aim, until having, by swiftness of thought, lightly bounded above the world, and taken their stand truly upon the vault of heaven, they purely contemplate immortality itself as it springs forth [2507] from the undefiled bosom of the Almighty. Earth could not bring forth this draught; heaven alone knew the fountain from whence it flows; for we must think of virginit; as walking indeed upon the earth, but as also reaching up to heaven. And hence some who have longed for it, and considering only the end of it, have come, by reason of coarseness of mind, ineffectually with unwashed feet, and have gone aside out of the way, from having conceived no worthy idea of the virginal manner of life. For it is not enough to keep the body only undefiled, just as we should not show that we think more of the temple than of the image of the god; but we should care for the souls of men as being the divinities of their bodies, and adorn them with righteousness. And then do they most care for them and tend them when, striving untiringly to hear divine discourses, they do not desist until, wearing the doors of the wise, [2508] they attain to the knowledge of the truth. For as the putrid humours and matter of flesh, and all those things which corrupt it, are driven out by salt, in the same manner all the irrational appetites of a virgin are banished from the body by divine teaching. For it must needs be that the soul which is not sprinkled with the words of Christ, as with salt, should stink and breed worms, as King David, openly confessing with tears in the mountains, cried out, "My wounds stink and are corrupt," [2509] because he had not salted himself with the exercises of self-control, and so subdued his carnal appetites, but self-indulgently had yielded to them, and became corrupted in adultery. And hence, in Leviticus, [2510] every gift, unless it be seasoned with salt, is forbidden to be offered as an oblation to the Lord God. Now the whole spiritual meditation of the Scriptures is given to us as salt which stings in order to benefit, and which disinfects, without which it is impossible for a soul, by means of reason, to be brought to the Almighty; for "ye are the salt of the earth," [2511] said the Lord to the apostles. It is fitting, then, that a virgin should always love things which are honourable, and be distinguished among the foremost for wisdom and addicted to nothing slothful or luxurious, but should excel, and set her mind upon things worthy of the state of virginit;, always putting away, by the word, the foulness of luxury, lest in any way some slight hidden corruption should breed the worm of incontinence; for "the unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord," how she may please the Lord, "that she may be holy both in body and in spirit," [2512] says the blessed Paul. But many of them who consider the hearing of the word quite a secondary matter, think they do great things if they give

their attention to it for a little while. But discrimination must be exercised with respect to these; for it is not fitting to impart divine instruction to a nature which is careful about trifles, and low, and which counterfeits wisdom. For would it not be laughable to go on talking to those who direct all their energy towards things of little value, in order that they may complete most accurately those things which they want to bring to perfection, but do not think that the greatest pains are to be taken with those necessary things by which most of all the love of chastity would be increased in them?

Chapter II.--Virginity a Plant from Heaven, Introduced Late; The Advancement of Mankind to Perfection, How Arranged.

For truly by a great stretch of power the plant of virginity was sent down to men from heaven, and for this reason it was not revealed to the first generations. For the race of mankind was still very small in number; and it was necessary that it should first be increased in number, and then brought to perfection. Therefore the men of old times thought it nothing unseemly to take their own sisters for wives, until the law coming separated them, and by forbidding that which at first had seemed to be right, declared it to be a sin, calling him cursed who should "uncover the nakedness" of his sister; [2513] God thus mercifully bringing to our race the needful help in due season, as parents do to their children. For they do not at once set masters over them, but allow them, during the period of childhood, to amuse themselves like young animals, and first send them to teachers stammering like themselves, until they cast off the youthful wool of the mind, and go onwards to the practice of greater things, and from thence again to that of greater still. And thus we must consider that the God and Father of all acted towards our forefathers. For the world, while still unfilled with men, was like a child, and it was necessary that it should first be filled with these, and so grow to manhood. But when hereafter it was colonized from end to end, the race of man spreading to a boundless extent, God no longer allowed man to remain in the same ways, considering how they might now proceed from one point to another, and advance nearer to heaven, until, having attained to the very greatest and most exalted lesson of virginity, they should reach to perfection; that first they should abandon the intermarriage of brothers and sisters, and marry wives from other families; and then that they should no longer have many wives, like brute beasts, as though born for the mere propagation of the species; and then that they should not be adulterers; and then again that they should go on to continence, and from continence to virginity, when, having trained themselves to despise the flesh, they sail fearlessly into the peaceful haven of immortality. [2514]

Chapter III.--By the Circumcision of Abraham, Marriage with Sisters Forbidden; In the Times of the Prophets Polygamy Put a Stop To; Conjugal Purity Itself by Degrees Enforced.

If, however, any one should venture to find fault with our argument as destitute of Scripture proof, we will bring forward the writings of the prophets, and more fully demonstrate the truth of the statements already made. Now Abraham, when he first received the covenant of circumcision, seems to signify, by receiving circumcision in a member of his own body, nothing else than this, that one should no longer beget children with one born of the same parent; showing that every one should abstain from intercourse with his own sister, as his own flesh. And thus, from the time of Abraham, the custom of marrying with sisters has ceased; and from the times of the prophets the contracting of marriage with several wives has been done away with; for we read, "Go not after thy lusts, but refrain thyself from thine appetites;" [2515] for "wine and women will make men of understanding to fall away;" [2516] and in another place, "Let thy fountain be blessed; and rejoice with the wife of thy youth," [2517] manifestly forbidding a plurality of wives. And Jeremiah clearly gives the name of "fed horses" [2518] to those who lust after other women; and we read, "The multiplying brood of the ungodly shall not thrive, nor take deep rooting from bastard slips, nor lay any fast foundation." [2519] Lest, however, we should seem prolix in collecting the testimonies of the prophets, let us again point out how chastity succeeded to marriage with one wife, taking away by degrees the lusts of the flesh, until it removed entirely the inclination for sexual intercourse engendered by habit. For presently one is introduced earnestly deprecating, from henceforth, this seduction, saying, "O Lord, Father, and Governor of my life, leave me not to their counsels; give me not a proud look; let not the greediness of the belly, nor lust of the flesh, take hold of me." [2520] And in the Book of Wisdom, a book full of all virtue, the Holy Spirit, now openly drawing His hearers to continence and chastity, sings on this wise, "Better it is to have no children, and to have virtue, for the memorial thereof is immortal; because it is known with God and with men. When it is present men take example at it; and when it is gone they desire it: it weareth a crown and triumpheth for ever, having gotten the victory, striving for undefiled rewards." [2521]

Chapter IV.--Christ Alone Taught Virginitv, Openly Preaching the Kingdom of Heaven; The Likeness of God to Be Attained in the Light of the Divine Virtues.

We have already spoken of the periods of the human race, and how, beginning with the intermarriage of brothers and sisters, it went on to continence; and we have now left for us the subject of virginitv. Let us then endeavour to speak of this as well as we can. And first let us inquire for what reason it was that no one of the many patriarchs and prophets and righteous men, who taught and did many noble things, either praised or chose the state of virginitv. Because it was reserved for the Lord alone to be the first to teach this doctrine, since He alone, coming down to us, taught man to draw near to God; for it was fitting that He who was first and chief of priests, of prophets, and of angels, should also be saluted as first and chief of virgins. [2522] For in old times man was not yet perfect, and for this reason was unable to receive perfection, which is virginitv. For, being made in the Image of God, he needed to receive that which was according to His Likeness; [2523] which the Word being sent down into the world to perfect, He first took upon Him our form, disfigured as it was by many sins, in order that we, for whose sake He bore it, might be able again to receive the divine form. For it is then that we are truly fashioned in the likeness of God, when we represent His features in a human life, like skilful painters, stamping them upon ourselves as upon tablets, learning the path which He showed us. And for this reason He, being God, was pleased to put on human flesh, so that we, beholding as on a tablet the divine Pattern of our life, should also be able to imitate Him who painted it. For He was not one who, thinking one thing, did another; nor, while He considered one thing to be right, taught another. But whatever things were truly useful and right, these He both taught and did.

Chapter V.--Christ, by Preserving His Flesh Incorrupt in Virginitv, Draws to the Exercise of Virginitv; The Small Number of Virgins in Proportion to the Number of Saints.

What then did the Lord, who is the Truth and the Light, take in hand when He came down from heaven? He preserved the flesh which He had taken upon Him incorrupt in virginitv, so that we also, if we would come to the likeness of God and Christ, should endeavour to honour virginitv. For the likeness of God is the avoiding of corruption. And that the Word, when He was incarnate, became chief Virgin, in the same way as He was chief Shepherd and chief Prophet of the Church, the Christ-possessed John shows us, saying, in the Book of the Revelation, "And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with Him an hundred forty and four thousand, having His name and His Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth;" [2524] showing that the Lord is leader of the choir of virgins. And remark, in addition to this, how very great in the sight of God is the dignity of virginitv: "These were redeemed from among men, being the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault," [2525] he says, "and they follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." And he clearly intends by this to teach us that the number of virgins was, from the beginning, restricted to so many, namely, a hundred and forty and four thousand, while the multitude of the other saints is innumerable. For let us consider what he means when discoursing of the rest. "I beheld a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues." [2526] It is plain, therefore, as I said, that in the case of the other saints he introduces an unspeakable multitude, while in the case of those who are in a state of virginitv he mentions only a very small number, so as to make a strong contrast with those who make up the innumerable number. [2527] This, O Arete, is my discourse to you on the subject of virginitv. But, if I have omitted anything, let Theophila, who succeeds me, supply the omission.

Chapter I.--Marriage Not Abolished by the Commendation of Virginity.

And then, she said, Theophila spoke: -- Since Marcella has excellently begun this discussion without sufficiently completing it, it is necessary that I should endeavour to put a finish to it. Now, the fact that man has advanced by degrees to virginity, God urging him on from time to time, seems to me to have been admirably proved; but I cannot say the same as to the assertion that from henceforth they should no longer beget children. For I think I have perceived clearly from the Scriptures that, after He had brought in virginity, the Word did not altogether abolish the generation of children; for although the moon may be greater than the stars, the light of the other stars is not destroyed by the moonlight. Let us begin with Genesis, that we may give its place of antiquity and supremacy to this scripture. Now the sentence and ordinance of God respecting the begetting of children [2528] is confessedly being fulfilled to this day, the Creator still fashioning man. For this is quite manifest, that God, like a painter, is at this very time working at the world, as the Lord also taught, "My Father worketh hitherto." [2529] But when the rivers shall cease to flow and fall into the reservoir of the sea, and the light shall be perfectly separated from the darkness, -- for the separation is still going on, -- and the dry land shall henceforth cease to bring forth its fruits with creeping things and four-footed beasts, and the predestined number of men shall be fulfilled; then from henceforth shall men abstain from the generation of children. But at present man must cooperate in the forming of the image of God, while the world exists and is still being formed; for it is said, "Increase and multiply." [2530] And we must not be offended at the ordinance of the Creator, from which, moreover, we ourselves have our being. For the casting of seed into the furrows of the matrix is the beginning of the generation of men, so that bone taken from bone, and flesh from flesh, by an invisible power, are fashioned into another man. And in this way we must consider that the saying is fulfilled, "This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh." [2531]

Chapter II.--Generation Something Akin to the First Formation of Eve from the Side and Nature of Adam; God the Creator of Men in Ordinary Generation.

And this perhaps is what was shadowed forth by the sleep and trance of the first man, which prefigured the embraces of connubial love. When thirsting for children a man falls into a kind of trance, [2532] softened and subdued by the pleasures of generation as by sleep, so that again something drawn from his flesh and from his bones is, as I said, fashioned into another man. For the harmony of the bodies being disturbed in the embraces of love, as those tell us who have experience of the marriage state, all the marrow-like and generative part of the blood, like a kind of liquid bone, coming together from all the members, worked into foam and curdled, is projected through the organs of generation into the living body of the female. And probably it is for this reason that a man is said to leave his father and his mother, since he is then suddenly unmindful of all things when united to his wife in the embraces of love, he is overcome by the desire of generation, offering his side to the divine Creator to take away from it, so that the father may again appear in the son. Wherefore, if God still forms man, shall we not be guilty of audacity if we think of the generation of children as something offensive, which the Almighty Himself is not ashamed to make use of in working with His undefiled hands; for He says to Jeremiah, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee;" [2533] and to Job, "Didst thou take clay and form a living creature, and make it speak upon the earth?" [2534] and Job draws near to Him in supplication, saying, "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me." [2535] Would it not, then, be absurd to forbid marriage unions, seeing that we expect that after us there will be martyrs, and those who shall oppose the evil one, for whose sake also the Word promised that He would shorten those days? [2536] For if the generation of children henceforth had seemed evil to God, as you said, for what reason will those who have come into existence in opposition to the divine decree and will be able to appear well-pleasing to God? And must not that which is begotten be something spurious, and not a creature of God, if, like a counterfeit coin, it is moulded apart from the intention and ordinance of the lawful authority? And so we concede to men the power of forming men.

Chapter III.--An Ambiguous Passage of Scripture; Not Only the Faithful But Even Prelates Sometimes Illegitimate.

But Marcella, interrupting, said, "O Theophila, there appears here a great mistake, and something contrary to what you have said; and do you think to escape under cover of the cloud which you have thrown around you? For there comes that argument, which perhaps any one who addresses you as a very wise person will bring forward: What do you say of those who are begotten unlawfully in adultery? For you laid it down that it was inconceivable and impossible for any one to enter into the world unless he was introduced by the will of the divine Ruler, his frame being prepared for him by God. And that you may not take refuge behind a safe wall, bringing forward the Scripture which says, As for the children of the adulterers, they shall not come to their perfection,' [2537] he will answer you easily, that we often see those who are unlawfully begotten coming to perfection like ripe fruit. And if, again, you answer sophistically, O, my friend, by those who come not to perfection I understand being perfected in Christ-taught righteousness;' he will say, But, indeed, my worthy friend, very many who are begotten of unrighteous seed are not only numbered among those who are gathered into the flock of the brethren, but are often called even to preside over them. [2538] Since, then, it is clear, and all testify, that those who are born of adultery do come to perfection, we must not imagine that the Spirit was teaching respecting conceptions and births, but rather perhaps concerning those who adulterate the truth, who, corrupting the Scriptures by false doctrines, bring forth an imperfect and immature wisdom, mixing their error with piety.' And, therefore, this plea being taken away from you, come now and tell us if those who are born of adultery are begotten by the will of God; for you said that it was impossible that the offspring of a man should be brought to perfection unless the Lord formed it and gave it life."

Chapter IV.--Human Generation, and the Work of God Therein Set Forth.

Theophila, as though caught round the middle by a strong antagonist, grew giddy, and with difficulty recovering herself, replied, "You ask a question, my worthy friend, which needs to be solved by an example, that you may still better understand how the creative power of God, pervading all things, is more especially the real cause in the generation of men, making those things to grow which are planted in the productive earth. For that which is sown is not to be blamed, but he who sows in a strange soil by unlawful embraces, as though purchasing a slight pleasure by shamefully selling his own seed. For imagine our birth into the world to be like some such thing as a house having its entrance lying close to lofty mountains; and that the house extends a great way down, far from the entrance, and that it has many holes behind, and that in this part it has circular." "I imagine it," said Marcella. "Well, then, suppose that a modeller seated within is fashioning many statues; imagine, again, that the substance of clay is incessantly brought to him from without, through the holes, by many men who do not any of them see the artist himself. Now suppose the house to be covered with mist and clouds, and nothing visible to those who are outside but only the holes." "Let this also be supposed," she said. "And that each one of those who are labouring together to provide the clay has one hole allotted to himself, into which he alone has to bring and deposit his own clay, not touching any other hole. And if, again, he shall officiously endeavour to open that which is allotted to another, let him be threatened with fire and scourges. "Well, now, consider further what comes after this: the modeller within going round to the holes and taking privately for his modelling the clay which he finds at each hole, and having in a certain number of months made his model, giving it back through the same hole; having this for his rule, that every lump of clay which is capable of being moulded shall be worked up indifferently, even if it be unlawfully thrown by any one through another's hole, for the clay has done no wrong, and, therefore, as being blameless, should be moulded and formed; but that he who, in opposition to the ordinance and law, deposited it in another's hole, should be punished as a criminal and transgressor. For the clay should not be blamed, but he who did this in violation of what is right; for, through incontinence, having carried it away, he secretly, by violence, deposited it in another's hole." "You say most truly."

Chapter V.--The Holy Father Follows Up the Same Argument.

And now that these things are completed, it remains for you to apply this picture, my wisest of friends, to the things which have been already spoken of; comparing the house to the invisible nature of our generation, and the entrance adjacent to the mountains to the sending down of our souls from heaven, and their descent into the bodies; the holes to the female sex, and the modeller to the creative power of God, which, under the cover of generation, making use of our nature, invisibly forms us men within, working the garments for the souls. Those who carry the clay represent the male sex in the comparison; when thirsting for children, they bring and cast in seed into the natural channels of the female, as those in the comparison cast clay into the holes. For the seed, which, so to speak, partakes of a divine creative power, is not to be thought guilty of the incentives to incontinence; and art always works up the matter submitted to it; and nothing is to be considered as evil in itself, but becomes so by the act of those who used it in such a way; for when properly and purely made use of, it comes out pure, but if disgracefully and improperly, then it becomes disgraceful. For how did iron, which was discovered for the benefit of agriculture and the arts, injure those who sharpened it for murderous battles? Or how did gold, or silver, or brass, and, to take it collectively, the whole of the workable earth, injure those who, ungratefully towards their Creator, make a wrong use of them by turning parts of them into various kinds of idols? And if any one should supply wool from that which had been stolen to the weaving art, that art, regarding this one thing only, manufactures the material submitted to it, if it will receive the preparation, rejecting nothing of that which is serviceable to itself, since that which is stolen is here not to be blamed, being lifeless. And, therefore, the material itself is to be wrought and adorned, but he who is discovered to have abstracted it unjustly should be punished. So, in like manner, the violators of marriage, and those who break the strings of the harmony of life, as of a harp, raging with lust, and letting loose their desires in adultery, should themselves be tortured and punished, for they do a great wrong stealing from the gardens of others the embraces of generation; but the seed itself, as in the case of the wool, should be formed and endowed with life.

Chapter VI.--God Cares Even for Adulterous Births; Angels Given to Them as Guardians.

But what need is there to protract the argument by using such examples? for nature could not thus, in a little time, accomplish so great a work without divine help. For who gave to the bones their fixed nature? and who bound the yielding members with nerves, to be extended and relaxed at the joints? or who prepared channels for the blood, and a soft windpipe for the breath? or what god caused the humours to ferment, mixing them with blood and forming the soft flesh out of the earth, but only the Supreme Artist making us to be man, the rational and living image of Himself, and forming it like wax, in the womb, from moist slight seed? or by whose providence was it that the foetus was not suffocated by damp when shut up within, in the connexion of the vessels? or who, after it was brought forth and had come into the light, changed it from weakness and smallness to size, and beauty, and strength, unless God Himself, the Supreme Artist, as I said, making by His creative power copies of Christ, and living pictures? Whence, also, we have received from the inspired writings, that those who are begotten, even though it be in adultery, are committed to guardian angels. But if they came into being in opposition to the will and the decree of the blessed nature of God, how should they be delivered over to angels, to be nourished with much gentleness and indulgence? and how, if they had to accuse their own parents, could they confidently, before the judgment seat of Christ, invoke Him and say, "Thou didst not, O Lord, grudge us this common light; but these appointed us to death, despising Thy command?" "For," He says, "children begotten of unlawful beds are witnesses of wickedness against their parents at their trial." [2539]

Chapter VII.--The Rational Soul from God Himself; Chastity Not the Only Good, Although the Best and Most Honoured.

And perhaps there will be room for some to argue plausibly among those who are wanting in discrimination and judgment, that this fleshly garment of the soul, being planted by men, is shaped spontaneously apart from the sentence of God. If, however, he should teach that the immortal being of the soul also is sown along with the mortal body, he will not be believed; for the Almighty alone breathes into man the undying and undecaying part, as also it is He alone who is Creator of the invisible and indestructible. For, He says, He "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." [2540] And those artificers who, to the destruction of men, make images in human form, not perceiving and knowing their own Maker, are blamed by the Word, which says, in the Book of Wisdom, a book full of all virtue, [2541] "his heart is ashes, his hope is more vile than earth, and his life of less value than clay; forasmuch as he knew not his Maker, and Him that inspired into him an active soul, and breathed in a living spirit;" [2542] that is, God, the Maker of all men; therefore, also, according to the apostle, He "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." [2543] And now, although this subject be scarcely completed, yet there are others which remain to be discussed. For when one thoroughly examines and understands those things which happen to man according to his nature, he will know not to despise the procreation of children, although he applauds chastity, and prefers it in honour. For although honey be sweeter and more pleasant than other things, we are not for that reason to consider other things bitter which are mixed up in the natural sweetness of fruits. And, in support of these statements, I will bring forward a trustworthy witness, namely, Paul, who says, "So then he that giveth her [2544] in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better." [2545] Now the word, in setting forth that which is better and sweeter, did not intend to take away the inferior, but arranges so as to assign to each its own proper use and advantage. For there are some to whom it is not given to attain virginity; and there are others whom He no longer wills to be excited by procreations to lust, and to be defiled, but henceforth to meditate and to keep the mind upon the transformation of the body to the likeness of angels, when they "neither marry nor are given in marriage," [2546] according to the infallible words of the Lord; since it is not given to all to attain that undefiled state of being a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, [2547] but manifestly to those only who are able to preserve the ever-blooming and unfading flower of virginity. For it is the custom of the prophetic Word to compare the Church to a flower covered and variegated meadow, adorned and crowned not only with the flowers of virginity, but also with those of child-bearing and of continence; for it is written, "Upon thy [2548] right hand did stand the queen in a vesture of gold, wrought about with divers colours." [2549] These words, O Arete, I bring according to my ability to this discussion in behalf of the truth. And when Theophila had thus spoken, Theopatra said that applause arose from all the virgins approving of her discourse; and that when they became silent, after a long pause, Thaleia arose, for to her had been assigned the third place in the contest, that which came after Theophila. And she then, as I think, followed, and spoke.

Chapter I.--Passages of Holy Scripture Compared.

You seem to me, O Theophila, to excel all in action and in speech, and to be second to none in wisdom. For there is no one who will find fault with your discourse, however contentious and contradictory he may be. Yet, while everything else seems rightly spoken, one thing, my friend, distresses and troubles me, considering that that wise and most spiritual man -- I mean Paul -- would not vainly refer to Christ and the Church the union of the first man and woman, [2551] if the Scripture meant nothing higher than what is conveyed by the mere words and the history; for if we are to take the Scripture as a bare representation wholly referring to the union of man and woman, for what reason should the apostle, calling these things to remembrance, and guiding us, as I opine, into the way of the Spirit, allegorize the history of Adam and Eve as having a reference to Christ and the Church? For the passage in Genesis reads thus: "And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." [2552] But the apostle considering this passage, by no means, as I said, intends to take it according to its mere natural sense, as referring to the union of man and woman, as you do; for you, explaining the passage in too natural a sense, laid down that the Spirit is speaking only of conception and births; that the bone taken from the bones was made another man, and that living creatures coming together swell like trees at the time of conception. But he, more spiritually referring the passage to Christ, thus teaches: "He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church: for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." [2553]

Chapter II.--The Digressions of the Apostle Paul; The Character of His Doctrine: Nothing in It Contradictory; Condemnation of Origen, Who Wrongly Turns Everything into Allegory.

Let it not disturb you, if, in discussing one class of subjects, he, i.e., Paul, should pass over into another, so as to appear to mix them up, and to import matters foreign to the subject under consideration, departing from the question, as now for instance. For wishing, as it seems, to strengthen most carefully the argument on behalf of chastity, he prepares the mode of argument beforehand, beginning with the more persuasive mode of speech. For the character of his speech being very various, and arranged for the purpose of progressive proof, begins gently, but flows forward into a style which is loftier and more magnificent. And then, again changing to what is deep, he sometimes finishes with what is simple and easy, and sometimes with what is more difficult and delicate; and yet introducing nothing which is foreign to the subject by these changes, but, bringing them all together according to a certain marvellous relationship, he works into one the question which is set forth as his subject. It is needful, then, that I should more accurately unfold the meaning of the apostle's arguments, yet rejecting nothing of what has been said before. For you seem to me, O Theophila, to have discussed those words of the Scripture amply and clearly, and to have set them forth as they are without mistake. For it is a dangerous thing wholly to despise the literal meaning, [2554] as has been said, and especially of Genesis, where the unchangeable decrees of God for the constitution of the universe are set forth, in agreement with which, even until now, the world is perfectly ordered, most beautifully in accordance with a perfect rule, until the Lawgiver Himself having re-arranged it, wishing to order it anew, shall break up the first laws of nature by a fresh disposition. But, since it is not fitting to leave the demonstration of the argument unexamined -- and, so to speak, half-lame -- come let us, as it were completing our pair, bring forth the analogical sense, looking more deeply into the Scripture; for Paul is not to be despised when he passes over the literal meaning, and shows that the words extend to Christ and the Church.

Chapter III.--Comparison Instituted Between the First and Second Adam.

And, first, we must inquire if Adam can be likened to the Son of God, when he was found in the transgression of the Fall, and heard the sentence, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." [2555] For how shall he be considered "the first-born of every creature," [2556] who, after the creation of the earth and the firmament, was formed out of clay? And how shall he be admitted to be "the tree of life" who was cast out for his transgression, [2557] lest "he should again stretch forth his hand and eat of it, and live forever?" [2558] For it is necessary that a thing which is likened unto anything else, should in many respects be similar and analogous to that of which it is the similitude, and not have its constitution opposite and dissimilar. For one who should venture to compare the uneven to the even, or harmony to discord, would not be considered rational. But the even should be compared to that which in its nature is even, although it should be even only in a small measure; and the white to that which in its nature is white, even although it should be very small, and should show but moderately the whiteness by reason of which it is called white. Now, it is beyond all doubt clear to every one, that that which is sinless and incorrupt is even, and harmonious, and bright as wisdom; but that that which is mortal and sinful is uneven and discordant, and cast out as guilty and subject to condemnation.

Chapter IV.--Some Things Here Hard and Too Slightly Treated, and Apparently Not Sufficiently Brought Out According to the Rule of Theology.

Such, then, I consider to be the objections urged by many who, despising, as it seems, the wisdom of Paul, dislike the comparing of the first man to Christ. For come, let us consider how rightly Paul compared Adam to Christ, not only considering him to be the type and image, but also that Christ Himself became the very same thing, [2559] because the Eternal Word fell upon Him. For it was fitting that the first-born of God, the first shoot, the only-begotten, even the wisdom of God, should be joined to the first-formed man, and first and first-born of mankind, and should become incarnate. And this was Christ, a man filled with the pure and perfect Godhead, and God received into man. For it was most suitable that the oldest of the Æons and the first of the Archangels, when about to hold communion with men, should dwell in the oldest and the first of men, even Adam. And thus, when renovating those things which were from the beginning, and forming them again of the Virgin by the Spirit, He frames the same [2560] just as at the beginning. When the earth was still virgin and untilled, God, taking mould, formed the reasonable creature from it without seed. [2561]

Chapter V.--A Passage of Jeremiah Examined.

And here I may adduce the prophet Jeremiah as a trustworthy and lucid witness, who speaks thus: "Then I went down to the potter's house; and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it." [2562] For when Adam, having been formed out of clay, was still soft and moist, and not yet, like a tile, made hard and incorruptible, sin ruined him, flowing and dropping down upon him like water. And therefore God, moistening him afresh and forming anew the same clay to His honour, having first hardened and fixed it in the Virgin's womb, and united and mixed it with the Word, brought it forth into life no longer soft and broken; lest, being overflowed again by streams of corruption from without, it should become soft, and perish as the Lord in His teaching shows in the parable of the finding of the sheep; where my Lord says to those standing by, "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it? and when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing; and when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost."

Chapter VI.--The Whole Number of Spiritual Sheep; Man a Second Choir, After the Angels, to the Praise of God; The Parable of the Lost Sheep Explained.

Now, since He truly was and is, being in the beginning with God, and being God, [2563] He is the chief Commander and Shepherd of the heavenly ones, whom all reasonable creatures obey and attend, who tends in order and numbers the multitudes of the blessed angels. For this is the equal and perfect number of immortal creatures, divided according to their races and tribes, man also being here taken into the flock. For he also was created without corruption, that he might honour the king and maker of all things, responding to the shouts of the melodious angels which came from heaven. But when it came to pass that, by transgressing the commandment (of God), he suffered a terrible and destructive fall, being thus reduced to a state of death, for this reason the Lord says that He came from heaven into (a human) life, leaving the ranks and the armies of angels. For the mountains are to be explained by the heavens, and the ninety and nine sheep by the principalities and powers [2564] which the Captain and Shepherd left when He went down to seek the lost one. For it remained that man should be included in this catalogue and number, the Lord lifting him up and wrapping him round, that he might not again, as I said, be overflowed and swallowed up by the waves of deceit. For with this purpose the Word assumed the nature of man, that, having overcome the serpent, He might by Himself destroy the condemnation which had come into being along with man's ruin. For it was fitting that the Evil One should be overcome by no other, but by him whom he had deceived, and whom he was boasting that he held in subjection, because no otherwise was it possible that sin and condemnation should be destroyed, unless that same man on whose account it had been said, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return," [2565] should be created anew, and undo the sentence which for his sake had gone forth on all, that "as in Adam" at first "all die, even so" again "in Christ," who assumed the nature and position of Adam, should "all be made alive." [2566]

Chapter VII.--The Works of Christ, Proper to God and to Man, the Works of Him Who is One.

And now we seem to have said almost enough on the fact that man has become the organ and clothing of the Only-begotten, and what He was who came to dwell in him. But the fact that there is no moral inequality or discord [2567] may again be considered briefly from the beginning. For he speaks well who says that that is in its own nature good and righteous and holy, by participation of which other things become good, and that wisdom is in connection with [2568] God, and that, on the other hand, sin is unholy and unrighteous and evil. For life and death, corruption and incorruption, are two things in the highest degree opposed to each other. For life is a moral equality, but corruption an inequality; and righteousness and prudence a harmony, but unrighteousness and folly a discord. Now, man being between these is neither righteousness itself, nor unrighteousness; but being placed midway between incorruption and corruption, to whichever of these he may incline is said to partake of the nature of that which has laid hold of him. Now, when he inclines to corruption, he becomes corrupt and mortal, and when to incorruption, he becomes incorrupt and immortal. For, being placed midway between the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, of the Fruit of which he tasted, [2569] he was changed into the nature of the latter, himself being neither the tree of life nor that of corruption; but having been shown forth as mortal, from his participation in and presence with corruption, and, again, as incorrupt and immortal by connection with and participation in life; as Paul also taught, saying, "Corruption shall not inherit incorruption, nor death life," [2570] rightly defining corruption and death to be that which corrupts and kills, and not that which is corrupted and dies; and incorruption and life that which gives life and immortality, and not that which receives life and immortality. And thus man is neither a discord and an inequality, nor an equality and a harmony. But when he received discord, which is transgression and sin, he became discordant and unseemly; but when he received harmony, that is righteousness, he became a harmonious and seemly organ, in order that the Lord, the Incorruption which conquered death, might harmonize the resurrection with the flesh, not suffering it again to be inherited by corruption. And on this point also let these statements suffice.

Chapter VIII.--The Bones and Flesh of Wisdom; The Side Out of Which the Spiritual Eve is Formed, the Holy Spirit; The Woman the Help-Meet of Adam; Virgins Betrothed to Christ.

For it has been already established by no contemptible arguments from Scripture, that the first man may be properly referred to Christ Himself, and is no longer a type and representation and image of the Only-begotten, but has become actually Wisdom and the Word. For man, having been composed, like water, of wisdom and life, has become identical with the very same untainted light which poured into him. Whence it was that the apostle directly referred to Christ the words which had been spoken of Adam. For thus will it be most certainly agreed that the Church is formed out of His bones and flesh; and it was for this cause that the Word, leaving His Father in heaven, came down to be "joined to His wife;" [2571] and slept in the trance of His passion, and willingly suffered death for her, that He might present the Church to Himself glorious and blameless, having cleansed her by the laver, [2572] for the receiving of the spiritual and blessed seed, which is sown by Him who with whispers implants it in the depths of the mind; and is conceived and formed by the Church, as by a woman. so as to give birth and nourishment to virtue. For in this way, too, the command, "Increase and multiply," [2573] is duly fulfilled, the Church increasing daily in greatness and beauty and multitude, by the union and communion of the Word who now still comes down to us and falls into a trance by the memorial of His passion; for otherwise the Church could not conceive believers, and give them new birth by the laver of regeneration, unless Christ, emptying Himself for their sake, that He might be contained by them, as I said, through the recapitulation of His passion, should die again, coming down from heaven, and being "joined to His wife," the Church, should provide for a certain power being taken from His own side, so that all who are built up in Him should grow up, even those who are born again by the laver, receiving of His bones and of His flesh, that is, of His holiness and of His glory. For he who says that the bones and flesh of Wisdom are understanding and virtue, says most rightly; and that the side [2574] is the Spirit of truth, the Paraclete, of whom the illuminated [2575] receiving are fitly born again to incorruption. For it is impossible for any one to be a partaker of the Holy Spirit, and to be chosen a member of Christ, unless the Word first came down upon him and fell into a trance, in order that he, being filled [2576] with the Spirit, and rising again from sleep with Him who was laid to sleep for his sake, should be able to receive renewal and restoration. For He may fitly be called the side [2577] of the Word, even the sevenfold Spirit of truth, according to the prophet; [2578] of whom God taking, in the trance of Christ, that is, after His incarnation and passion, prepares a help-meet for Him [2579] -- I mean the souls which are betrothed and given in marriage to Him. For it is frequently the case that the Scriptures thus call the assembly and mass of believers by the name of the Church, the more perfect in their progress being led up to be the one person and body of the Church. For those who are the better, and who embrace the truth more clearly, being delivered from the evils of the flesh, become, on account of their perfect purification and faith, a church and help-meet of Christ, betrothed and given in marriage to Him as a virgin, according to the apostle, [2580] so that receiving the pure and genuine seed of His doctrine, they may

co-operate with Him, helping in preaching for the salvation of others. And those who are still imperfect and beginning their lessons, are born to salvation, and shaped, as by mothers, by those who are more perfect, until they are brought forth and regenerated unto the greatness and beauty of virtue; and so these, in their turn making progress, having become a church, assist in labouring for the birth and nurture of other children, accomplishing in the receptacle of the soul, as in a womb, the blameless will of the Word.

Chapter IX.--The Dispensation of Grace in Paul the Apostle.

Now we should consider the case of the renowned Paul, that when he was not yet perfect in Christ, he was first born and suckled, Ananias preaching to him, and renewing him in baptism, as the history in the Acts relates. But when he was grown to a man, and was built up, then being moulded to spiritual perfection, he was made the help-meet and bride of the Word; and receiving and conceiving the seeds of life, he who was before a child, becomes a church and a mother, himself labouring in birth of those who, through him, believed in the Lord, until Christ was formed and born in them also. For he says, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you;" [2581] and again, "In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel." [2582] It is evident, then, that the statement respecting Eve and Adam is to be referred to the Church and Christ. For this is truly a great mystery and a supernatural, of which I, from my weakness and dulness, am unable to speak, according to its worth and greatness. Nevertheless, let us attempt it. It remains that I speak to you on what follows, and of its signification.

Chapter X.--The Doctrine of the Same Apostle Concerning Purity.

Now Paul, when summoning all persons to sanctification and purity, in this way referred that which had been spoken concerning the first man and Eve in a secondary sense to Christ and the Church, in order to silence the ignorant, now deprived of all excuse. For men who are incontinent in consequence of the uncontrolled impulses of sensuality in them, dare to force the Scriptures beyond their true meaning, so as to twist into a defence of their incontinence the saying, "Increase and multiply;" [2583] and the other, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother;" [2584] and they are not ashamed to run counter to the Spirit, but, as though born for this purpose, they kindle up the smouldering and lurking passion, fanning and provoking it; and therefore he, cutting off very sharply these dishonest follies and invented excuses, and having arrived at the subject of instructing them how men should behave to their wives, showing that it should be as Christ did to the Church, "who gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing [2585] of water by the Word," [2586] he referred back to Genesis, mentioning the things spoken concerning the first man, and explaining these things as bearing on the subject before him, that he might take away occasion for the abuse of these passages from those who taught the sensual gratification of the body, under the pretext of begetting children.

Chapter XI.--The Same Argument.

For consider, O virgins, how he, [2587] desiring with all his might that believers in Christ should be chaste, endeavours by many arguments to show them the dignity of chastity, as when he says, [2588] Now, concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman," thence showing already very clearly that it is good not to touch [2589] a woman, laying it down. and setting it forth unconditionally. But afterwards, being aware of the weakness of the less continent, and their passion for intercourse, he permitted those who are unable to govern the flesh to use their own wives, rather than, shamefully transgressing, to give themselves up to fornication. Then, after having given this permission, he immediately added these words, [2590] "that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency;" which means, "if you, such as you are, cannot, on account of the incontinence and softness of your bodies, be perfectly continent, I will rather permit you to have intercourse with your own wives, lest, professing perfect continence, ye be constantly tempted by the evil one, and be inflamed with lust after other men's wives."

Chapter XII.--Paul an Example to Widows, and to Those Who Do Not Live with Their Wives.

Come, now, and let us examine more carefully the very words which are before us, and observe that the apostle did not grant these things unconditionally to all, but first laid down the reason on account of which he was led to this. For, having set forth that "it is good for a man not to touch a woman," [2591] he added immediately, "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife" [2592] -- that is, "on account of the fornication which would arise from your being unable to restrain your voluptuousness" -- "and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to prayer; [2593] and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment." [2594] And this is very carefully considered. "By permission" he says, showing that he was giving counsel, "not of command;" for he receives command respecting chastity and the not touching of a woman, but permission respecting those who are unable, as I said, to chasten their appetites. These things, then, he lays down concerning men and women who are married to one spouse, or who shall hereafter be so; but we must now examine carefully the apostle's language respecting men who have lost their wives, and women who have lost their husbands, and what he declares on this subject. "I say therefore," he goes on, [2595] "to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn." Here also he persisted in giving the preference to continence. For, taking himself as a notable example, in order to stir them up to emulation, he challenged his hearers to this state of life, teaching that it was better that a man who had been bound to one wife should henceforth remain single, as he also did. [2596] But if, on the other hand, this should be a matter of difficulty to any one, on account of the strength of animal passion, he allows that one who is in such a condition may, "by permission," contract a second marriage; not as though he expressed the opinion that a second marriage was in itself good, [2597] but judging it better than burning. Just as though, in the fast which prepares for the Easter celebration, one should offer food to another who was dangerously ill, and say, "In truth, my friend, it were fitting and good that you should bravely hold out like us, and partake of the same things, [2598] for it is forbidden even to think of food to-day; but since you are held down and weakened by disease, and cannot bear it, therefore, by permission,' we advise you to eat food, lest, being quite unable, from sickness, to hold up against the desire for food, you perish." Thus also the apostle speaks here, first saying that he wished all were healthy and continent, as he also was, but afterwards allowing a second marriage to those who are burdened with the disease of the passions, lest they should be wholly defiled by fornication, goaded on by the itchings of the organs of generation to promiscuous intercourse, considering such a second marriage far preferable to burning and indecency.

Chapter XIII.--The Doctrine of Paul Concerning Virginity Explained.

I have now brought to an end what I have to say respecting continence and marriage and chastity, and intercourse with men, and in which of these there is help towards progress in righteousness; but it still remains to speak concerning virginity -- if, indeed, anything be prescribed on this subject. Let us then treat this subject also; for it stands thus: [2599] "Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress; I say, that it is good for a man so to be. Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you." Having given his opinion with great caution respecting virginity, and being about to advise him who wished it to give his virgin in marriage, so that none of those things which conduce to sanctification should be of necessity and by compulsion, but according to the free purpose of the soul. for this is acceptable to God, he does not wish these things to be said as by authority, and as the mind of the Lord, with reference to the giving of a virgin in marriage; for after he had said, [2600] "if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned," directly afterwards, with the greatest caution, he modified his statement, showing that he had advised these things by human permission, and not by divine. So, immediately after he had said, "if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned," he added, "such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you." [2601] By which he means: "I sparing you, such as you are, consented to these things, because you have chosen to think thus of them, that I may not seem to hurry you on by violence, and compel any one to this. [2602] But yet if it shall please you who find chastity hard to bear, rather to turn to marriage; I consider it to be profitable for you to restrain yourselves in the gratification of the flesh, not making your marriage an occasion for abusing your own vessels to uncleanness." Then he adds, [2603] "But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none." And again, going on and challenging them to the same things, he confirmed his statement, powerfully supporting the state of virginity, and adding expressly the following words to those which he had spoken before, he exclaimed, [2604] "I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord: [2605] but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is a difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband." Now it is clear to all, without any doubt, that to care for the things of the Lord and to please God, is much better than to care for the things of the world and to please one's wife. For who is there so foolish and blind. as not to perceive in this statement the higher praise which Paul accords to chastity? "And this," he says, [2606] "I speak for your own profit, not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely."

Chapter XIV.--Virginity a Gift of God: the Purpose of Virginity Not Rashly to Be Adopted by Any One.

Consider besides how, in addition to the words already quoted, he commends the state of virginity as a gift of God. Wherefore he rejects those of the more incontinent, who, under the influence of vain-glory, would advance to this state, advising them to marry, lest in their time of manly strength, the flesh stirring up the desires and passions, they should be goaded on to defile the soul. For let us consider what he lays down: [2607] "But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely towards his virgin," he says, "if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let him marry;" properly here preferring marriage to "uncomeliness," in the case of those who had chosen the state of virginity, but afterwards finding it intolerable and grievous, and in word boasting of their perseverance before men, out of shame, but indeed no longer having the power to persevere in the life of a eunuch. But for him who of his own free will and purpose decides to preserve his flesh in virgin purity, "having no necessity," [2608] that is, passion calling forth his loins to intercourse, for there are, as it seems, differences in men's bodies; such a one contending and struggling, and zealously abiding by his profession, and admirably fulfilling it, he exhorts to abide and to preserve it, according the highest prize to virginity. For he that is able, he says, and ambitious to preserve his flesh pure, does better; but he that is unable, and enters into marriage lawfully, and does not indulge in secret corruption, does well. And now enough has been said on these subjects. Let any one who will, take in his hand the Epistle to the Corinthians, and, examining all its passages one by one, then consider what we have said, comparing them together, as to whether there is not a perfect harmony and agreement between them. These things, according to my power, O Arete, I offer to thee as my contribution on the subject of chastity. Euboulios. Through many things, O Gregorion, she has scarcely come to the subject, having measured and crossed a mighty sea of words. Gregorion. So it seems; but come, I must mention the rest of what was said in order, going through it and repeating it, while I seem to have the sound of it dwelling in my ears, before it flies away and escapes; for the remembrance of things lately heard is easily effaced from the aged. Euboulios. Say on, then; for we have come to have the pleasure of hearing these discourses. Gregorion. And then after, as you observed, Thaleia had descended from her smooth and unbroken course to the earth, Theopatra, she said, followed her in order, and spoke as follows.

Chapter I.--The Necessity of Praising Virtue, for Those Who Have the

Power. If the art of speaking, O virgins, always went by the same ways, and passed along the same path, there would be no way to avoid wearying you for one who persisted in the arguments which had already been urged. But since there are of arguments myriads of currents and ways, God inspiring us "at sundry times and in divers manners," [2609] who can have the choice of holding back or of being afraid? For he would not be free from blame to whom the gift has been given, if he failed to adorn that which is honourable with words of praise. Come then, we also, according to our gifts, will sing the brightest and most glorious star of Christ, which is chastity. For this way of the Spirit is very wide and large. Beginning, therefore, at the point from which we may say those things which are suitable and fitting to the subject before us, let us from thence consider it.

Chapter II.--The Protection of Chastity and Virginity Divinely Given to Men, that They May Emerge from the Mire of Vices.

Now I at least seem to perceive that nothing has been such a means of restoring men to paradise, and of the change to incorruption, and of reconciliation to God, and such a means of salvation to men, by guiding us to life, as chastity. And I will now endeavour to show why I think so concerning these things, that having heard distinctly the power of the grace already spoken of, you may know of how great blessings it has become the giver to us. Anciently, then, after the fall of man, when he was cast out by reason of his transgression, the stream of corruption poured forth abundantly, and running along in violent currents, not only fiercely swept along whatever touched it from without, but also rushing within it, overwhelmed the souls of men. And they, [2610] continuously exposed to this, were carried along dumb and stupid, neglecting to pilot their vessels, [2611] from having nothing firm to lay hold of. For the senses of the soul, as those have said who are learned in these things, when, being overcome by the excitements to passion which fall upon them from without, they receive the sudden bursts of the waves of folly which rush into them, being darkened turn aside from the divine course its whole vessel, which is by nature easily guided. Wherefore God, pitying us who were in such a condition, and were able neither to stand nor to rise, sent down from heaven the best and most glorious help, virginity, that by it we might tie our bodies fast, like ships, and have a calm, coming to an anchorage without damage, as also the Holy Spirit witnesses. For this is said in the hundred and thirty-sixth [2612] psalm, where the souls send joyfully up to God a hymn of thanksgiving, [2613] as many as have been taken hold of and raised up to walk with Christ in heaven, that they might not be overwhelmed by the streams of the world and the flesh. Whence, also, they say that Pharaoh was a type of the devil in Egypt, since he mercilessly commanded the males to be cast into the river, [2614] but the females to be preserved alive. For the devil, ruling [2615] from Adam to Moses over this great Egypt, the world, took care to have the male and rational offspring of the soul carried away and destroyed by the streams of passions, but he longs for the carnal and irrational offspring to increase and multiply.

Chapter III.--That Passage of David Explained; What the Harps Hung Upon the Willows Signify; The Willow a Symbol of Chastity; The Willows Watered by Streams.

But not to pass away from our subject, come, let us take in our hands and examine this psalm, which the pure and stainless souls sing to God, saying: [2617] "By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down; yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof," clearly giving the name of harps to their bodies which they hung upon the branches of chastity, fastening them to the wood that they might not be snatched away and dragged along again by the stream of incontinence. For Babylon, which is interpreted "disturbance" or "confusion," signifies this life around which the water flows, while we sit in the midst of which the water flows round us, as long as we are in the world, the rivers of evil always beating upon us. Wherefore, also, we are always fearful, and we groan and cry with weeping to God, that our harps may not be snatched off by the waves of pleasure, and slip down from the tree of chastity. For everywhere the divine writings take the willow as the type of chastity, because, when its flower is steeped in water, if it be drunk, it extinguishes whatever kindles sensual desires and passions within us, until it entirely renders barren, and makes every inclination to the begetting of children without effect, as also Homer indicated, for this reason calling the willows destructive of fruit. [2618] And in Isaiah the righteous are said to "spring up as willows by the water courses." [2619] Surely, then, the shoot of virginity is raised to a great and glorious height, when the righteous, and he to whom it is given to preserve it and to cultivate it, bedewing it with wisdom, is watered by the gentlest streams of Christ. For as it is the nature of this tree to bud and grow through water, so it is the nature of virginity to blossom and grow to maturity when enriched by words, so that one can hang his body [2620] upon it.

Chapter IV.--The Author Goes on with the Interpretation of the Same Passage.

If, then, the rivers of Babylon are the streams of voluptuousness, as wise men say, which confuse and disturb the soul, then the willows must be chastity, to which we may suspend and draw up the organs of lust which overbalance and weigh down the mind, so that they may not be borne down by the torrents of incontinence, and be drawn like worms to impurity and corruption. For God has bestowed upon us virginity as a most useful and a serviceable help towards incorruption, sending it as an ally to those who are contending for and longing after Zion, as the psalm shows, which is resplendent charity and the commandment respecting it, for Zion is interpreted "The commandment of the watchtower." [2621] Now, let us here enumerate the points which follow. For why do the souls declare that they were asked by those who led them captive to sing the Lord's song in a strange land? Surely because the Gospel teaches a holy and secret song, which sinners and adulterers sing to the Evil One. For they insult the commandments, accomplishing the will of the spirits of evil, and cast holy things to dogs, and pearls before swine, [2622] in the same manner as those of whom the prophet says with indignation, "They read the law [2623] without;" [2624] for the Jews were not to read the law going forth out of the gates of Jerusalem or out of their houses; and for this reason the prophet blames them strongly, and cries that they were liable to condemnation, because, while they were transgressing the commandments, and acting impiously towards God, they were pretentiously reading the law, as if, forsooth, they were piously observing its precepts; but they did not receive it in their souls, holding it firmly with faith, but rejected it, denying it by their works. And hence they sing the Lord's song in a strange land, explaining the law by distorting and degrading it, expecting a sensual kingdom, and setting their hopes on this alien world, which the Word says will pass away, [2625] where those who carry them captive entice them with pleasures, lying in wait to deceive them.

Chapter V.--The Gifts of Virgins, Adorned with Which They are Presented to One Husband, Christ.

Now, those who sing the Gospel to senseless people seem to sing the Lord's song in a strange land, of which Christ is not the husbandman; but those who have put on and shone in the most pure and bright, and unmingled and pious and becoming, ornament of virginity, and are found barren and unproductive of unsettled and grievous passions, do not sing the song in a strange land; because they are not borne thither by their hopes, nor do they stick fast in the lusts of their mortal bodies, nor do they take a low view of the meaning of the commandments, but well and nobly, with a lofty disposition, they have regard to the promises which are above, thirsting for heaven as a congenial abode, whence God, approving their dispositions, promises with an oath to give them choice honours, appointing and establishing them "above His chief joy;" for He says thus: [2626] "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy;" meaning by Jerusalem, as I said, these very undefiled and incorrupt souls, which, having with self-denial drawn in the pure draught of virginity with unpolluted lips, are "espoused to one husband," to be presented "as a chaste virgin to Christ" [2627] in heaven, "having gotten the victory, striving for undefiled rewards." [2628] Hence also the prophet Isaiah proclaims, saying, [2629] "Arise, shine, [2630] for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." Now these promises, it is evident to every one, will be fulfilled after the resurrection. [2631] For the Holy Spirit does not speak of that well-known town in Judea; but truly of that heavenly city, the blessed Jerusalem, which He declares to be the assembly of the souls which God plainly promises to place first, "above His chief joy," in the new dispensation, settling those who are clothed in the most white robe of virginity in the pure dwelling of unapproachable light; because they had it not in mind to put off their wedding garment -- that is, to relax their minds by wandering thoughts.

Chapter VI.--Virginity to Be Cultivated and Commended in Every Place and Time.

Further, the expression in Jeremiah, [2632] "That a maid should not forget her ornaments, nor a bride her attire," [2633] shows that she should not give up or loosen the band of chastity through wiles and distractions. For by the heart are properly denoted our heart and mind. Now the breastband, the girdle which gathers together and keeps firm the purpose of the soul to chastity, is love to God, which our Captain and Shepherd, Jesus, who is also our Ruler and Bridegroom, O illustrious virgins, commands both you and me to hold fast unbroken and sealed up even to the end; for one will not easily find anything else a greater help to men than this possession, pleasing and grateful to God. Therefore, I say, that we should all exercise and honour chastity, and always cultivate and commend it. Let these first-fruits of my discourse suffice for thee, O Arete, in proof of my education and my zeal. "And I receive the gift," she said that Arete replied, "and bid Thallousa speak after thee; for I must have a discourse from each one of you." And she said that Thallousa, pausing a little, as though considering somewhat with herself, thus spoke.

Chapter I.--The Offering of Chastity a Great Gift.

I pray you, Arete, that you will give your assistance now too, that I may seem to speak something worthy in the first place of yourself, and then of those who are present. For I am persuaded, having thoroughly learnt it from the sacred writings, that the greatest and most glorious offering and gift, to which there is nothing comparable, which men can offer to God, is the life [2635] of virginity. For although many accomplished many admirable things, according to their vows, in the law, they alone were said to fulfil a great vow who were willing to offer themselves of their free-will. For the passage runs thus: "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, when either man or woman shall separate themselves...unto the Lord." [2636] One vows to offer gold and silver vessels for the sanctuary when he comes, another to offer the tithe of his fruits, another of his property, another the best of his flocks, another consecrates his being; and no one is able to vow a great vow to the Lord, but he who has offered himself entirely to God.

Chapter II.--Abraham's Sacrifice of a Heifer Three Years Old, of a Goat, and of a Ram Also Three Years Old: Its Meaning; Every Age to Be Consecrated to God; The Threefold Watch and Our Age.

I must endeavour, O virgins, by a true exposition, to explain to you the mind of the Scripture according to its meaning. [2637] Now, he who watches over and restrains himself in part, and in part is distracted and wandering, is not wholly given up to God. Hence it is necessary that the perfect man offer up all, both the things of the soul and those of the flesh, so that he may be complete and not lacking. Therefore also God commands Abraham, [2638] "Take Me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle dove, and a young pigeon;" which is admirably said; for remark, that concerning those things, He also gives this command, Bring them Me and keep them free from the yoke, even thy soul uninjured, like a heifer, and your flesh, and your reason; the last like a goat, since he traverses lofty and precipitous places, and the other like a ram, that he may in nowise skip away, and fall and slip off from the right way. For thus shalt thou be perfect and blameless, O Abraham, when thou hast offered to Me thy soul, and thy sense, and thy mind, which He mentioned under the symbol of the heifer, the goat, and the ram of three years old, as though they represented the pure knowledge of the Trinity. And perhaps He also symbolizes the beginning, the middle, and the end of our life and of our age, wishing as far as possible that men should spend their boyhood, their manhood, and their more advanced life purely, and offer them up to Him. Just as our Lord Jesus Christ commands in the Gospels, thus directing: "Let not your lights be extinguished, and let not your loins be loosed. Therefore also be ye like men who wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are ye, when he shall make you sit down, and shall come and serve you. And if he come in the second, or in the third watch, ye are blessed." [2639] For consider, O virgins, when He mentions three watches of the night, and His three comings, He shadows forth in symbol our three periods of life, that of the boy, of the full-grown man, and of the old man; so that if He should come and remove us from the world while spending our first period, that is, while we are boys, He may receive us ready and pure, having nothing amiss; and the second and the third in like manner. For the evening watch is the time of the budding and youth of man, when the reason begins to be disturbed and to be clouded by the changes of life, his flesh gaining strength and urging him to lust. The second is the time when, afterwards advancing to a full-grown man, he begins to acquire stability, and to make a stand against the turbulence of passion and self-conceit. And the third, when most of the imaginations and desires fade away, the flesh now withering and declining to old age.

Chapter III.--Far Best to Cultivate Virtue from Boyhood.

Therefore, it is becoming that we should kindle the unquenchable light of faith in the heart, and gird our loins with purity, and watch and ever wait for the Lord so that, if He should will to come and take any of us away in the first period of life, or in the second, or in the third, and should find us most ready, and working what He appointed, He may make us to lie down in the bosom of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. Now Jeremiah says, "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth;" [2640] and "that his soul should not depart from the Lord." It is good, indeed, from boyhood, to submit the neck to the divine Hand, and not to shake off, even to old age, the Rider who guides with pure mind, when the Evil One is ever dragging down the mind to that which is worse. For who is there that does not receive through the eyes, through the ears, through the taste and smell and touch, pleasures and delights, so as to become impatient of the control of continence as a driver, who checks and vehemently restrains the horse from evil? Another who turns his thoughts to other things will think differently; but we say that he offers himself perfectly to God who strives to keep the flesh undefiled from childhood, practising virginity; for it speedily brings great and much-desired gifts of hopes to those who strive for it, drying up the corrupting lusts and passions of the soul. But come, let us explain how we give ourselves up to the Lord.

Chapter IV.--Perfect Consecration and Devotion to God: What It is.

That which is laid down in the Book of Numbers, [2641] "greatly to vow a vow," serves to show, as, with a little more explanation, I proceed to prove, that chastity is the great vow above all vows. For then am I plainly consecrated altogether to the Lord, when I not only strive to keep the flesh untouched by intercourse, but also unspotted by other kinds of unseemliness. For "the unmarried woman," it is said, [2642] "careth for the things of the Lord, how she may please the Lord.;" not merely that she may bear away the glory in part of not being maimed in her virtue, but in both parts, according to the apostle, that she may be sanctified in body and spirit, offering up her members to the Lord. For let us say what it is to offer up oneself perfectly to the Lord. If, for instance, I open my mouth on some subjects, and close it upon others; thus, if I open it for the explanation of the Scriptures, for the praise of God, according to my power, in a true faith and with all due honour, and if I close it, putting a door and a watch upon it [2643] against foolish discourse, my mouth is kept pure, and is offered up to God. "My tongue is a pen," [2644] an organ of wisdom; for the Word of the Spirit writes by it in clearest letters, from the depth and power of the Scriptures, even the Lord, the swift Writer of the ages, that He quickly and swiftly registers and fulfils the counsel of the Father, hearing the words, "quickly spoil, swiftly plunder." [2645] To such a Scribe the words may be applied, "My tongue is a pen;" for a beautiful pen is sanctified and offered to Him, writing things more lovely than the poets and orators who confirm the doctrines of men. If, too, I accustom my eyes not to lust after the charms of the body, nor to take delight in unseemly sights, but to look up to the things which are above, then my eyes are kept pure, and are offered to the Lord. If I shut my ears against detraction and slanders, and open them to the word of God, having intercourse with wise men, [2646] then have I offered up my ears to the Lord. If I keep my hands from dishonourable dealing, from acts of covetousness and of licentiousness, then are my hands kept pure to God. If I withhold my steps from going [2647] in perverse ways, then have I offered up my feet, not going to the places of public resort and banquets, where wicked men are found, but into the right way, fulfilling something of the [2648] commands. What, then, remains to me, if I also keep the heart pure, offering up all its thoughts to God; if I think no evil, if anger and wrath gain no rule over me, if I meditate in the law of the Lord day and night? And this is to preserve a great chastity, and to vow a great vow.

Chapter V.--The Vow of Chastity, and Its Rites in the Law; Vines, Christ, and the Devil.

I will now endeavour to explain to you, O virgins, the rest of that which is prescribed; for this is attached to your duties, consisting of laws concerning virginity, which are useful as teaching how we should abstain, and how advance to virginity. For it is written thus: [2649] "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the Lord; he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried, all the days of his separation." And this means, that he who has devoted and offered himself to the Lord shall not take of the fruits of the plant of evil, because of its natural tendency to produce intoxication and distraction of mind. For we perceive from the Scriptures two kinds of vines which were separate from each other, and were unlike. For the one is productive of immortality and righteousness; but the other of madness and insanity. The sober and joy-producing vine, from whose instructions, as from branches, there joyfully hang down clusters of graces, distilling love, is our Lord Jesus, who says expressly to the apostles, [2650] "I am the true vine, ye are the branches; and my Father is the husbandman." But the wild and death-bearing vine is the devil, who drops down fury and poison and wrath, as Moses relates, writing concerning him, [2651] "For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter: their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps." The inhabitants of Sodom having gathered grapes from this, were goaded on to an unnatural and fruitless desire for males. Hence, also, in the time of Noah, men having given themselves up to drunkenness, sank down into unbelief, and, being overwhelmed by the deluge, were drowned. And Cain, too, having drawn from this, stained his fratricidal hands, and defiled the earth with the blood of his own family. Hence, too, the heathen, becoming intoxicated, sharpen their passions for murderous battles; for man is not so much excited, nor goes so far astray through wine, as from anger and wrath. A man does not become intoxicated and go astray through wine, in the same way as he does from sorrow, or from love, or from incontinence. And therefore it is ordered that a virgin shall not taste of this vine, so that she may be sober and watchful from the cares of life, and may kindle the shining torch of the light of righteousness for the Word. "Take heed to yourselves," says the Lord, [2652] "lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares, as a snare."

Chapter VI.--Sikera, a Manufactured and Spurious Wine, Yet Intoxicating; Things Which are Akin to Sins are to Be Avoided by a Virgin; The Altar of Incense (a Symbol Of) Virgins.

Moreover, it is not only forbidden to virgins in any way to touch those things which are made from that vine, but even such things as resemble them and are akin to them. For Sikera, which is manufactured, is called a spurious kind of wine, whether made of palms or of other fruit-trees. For in the same way that draughts of wine overthrow man's reason, so do these exceedingly; and to speak the plain truth, the wise are accustomed to call by the name of Sikera all that produces drunkenness and distraction of mind, besides wine. In order, therefore, that the virgin may not, when guarding against those sins which are in their own nature evil, be defiled by those which are like them and akin to them, conquering the one and being conquered by the other, that is, decorating herself with textures of different cloths, or with stones and gold, and other decorations of the body, things which intoxicate the soul; on this account it is ordered that she do not give herself up to womanish weaknesses and laughter, exciting herself to wiles and foolish talking, which whirl the mind around and confuse it; as it is indicated in another place, [2653] "Ye shall not eat the hyæna and animals like it; nor the weasel and creatures of that kind." For this is the straight and direct way to heaven, not merely not to avoid any stumbling-block which would trip up and destroy men who are agitated by a desire for luxuries and pleasures, but also from such things as resemble them. Moreover, it has been handed down that the unbloody altar of God signifies the assembly of the chaste; thus virginity appears to be something great and glorious. Therefore it ought to be preserved undefiled and altogether pure, having no participation in the impurities of the flesh; but it should be set up before the presence of the testimony, gilded with wisdom, for the Holy of holies, sending forth a sweet savour of love to the Lord; for He says, [2654] "Thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: of shittim-wood shalt thou make it. And thou shalt make the staves of shittim-wood, and overlay them with gold. And thou shalt put it before the veil that is by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy-seat that is over the testimony, where I will meet with thee. And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it; a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations. Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt-sacrifices nor meat-offering; neither shall ye pour drink-offering thereon."

Chapter VII.--The Church Intermediate Between the Shadows of the Law and the Realities of Heaven.

If the law, according to the apostle, is spiritual, containing the images "of future good things," [2655] come then, let us strip off the veil of the letter which is spread over it, and consider its naked and true meaning. The Hebrews were commanded to ornament the Tabernacle as a type of the Church, that they might be able, by means of sensible things, to announce beforehand the image of divine things. For the pattern which was shown to Moses [2656] in the mount, to which he was to have regard in fashioning the Tabernacle, was a kind of accurate representation of the heavenly dwelling, which we now perceive more clearly than through types, yet more darkly than if we saw the reality. For not yet, in our present condition, has the truth come unmingled to men, who are here unable to bear the sight of pure immortality, just as we cannot bear to look upon the rays of the sun. And the Jews declared that the shadow of the image (of the heavenly things which was afforded to them), was the third from the reality; but we clearly behold the image of the heavenly order; for the truth will be accurately made manifest after the resurrection, when we shall see the heavenly tabernacle (the city in heaven "whose builder and maker is God" [2657]) "face to face," and not "darkly" and "in part." [2658]

Chapter VIII.--The Double Altar, Widows and Virgins; Gold the Symbol of Virginitv.

Now the Jews prophesied our state, but we foretell the heavenly; since the Tabernacle was a symbol of the Church, and the Church of heaven. Therefore, these things being so, and the Tabernacle being taken for a type of the Church, as I said, it is fitting that the altars should signify some of the things in the Church. And we have already compared the brazen altar to the company and circuit of widows; for they are a living altar of God, to which they bring calves and tithes, and free-will offerings, as a sacrifice to the Lord; but the golden altar within the [2659] Holy of holies, before the presence of the testimony, on which it is forbidden to offer sacrifice and libation, has reference to those in a state of virginitv, as those who have their bodies preserved pure, like unalloyed gold, from carnal intercourse. Now gold is commended for two reasons: the first, that it does not rust, and the second, that in its colour it seems in a measure to resemble the rays of the sun; and thus it is suitably a symbol of virginitv, which does not admit any stain or spot, but ever shines forth with the light of the Word. Therefore, also, it stands nearer to God within the Holy of holies, and before the veil, with undefiled hands, like incense, offering up prayers to the Lord, acceptable as a sweet savour; as also John indicated, saying that the incense in the vials of the four-and-twenty elders were the prayers of the saints. This, then, I offer to thee, O Arete, on the spur of the moment, according to my ability, on the subject of chastity. And when Thallousa had said this, Theopatra said that Arete touched Agathe with her sceptre, and that she, perceiving it, immediately arose and answered.

Chapter I.--The Excellence of the Abiding Glory of Virginity; The Soul

Made in the Image of the Image of God, that is of His Son; The Devil a Suitor for the Soul. With great confidence of being able to persuade, and to carry on this admirable discourse, O Arete, if thou go with me, will I also endeavour, according to my ability, to contribute something to the discussion of the subject before us; something commensurate to my own power, and not to be compared with that which has already been spoken. For I should be unable to put forth in philosophizing anything that could compete with those things which have already been so variously and brilliantly worked out. For I shall seem to bear away the reproach of silliness, if I make an effort to match myself with my superiors in wisdom. If, however, you will bear even with those who speak as they can, I will endeavour to speak, not lacking at least in good will. And here let me begin. We have all come into this world, O virgins, endowed with singular beauty, which has a relationship and affinity to divine wisdom. For the souls of men do then most accurately resemble Him who begat and formed them, when, reflecting the unsullied representation of His likeness, and the features of that countenance, to which God looking formed them to have an immortal and indestructible shape, they remain such. For the unbegotten and incorporeal beauty, which neither begins nor is corruptible, but is unchangeable, and grows not old and has need of nothing, He resting in Himself, and in the very light which is in unspeakable and inapproachable places, [2660] embracing all things in the circumference of His power, creating and arranging, made the soul after the image of His image. Therefore, also, it is reasonable and immortal. For being made after the image of the Only-begotten, as I said, it has an unsurpassable beauty, and therefore evil spirits [2661] love it, and plot and strive to defile its godlike and lovely image, as the prophet Jeremiah shows, reproaching Jerusalem, "Thou hadst a whore's forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed;" [2662] speaking of her who prostituted herself to the powers which came against her to pollute her. For her lovers are the devil and his angels, who plan to defile and pollute our reasonable and clear-sighted beauty of mind by intercourse with themselves, and desire to cohabit with every soul which is betrothed to the Lord.

Chapter II.--The Parable of the Ten Virgins.

If, then, any one will keep this beauty inviolate and unharmed, and such as He who constructed it formed and fashioned it, imitating the eternal and intelligible nature of which man is the representation and likeness, and will become like a glorious and holy image, he will be transferred thence to heaven, the city of the blessed, and will dwell there as in a sanctuary. Now our beauty is then best preserved undefiled and perfect when, protected by virginity, it is not darkened by the heat of corruption from without; but, remaining in itself, it is adorned with righteousness, being brought as a bride to the Son of God; as He also Himself suggests, exhorting that the light of chastity should be kindled in their flesh, as in lamps; since the number of the ten virgins signifies the souls that have believed in Jesus Christ, symbolizing by the ten the only right way to heaven. Now five of them were prudent and wise; and five were foolish and unwise, for they had not the forethought to fill their vessels with oil, remaining destitute of righteousness. Now by these He signifies those who strive to come to the boundaries of virginity, and who strain every nerve to fulfil this love, acting virtuously and temperately, and who profess and boast that this is their aim; but who, making light of it, and being subdued by the changes of the world, come rather to be sketches of the shadowy image of virtue, than workers who represent the living truth itself.

Chapter III.--The Same Endeavour and Effort After Virginity, with a Different Result.

Now when it is said [2664] that "the kingdom of heaven is likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom," this means that the same way towards the goal had been entered upon, as is shown by the mark X. [2665] By profession they had equally proposed the same end, and therefore they are called ten, since, as I have said, they chose the same profession; but they did not, for all that, go forth in the same way to meet the bridegroom. For some provided abundant future nourishment for their lamps which were fed with oil, but others were careless, thinking only of the present. And, therefore, they are divided into two equal numbers of five, inasmuch as the one class preserved the five senses, which most people consider the gates of wisdom, pure and undefiled by sins; but the others, on the contrary, corrupted them by multitudes of sins, defiling themselves with evil. For having restrained them, and kept them free from righteousness, they bore a more abundant crop of transgressions, in consequence of which it came to pass that they were forbidden, and shut out from the divine courts. For whether, on the one hand, we do right, or, on the other, do wrong through these senses, our habits of good and evil are confirmed. And as Thallousa said that there is a chastity of the eyes, and of the ears, and of the tongue, and so on of the other senses; so here she who keeps inviolate the faith of the five pathways of virtue -- sight, taste, smell, touch, and hearing -- is called by the name of the five virgins, because she has kept the five forms of the sense pure to Christ, as a lamp, causing the light of holiness to shine forth clearly from each of them. For the flesh is truly, as it were, our five-lighted lamp, which the soul will bear like a torch, when it stands before Christ the Bridegroom, on the day of the resurrection, showing her faith springing out clear and bright through all the senses, as He Himself taught, saying, [2666] "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I if it be already kindled?" meaning by the earth our bodies, in which He wished the swift-moving and fiery operation of His doctrine to be kindled. Now the oil represents wisdom and righteousness; for while the soul rains down unsparingly, and pours forth these things upon the body, the light of virtue is kindled unquenchably, making its good actions to shine before men, so that our Father which is in heaven may be glorified. [2667]

Chapter IV.--What the Oil in the Lamps Means.

Now they offered, in Leviticus, [2668] oil of this kind, "pure oil olive, beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn continually, without the veil...before the Lord." But they were commanded to have a feeble light from the evening to the morning. For their light seemed to resemble the prophetic word, which gives encouragement to temperance, being nourished by the acts and the faith of the people. But the temple (in which the light was kept burning) refers to "the lot of their inheritance," [2669] inasmuch as a light can shine in only one house. Therefore it was necessary that it should be lighted before day. For he says, [2670] "they shall burn it until the morning," that is, until the coming of Christ. But the Sun of chastity and of righteousness having arisen, there is no need of other light. So long, then, as this people treasured up nourishment for the light, supplying oil by their works, the light of continence was not extinguished among them, but was ever shining and giving light in the "lot of their inheritance." But when the oil failed, by their turning away from the faith to incontinence, the light was entirely extinguished, so that the virgins have again to kindle their lamps by light transmitted from one to another, bringing the light of incorruption to the world from above. Let us then supply now the oil of good works abundantly, and of prudence, being purged from all corruption which would weigh us down; lest, while the Bridegroom tarries, our lamps may also in like manner be extinguished. For the delay is the interval which precedes the appearing of Christ. Now the slumbering and sleeping of the virgins signifies the departure from life; and the midnight is the kingdom of Antichrist, during which the destroying angel passes over the houses. [2671] But the cry which was made when it was said, [2672] "Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him," is the voice which shall be heard from heaven, and the trumpet, when the saints, all their bodies being raised, shall be caught up, and shall go on the clouds to meet the Lord. [2673] For it is to be observed that the word of God says, that after the cry all the virgins arose, that is, that the dead shall be raised after the voice which comes from heaven, as also Paul intimates, [2674] that "the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first;" that is the tabernacles, [2675] for they died, being put off by their souls. "Then we which are alive shall be caught up together with them," meaning our souls. [2676] For we truly who are alive are the souls which, with the bodies, having put them on again, shall go to meet Him in the clouds, bearing our lamps trimmed, not with anything alien and worldly, but like stars radiating the light of prudence and continence, full of ethereal splendour.

Chapter V.--The Reward of Virginitv.

These, O fair virgins, are the orgies of our mysteries; these the mystic rites of those who are initiated in virginitv; these the "undefiled rewards" [2677] of the conflict of virginitv. I am betrothed to the Word, and receive as a reward the eternal crown of immortality and riches from the Father; and I triumph in eternity, crowned with the bright and unfading flowers of wisdom. I am one in the choir with Christ dispensing His rewards in heaven, around the unbeginning and never-ending King. I have become the torch-bearer of the unapproachable lights, [2678] and I join with their company in the new song of the archangels, showing forth the new grace of the Church; for the Word says that the company of virgins always follow the Lord, and have fellowship with Him wherever He is. And this is what John signifies in the commemoration of the hundred and forty-four thousand. [2679] Go then, ye virgin band of the new ages. Go, fill your vessels with righteousness, for the hour is coming when ye must rise and meet the bridegroom. Go, lightly leaving on one side the fascinations and the pleasures of life, which confuse and bewitch the soul; and thus shall ye attain the promises, "This I swear by Him who has shown me the way of life." This crown, woven by the prophets, I have taken from the prophetic meadows, and offer to thee, O Arete. Agathe having thus admirably brought her discourse to an end, she said, and having been applauded for what she had uttered, Arete again commanded Procilla to speak. And she, rising and passing before the entrance, spoke thus.

Chapter I.--What the True and Seemly Manner of Praising; The Father

Greater Than the Son, Not in Substance, But in Order; Virginitie the Lily; Faithful Souls and Virgins, the One Bride of the One Christ. It is not lawful for me to delay, O Arete, after such discourses, seeing that I confide undoubtingly in the manifold wisdom of God, which gives richly and widely to whomsoever it wills. For sailors who have experience of the sea declare that the same wind blows on all who sail; and that different persons, managing their course differently, strive to reach different ports. Some have a fair wind; to others it blows across their course; and yet both easily accomplish their voyage. Now, in the same way, the "understanding Spirit, [2680] holy, one only," [2681] gently breathing down from the treasures of the Father above, giving us all the clear fair wind of knowledge, will suffice to guide the course of our words without offence. And now it is time for me to speak. This, O virgins, is the one true and seemly mode of praising, when he who praises brings forward a witness better than all those who are praised. For thence one may learn with certainty that the commendation is given not from favour, nor of necessity, nor from repute, but in accordance with truth and an unflattering judgment. And so the prophets and apostles, who spoke more fully concerning the Son of God, and assigned to Him a divinity above other men, did not refer their praises of Him to the teaching of angels, but to Him upon whom all authority and power depend. For it was fitting that He who was greater than all things after the Father, should have the Father, who alone is greater than Himself, [2682] as His witness. And so I will not bring forward the praises of virginity from mere human report, but from Him who cares for us, and who has taken up the whole matter, showing that He is the husbandman of this grace, and a lover of its beauty, and a fitting witness. And this is quite clear, in the Song of Songs, [2683] to any one who is willing to see it, where Christ Himself, praising those who are firmly established in virginity, says, [2684] "As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters;" comparing the grace of chastity to the lily, on account of its purity and fragrance, and sweetness and joyousness. For chastity is like a spring flower, always softly exhaling immortality from its white petals. Therefore He is not ashamed to confess that He loves the beauty of its prime, in the following words: [2685] "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices! Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb; honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon. A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed." These praises does Christ proclaim to those who have come to the boundaries of virginity, describing them all under the one name of His spouse; for the spouse must be betrothed to the Bridegroom, and called by His name. And, moreover, she must be undefiled and unpolluted, as a garden sealed, in which all the odours of the fragrance of heaven are grown, that Christ alone may come and gather them, blooming with incorporeal seeds. For the Word loves none of the things of the flesh, because He is not of such a nature as to be contented with any of the things which are corruptible, as hands, or face, or feet; but He looks upon and delights in the beauty which is

immaterial and spiritual, not touching the beauty of the body.

Chapter II.--The Interpretation of that Passage of the Canticles.

Consider now, O virgins, that, in saying to the bride, "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse," He shows the clear eye of the understanding, when the inner man has cleansed it and looks more clearly upon the truth. For it is clear to every one that there is a twofold power of sight, the one of the soul, and the other of the body. But the Word does not profess a love for that of the body, but only that of the understanding, saying, "Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck;" which means, By the most lovely sight of thy mind, thou hast urged my heart to love, radiating forth from within the glorious beauty of chastity. Now the chains of the neck are necklaces which are composed of various precious stones; and the souls which take care of the body, place around the outward neck of the flesh this visible ornament to deceive those who behold; but those who live chastely, on the other hand, adorn themselves within with ornaments truly composed of various precious stones, namely, of freedom, of magnanimity, of wisdom, and of love, caring little for those temporal decorations which, like leaves blossoming for an hour, dry up with the changes of the body. For there is seen in man a twofold beauty, of which the Lord accepts that which is within and is immortal, saying, "Thou hast ravished my heart with one chain of thy neck;" meaning to show that He had been drawn to love by the splendour of the inner man shining forth in its glory, even as the Psalmist also testifies, saying, "The King's daughter is all glorious within." [2687]

Chapter III.--Virgins Being Martyrs First Among the Companions of Christ.

Let no one suppose that all the remaining company of those who have believed are condemned, thinking that we who are virgins alone shall be led on to attain the promises, not understanding that there shall be tribes and families and orders, according to the analogy of the faith of each. And this Paul, too, sets forth, saying, [2688] "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead." And the Lord does not profess to give the same honours to all; but to some He promises that they shall be numbered in the kingdom of heaven, to others the inheritance of the earth, and to others to see the Father. [2689] And here, also, He announces that the order and holy choir of the virgins shall first enter in company with Him into the rest of the new dispensation, as into a bridal chamber. For they were martyrs, not as bearing the pains of the body for a little moment of time, but as enduring them through all their life, not shrinking from truly wrestling in an Olympian contest for the prize of chastity; but resisting the fierce torments of pleasures and fears and griefs, and the other evils of the iniquity of men, they first of all carry off the prize, taking their place in the higher rank of those who receive the promise. Undoubtedly these are the souls whom the Word calls alone His chosen spouse and His sister, but the rest concubines and virgins and daughters, speaking thus: [2690] "There are threescore queens and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number. My dove, my undefiled, is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her: the daughters saw her and blessed her: yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her." For there being plainly many daughters of the Church, one alone is the chosen and most precious in her eyes above all, namely, the order of virgins.

Chapter IV.--The Passage Explained; The Queens, the Holy Souls Before the Deluge; The Concubines, the Souls of the Prophets; The Divine Seed for Spiritual Offspring in the Books of the Prophets; The Nuptials of the Word in the Prophets as Though Clandesti

Now if any one should have a doubt about these things, inasmuch as the points are nowhere fully wrought out, and should still wish more fully to perceive their spiritual significance, namely, what the queens and the concubines and the virgins are, we will say that these may have been spoken concerning those who have been conspicuous for their righteousness from the beginning throughout the progress of time; as of those before the flood, and those after the flood, and so on of those after Christ. The Church, then, is the spouse. The queens are those royal souls before the deluge, who became well-pleasing to God, that is, those about Abel and Seth and Enoch. The concubines [2692] those after the flood, namely, those of the prophets, in whom, before the Church was betrothed to the Lord, being united to them after the manner of concubines, He sowed true words in an incorrupt and pure philosophy, so that, conceiving faith, they might bring forth to Him the Spirit of salvation. For such fruits do the souls bring forth with whom Christ has had intercourse, fruits which bear an ever-memorable renown. For if you will look at the books of Moses, or David, or Solomon, or Isaiah, or of the prophets who follow, O virgins, you will see what offspring they have left, for the saving of life, from their intercourse with the Son of God. Hence the Word has with deep perception called the souls of the prophets concubines, because He did not espouse them openly, as He did the Church, having killed for her the fatted calf. [2693]

Chapter V.--The Sixty Queens: Why Sixty, and Why Queens; The Excellence of the Saints of the First Age.

In addition to these matters, there is this also to be considered, so that nothing may escape us of things which are necessary, why He said that the queens were sixty, and the concubines eighty, and the virgins so numerous as not to be counted from their multitude, but the spouse one. And first let us speak of the sixty. I imagine that He named under the sixty queens, those who had pleased God from the first-made man in succession to Noah, for this reason, since these had no need of precepts and laws for their salvation, the creation of the world in six days being still recent. For they remembered that in six days God formed the creation, and those things which were made in paradise; and how man, receiving a command not to touch [2694] the tree of knowledge, ran aground, the author of evil having led him astray. [2695] Thence he gave the symbolical name of sixty queens to those souls who, from the creation of the world, in succession chose God as the object of their love, and were almost, so to speak, the offspring of the first age, and neighbours of the great six days' work, from their having been born, as I said, immediately after the six days. For these had great honour, being associated with the angels, and often seeing God manifested visibly, and not in a dream. For consider what confidence Seth had towards God, and Abel, and Enos, and Enoch, and Methuselah, and Noah, the first lovers of righteousness, and the first of the first-born children who are written in heaven, [2696] being thought worthy of the kingdom, as a kind of first-fruits of the plants for salvation, coming out as early fruit to God. And so much may suffice concerning these.

Chapter VI.--The Eighty Concubines, What; The Knowledge of the Incarnation Communicated to the Prophets.

It still remains to speak concerning the concubines. To those who lived after the deluge the knowledge of God was henceforth more remote, and they needed other instruction to ward off the evil, and to be their helper, since idolatry was already creeping in. Therefore God, that the race of man might not be wholly destroyed, through forgetfulness of the things which were good, commanded His own Son to reveal to the prophets His own future appearance in the world by the flesh, in which the joy and knowledge of the spiritual eighth day [2697] shall be proclaimed, which would bring the remission of sins and the resurrection, and that thereby the passions and corruptions of men would be circumcised. And, therefore, He called by the name of the eighty virgins the list of the prophets from Abraham, on account of the dignity of circumcision, which embraces the number eight, in accordance with which also the law is framed; because they first, before the Church was espoused to the Word, received the divine seed, and foretold the circumcision of the spiritual eighth day.

Chapter VII.--The Virgins, the Righteous Ancients; The Church, the One Only Spouse, More Excellent Than the Others.

Now he calls by the name of virgins, who belong to a countless assembly, those who, being inferior to the better ones, have practised righteousness, and have striven against sin with youthful and noble energy. But of these, neither the queens, nor the concubines, nor the virgins, are compared to the Church. For she is reckoned the perfect and chosen one beyond all these, consisting and composed of all the apostles, the Bride who surpasses all in the beauty of youth and virginity. Therefore, also, she is blessed and praised by all, because she saw and heard freely what those desired to see, even for a little time, and saw not, and to hear, but heard not. For "blessed," said our Lord to His disciples, [2699] "are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." For this reason, then, the prophets count them blessed, and admire them, because the Church was thought worthy to participate in those things which they did not attain to hear or see. For "there are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number. My dove, my undefiled, is but one." [2700]

Chapter VIII.--The Human Nature of Christ His One Dove.

Can any one now say otherwise than that the Bride is the undefiled flesh of the Lord, for the sake of which He left the Father and came down here, and was joined to it, and, being incarnate, dwelt in it? Therefore He called it figuratively a dove, because that creature is tame and domestic, and readily adapts itself to man's mode of life. For she alone, so to speak, was found spotless and undefiled, and excelling all in the glory and beauty of righteousness, so that none of those who had pleased God most perfectly could stand near to her in a comparison of virtue. And for this reason she was thought worthy to become a partaker of the kingdom of the Only-begotten, being betrothed and united to Him. And in the forty-fourth psalm, [2701] the queen who, chosen out of many, stands at the right hand of God, clothed in the golden ornament of virtue, whose beauty the King desired, [2702] is, as I said, the undefiled and blessed flesh, which the Word Himself carried into the heavens, and presented at the right hand of God, "wrought about with divers colours," that is, in the pursuits of immortality, which he calls symbolically golden fringes. For since this garment is variegated and woven of various virtues, as chastity, prudence, faith, love, patience, and other good things, which, covering, as they do, the unseemliness of the flesh, adorn man with a golden ornament.

Chapter IX.--The Virgins Immediately After the Queen and Spouse.

Moreover, we must further consider what the Spirit delivers to us in the rest of the psalm, after the enthronization of the manhood assumed by the Word at the right hand of the Father. "The virgins," He says, [2703] "that be her fellows shall bear her company, and shall be brought unto thee. With joy and gladness shall they be brought, and shall enter into the King's palace." Now, here the Spirit seems quite plainly to praise virginity, next, as we have explained, to the Bride of the Lord, who promises that the virgins shall approach second to the Almighty with joy and gladness, guarded and escorted by angels. For so lovely and desirable is in truth the glory of virginity, that, next to the Queen, whom the Lord exalts, and presents in sinless glory to the Father, the choir and order of virgins bear her company, assigned to a place second to that of the Bride. Let these efforts of mine to speak to thee, O Arete, concerning chastity, be engraven on a monument. And Procilla having thus spoken, Thekla said, It is my turn after her to continue the contest; and I rejoice, since I too have the favouring wisdom of words, perceiving that I am, like a harp, inwardly attuned, and prepared to speak with elegance and propriety. Arete. I most willingly hail thy readiness, O Thekla, in which I confide to give me fitting discourse, in accordance with thy powers; since thou wilt yield to none in universal philosophy and instruction, instructed by Paul in what is fitting to say of evangelical and divine doctrine.

Chapter I.--Methodius' Derivation of the Word Virginité: Wholly

Divine; Virtue, in Greek -- arete, Whence So Called. Well, then, let us first say, beginning from the origin of the name, for what cause this supreme and blessed pursuit was called parthenia, what it aims at, what power it has, and afterwards, what fruits it gives forth. For almost all have been ignorant of this virtue as being superior to ten thousand other advantages of virtue which we cultivate for the purification and adornment of the soul. For virginity [2705] is divine by the change of one letter, [2706] as she alone makes him who has her, and is initiated by her incorruptible rites like unto God, than which it is impossible to find a greater good, removed, as it is, from pleasure and grief; and the wing of the soul sprinkled by it becomes stronger and lighter, accustomed daily to fly from human desires. For since the children of the wise have said that our life is a festival, and that we have come to exhibit in the theatre the drama of truth, that is, righteousness, the devil and the demons plotting and striving against us, it is necessary for us to look upwards and to take our flight aloft, and to flee from the blandishments of their tongues, and from their forms tinged with the outward appearance of temperance, more than from the Sirens of Homer. For many, bewitched by the pleasures of error, take their flight downwards, and are weighed down when they come into this life, their nerves being relaxed and unstrung, by means of which the power of the wings of temperance is strengthened, lightening the downward tendency of the corruption of the body. Whence, O Arete, whether thou hast thy name, signifying virtue, because thou art worthy of being chosen [2707] for thyself, or because thou raisest [2708] and liftest up to heaven, ever going in the purest minds, come, give me thy help in my discourse, which thou hast thyself appointed me to speak.

Chapter II.--The Lofty Mind and Constancy of the Sacred Virgins; The Introduction of Virgins into the Blessed Abodes Before Others.

Those who take a downward flight, and fall into pleasures, do not desist from grief and labours until, through their passionate desires, they fulfil the want of their intemperance, and, being degraded and shut out from the sanctuary, they are removed from the scene of truth, and, instead of procreating children with modesty and temperance, they rave in the wild pleasures of unlawful amours. But those who, on light wing, ascend into the supramundane life, and see from afar what other men do not see, the very pastures of immortality, bearing in abundance flowers of inconceivable beauty, are ever turning themselves again to the spectacles there; and, for this reason, those things are thought small which are here considered noble -- such as wealth, and glory, and birth, and marriage; and they think no more of those things. [2709] But yet if any of them should choose to give up their bodies to wild beasts or to fire, and be punished, they are ready to have no care for pains, for the desire of them or the fear of them; so that they seem, while in the world, not to be in the world, but to have already reached, in thought and in the tendency of their desires, the assembly of those who are in heaven. Now it is not right that the wing of virginity should, by its own nature, be weighed down upon the earth, but that it should soar upwards to heaven, to a pure atmosphere, and to the life which is akin to that of angels. Whence also they, first of all, after their call and departure hence, who have rightly and faithfully contended as virgins for Christ, bear away the prize of victory, being crowned by Him with the flowers of immortality. For, as soon as their souls have left the world, it is said that the angels meet them with much rejoicing, and conduct them to the very pastures already spoken of, to which also they were longing to come, contemplating them in imagination from afar, when, while they were yet dwelling in their bodies, they appeared to them divine.

Chapter III.--The Lot and Inheritance of Virginity.

Furthermore, when they have come hither, they see wonderful and glorious and blessed things of beauty, and such as cannot be spoken to men. They see there righteousness itself and prudence, and love itself, and truth and temperance, and other flowers and plants of wisdom, equally splendid, of which we here behold only the shadows [2710] and apparitions, as in dreams, and think that they consist of the actions of men, because there is no clear image of them here, but only dim copies, which themselves we see often when making dark copies of them. For never has any one seen with his eyes the greatness or the form or the beauty of righteousness itself, or of understanding, or of peace; but there, in Him whose name is I AM, [2711] they are seen perfect and clear, as they are. For there is a tree of temperance itself, and of love, and of understanding, as there are plants of the fruits which grow here -- as of grapes, the pomegranate, and of apples; and so, too, the fruits of those trees are gathered and eaten, and do not perish and wither, but those who gather them grow to immortality and a likeness to God. Just as he from whom all are descended, before the fall and the blinding of his eyes, being in paradise, enjoyed its fruits, God appointing man to dress and to keep the plants of wisdom. For it was entrusted to the first Adam to cultivate those fruits. Now Jeremiah saw that these things exist specially in a certain place, removed to a great distance from our world, where, compassionating those who have fallen from that good state, he says: [2712] "Learn where is wisdom, where is strength, where is understanding; that thou mayest know also where is length of days, and life, where is the light of the eyes, and peace. Who hath found out her place? or who hath come into her treasures?" The virgins having entered into the treasures of these things, gather the reasonable fruits of the virtues, sprinkled with manifold and well-ordered lights, which, like a fountain, God throws up over them, irradiating that state with unquenchable lights. And they sing harmoniously, giving glory to God. For a pure atmosphere is shed over them, and one which is not oppressed by the sun.

Chapter IV.--Exhortation to the Cultivation of Virginity; A Passage from the Apocalypse is Proposed to Be Examined.

Now, then, O Virgins, daughters of undefiled temperance, let us strive for a life of blessedness and the kingdom of heaven. And do ye unite with those before you in an earnest desire for the same glory of chastity, caring little for the things of this life. For immortality and chastity do not contribute a little to happiness, raising up the flesh aloft, and drying up its moisture and its clay-like weight, by a greater force of attraction. And let not the uncleanness which you hear creep in and weigh you down to the earth; nor let sorrow transform your joy, melting away your hopes in better things; but shake off incessantly the calamities which come upon you, not defiling your mind with lamentations. Let faith conquer wholly, and let its light drive away the visions of evil which crowd around the heart. For, as when the moon brightly shining fills the heaven with its light, and all the air becomes clear, but suddenly the clouds from the west, enviously rushing in, for a little while overshadow its light, but do not destroy it, since they are immediately driven away by a blast of the wind; so ye also, when causing the light of chastity to shine in the world, although pressed upon by afflictions and labours, do not grow weary and abandon your hopes. For the clouds which come from the Evil One are driven away by the Spirit, [2714] if ye, like your Mother, who gives birth to the male Virgin in heaven, fear nothing the serpent that lies in wait and plots against you; concerning whom I intend to discourse to you more plainly; for it is now time. John, in the course of the Apocalypse, says: [2715] "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: and she, being with child, cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man-child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to His throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days." So far we have given, in brief, the history of the woman and the dragon. But to search out and explain the solution of them is beyond my powers. Nevertheless, let me venture, trusting in Him who commanded to search the Scriptures. [2716] If, then, you agree with this, it will not be difficult to undertake it; for you will quite pardon me, if I am unable sufficiently to explain the exact meaning of the Scripture.

Chapter V.--The Woman Who Brings Forth, to Whom the Dragon is Opposed, the Church; Her Adornment and Grace.

The woman who appeared in heaven clothed with the sun, and crowned with twelve stars, and having the moon for her footstool, and being with child, and travailing in birth, is certainly, according to the accurate interpretation, our mother, [2717] O virgins, being a power by herself distinct from her children; whom the prophets, according to the aspect of their subjects, have called sometimes Jerusalem, sometimes a Bride, sometimes Mount Zion, and sometimes the Temple and Tabernacle of God. For she is the power which is desired to give light in the prophet, the Spirit crying to her: [2718] "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see; all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side." It is the Church whose children shall come to her with all speed after the resurrection, running to her from all quarters. She rejoices receiving the light which never goes down, and clothed with the brightness of the Word as with a robe. For with what other more precious or honourable ornament was it becoming that the queen should be adorned, to be led as a Bride to the Lord, when she had received a garment of light, and therefore was called by the Father? Come, then, let us go forward in our discourse, and look upon this marvelous woman as upon virgins prepared for a marriage, pure and undefiled, perfect and radiating a permanent beauty, wanting nothing of the brightness of light; and instead of a dress, clothed with light itself; and instead of precious stones, her head adorned with shining stars. For instead of the clothing which we have, she had light; and for gold and brilliant stones, she had stars; but stars not such as those which are set in the invisible heaven, but better and more resplendent, so that those may rather be considered as their images and likenesses.

Chapter VI.--The Works of the Church, the Bringing Forth of Children in Baptism; The Moon in Baptism, the Full Moon of Christ's Passion.

Now the statement that she stands upon the moon, as I consider, denotes the faith of those who are cleansed from corruption in the laver of regeneration, because the light of the moon has more resemblance to tepid water, and all moist substance is dependent upon her. The Church, then, stands upon our faith and adoption, under the figure of the moon, until the fulness of the nations come in, labouring and bringing forth natural men as spiritual men; for which reason too she is a mother. For just as a woman receiving the unformed seed of a man, within a certain time brings forth a perfect man, in the same way, one should say, does the Church conceive those who flee to the Word, and, forming them according to the likeness and form of Christ, after a certain time produce them as citizens of that blessed state. Whence it is necessary that she should stand upon the laver, bringing forth those who are washed in it. And in this way the power which she has in connection with the laver is called the moon, [2719] because the regenerate shine being renewed with a new ray, [2720] that is, a new light. Whence, also, they are by a descriptive term called newly-enlightened; [2721] the moon ever showing forth anew to them the spiritual full moon, namely, the period and the memorial of the passion, until the glory and the perfect light of the great day arise.

Chapter VII.--The Child of the Woman in the Apocalypse Not Christ, But the Faithful Who are Born in the Laver.

If any one, for there is no difficulty in speaking distinctly, should be vexed, and reply to what we have said: "But how, O virgins, can this explanation seem to you to be according to the mind of Scripture, when the Apocalypse plainly defines that the Church brings forth a male, while you teach that her labour-pains have their fulfilment in those who are washed in the laver?" We will answer, But, O faultfinder, not even to you will it be possible to show that Christ Himself [2722] is the one who is born. For long before the Apocalypse, the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word was fulfilled. And John speaks concerning things present and things to come. But Christ, long ago conceived, was not caught up to the throne of God when He was brought forth, from fear of the serpent injuring Him. But for this was He begotten, and Himself came down from the throne of the Father, that He should remain and subdue the dragon who made an assault upon the flesh. So that you also must confess that the Church labours and gives birth to those who are baptized. As the spirit says somewhere in Isaiah: [2723] "Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man-child. Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children." [2724] From whom did he flee? Surely from the dragon, that the spiritual Zion might bear a masculine people, who should come back from the passions and weakness of women to the unity of the Lord, and grow strong in manly virtue.

Chapter VIII.--The Faithful in Baptism Males, Configured to Christ; The Saints Themselves Christs.

Let us then go over the ground again from the beginning, until we come in course to the end, explaining what we have said. Consider if the passage seems to you to be explained to your mind. For I think that the Church is here said to give birth to a male; since the enlightened [2725] receive the features, and the image, and the manliness of Christ, the likeness of the form of the Word being stamped upon them, and begotten in them by a true knowledge and faith, so that in each one Christ is spiritually born. And, therefore, the Church swells and travails in birth until Christ is formed in us, [2726] so that each of the saints, by partaking of Christ, has been born a Christ. According to which meaning it is said in a certain scripture, [2727] "Touch not mine anointed, [2728] and do my prophets no harm," as though those who were baptized into Christ had been made Christs [2729] by communication of the Spirit, the Church contributing here their clearness and transformation into the image of the Word. And Paul confirms this, teaching it plainly, where he says: [2730] "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." For it is necessary that the word of truth should be imprinted and stamped upon the souls of the regenerate.

Chapter IX.--The Son of God, Who Ever Is, is To-Day Begotten in the Minds and Sense of the Faithful.

Now, in perfect agreement and correspondence with what has been said, seems to be this which was spoken by the Father from above to Christ when He came to be baptized in the water of the Jordan, "Thou art my son: this day have I begotten thee;" [2731] for it is to be remarked that He was declared to be His Son unconditionally, and without regard to time; for He says "Thou art," and not "Thou hast become," showing that He had neither recently attained to the relation of Son, nor again, having begun before, after this had an end, but having been previously begotten, [2732] that He was to be, and was the same. But the expression, "This day have I begotten thee," signifies that He willed that He who existed before the ages in heaven should be begotten on the earth -- that is, that He who was before unknown should be made known. Now, certainly, Christ has never yet been born in those men who have never perceived the manifold wisdom of God -- that is, has never been known, has never been manifested, has never appeared to them. But if these also should perceive the mystery of grace, then in them too, when they were converted and believed, He would be born in knowledge and understanding. Therefore from hence the Church is fitly said to form and beget the male Word in those who are cleansed. [2733] So far I have spoken according to my ability concerning the travail of the Church; and here we must change to the subject of the dragon and the other matters. Let us endeavour, then, to explain it in some measure, not deterred by the greatness of the obscurity of the Scripture; and if anything difficult comes to be considered, I will again help you to cross it like a river.

Chapter X.--The Dragon, the Devil; The Stars Struck from Heaven by the Tail of the Dragon, Heretics; The Numbers of the Trinity, that Is, the Persons Numbered; Errors Concerning Them.

The dragon, which is great, and red, and cunning, and manifold, and seven-headed, and horned, and draws down the third part of the stars, and stands ready to devour the child of the woman who is travailing, is the devil, who lies in wait to destroy the Christ-accepted mind of the baptized, and the image and clear features of the Word which had been brought forth in them. But he misses and fails of his prey, the regenerate being caught up on high to the throne of God -- that is, the mind of those who are renovated is lifted up around the divine seat and the basis of truth against which there is no stumbling, being taught to look upon and regard the things which are there, so that it may not be deceived by the dragon weighing them down. For it is not allowed to him to destroy those whose thoughts and looks are upwards. And the stars, which the dragon touched with the end of his tail, and drew them down to earth, are the bodies of heresies; for we must say that the stars, which are dark, obscure, and falling, are the assemblies of the heterodox; since they, too, wish to be acquainted with the heavenly ones, and to have believed in Christ, and to have the seat of their soul in heaven, and to come near to the stars as children of light. But they are dragged down, being shaken out by the folds of the dragon, because they did not remain within the triangular forms of godliness, falling away from it with respect to an orthodox service. Whence also they are called the third part of the stars, as having gone astray with regard to one of the three Persons of the Trinity. As when they say, like Sabellios, that the Almighty Person of the Father Himself suffered; [2734] or as when they say, like Artemas, that the Person of the Son was born and manifested only in appearance; [2735] or when they contend, like the Ebionites, that the prophets spoke of the Person of the Spirit, of their own motion. For of Marcion and Valentinus, and those about Elkesaios and others, it is better not even to make mention.

Chapter XI.--The Woman with the Male Child in the Wilderness the Church; The Wilderness Belongs to Virgins and Saints; The Perfection of Numbers and Mysteries; The Equality and Perfection of the Number Six; The Number Six Related to Christ; From This Numb

Now she who brings forth, and has brought forth, the masculine Word in the hearts of the faithful, and who passed, undefiled and uninjured by the wrath of the beast, into the wilderness, is, as we have explained, our mother the Church. And the wilderness into which she comes, and is nourished for a thousand two hundred and sixty days, which is truly waste and unfruitful of evils, and barren of corruption, and difficult of access and of transit to the multitude; but fruitful and abounding in pasture, and blooming and easy of access to the holy, and full of wisdom, and productive of life, is this most lovely, and beautifully wooded and well-watered abode of Arete. [2736] Here the south wind awakes, and the north wind blows, and the spices flow out, [2737] and all things are filled with refreshing dews, and crowned with the unfading plants of immortal life; in which we now gather flowers, and weave with sacred fingers the purple and glorious crown of virginity for the queen. For the Bride of the Word is adorned with the fruits of virtue. And the thousand two hundred and sixty days that we are staying here, O virgins, is the accurate and perfect understanding concerning the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit, in which our mother increases, and rejoices, and exults throughout this time, until the restitution of the new dispensation, when, coming into the assembly in the heavens, she will no longer contemplate the I AM through the means of human knowledge, but will clearly behold entering in together with Christ. For a thousand, [2738] consisting of a hundred multiplied by ten, embraces a full and perfect number, and is a symbol of the Father Himself, who made the universe by Himself, and rules all things for Himself. Two hundred embraces two perfect numbers united together, and is the symbol of the Holy Spirit, since He is the Author of our knowledge of the Son and the Father. But sixty has the number six multiplied by ten, and is a symbol of Christ, because the number six proceeding [2739] from unity is composed of its proper parts, so that nothing in it is wanting or redundant, and is complete when resolved into its parts. Thus it is necessary that the number six, when it is divided into even parts by even parts, should again make up the same quantity from its separated segments. [2740] For, first, if divided equally, it makes three; then, if divided into three parts, it makes two; and again, if divided by six, it makes one, and is again collected into itself. For when divided into twice three, and three times two, and six times one, when the three and the two and the one are put together, they complete the six again. But everything is of necessity perfect which neither needs anything else in order to its completion, nor has anything over. Of the other numbers, some are more than perfect, as twelve. For the half of it is six, and the third four, and the fourth three, and the sixth two, and the twelfth one. The numbers into which it can be divided, when put together, exceed twelve, this number not having preserved itself equal to its parts, like the number six. And those which are imperfect, are numbers like eight. For the half of it is four, and the fourth two, and the eighth one. Now the numbers into which it is divided, when put together,

make seven, and one is wanting to its completion, not being in all points harmonious with itself, like six, which has reference to the Son of God, who came from the fulness of the Godhead into a human life. For having emptied Himself, [2741] and taken upon Him the form of a slave, He was restored again to His former perfection and dignity. For He being humbled, and apparently degraded, was restored again from His humiliation and degradation to His former completeness and greatness, having never been diminished from His essential perfection. Moreover, it is evident that the creation of the world was accomplished in harmony with this number, God having made heaven and earth, and the things which are in them, in six days; the word of creative power containing the number six, in accordance with which the Trinity is the maker of bodies. For length, and breadth, and depth make up a body. And the number six is composed of triangles. On these subjects, however, there is not sufficient time at present to enlarge with accuracy, for fear of letting the main subject slip, in considering that which is secondary.

Chapter XII.--Virgins are Called to the Imitation of the Church in the Wilderness Overcoming the Dragon.

The Church, then, coming hither into this wilderness, a place unproductive of evils, is nourished, flying on the heavenward wings of virginity, which the Word called the "wings of great eagle," [2742] having conquered the serpent, and driven away from her full moon the wintry clouds. It is for the sake of these things, meanwhile, that all these discourses are held, teaching us, O fair virgins, to imitate according to our strength our mother, and not to be troubled by the pains and changes and afflictions of life, that you may enter in exulting with her into the bride-chamber, showing your lamps. Do not, therefore, lose courage on account of the schemes and slanders of the beast, but bravely prepare for the battle, armed with the helmet of salvation, [2743] and the breastplate, and the greaves. For you will bring upon him an immense consternation when you attack him with great advantage and courage; nor will he at all resist, seeing his adversaries set in array by One more powerful; but the many-headed and many-faced beast will immediately allow you to carry off the spoils of the seven contests: -- "Lion in front, but dragon all behind, And in the midst a she-goat breathing forth Profuse the violence of flaming fire. Her slew Bellerophon in truth. And this Slew Christ the King; for many she destroyed, Nor could they bear the fetid foam which burst From out the fountain of her horrid jaws;" [2744] unless Christ had first weakened and overcome her, making her powerless and contemptible before us.

Chapter XIII.--The Seven Crowns of the Beast to Be Taken Away by Victorious Chastity; The Ten Crowns of the Dragon, the Vices Opposed to the Decalogue; The Opinion of Fate the Greatest Evil.

Therefore, taking to you a masculine and sober mind, oppose your armour to the swelling beast, and do not at all give way, nor be troubled because of his fury. For you will have immense glory if you overcome him, and take away the seven crowns which are upon him, on account of which we have to struggle and wrestle, according to our teacher Paul. For she who having first overcome the devil, and destroyed his seven heads, becomes possessed of the seven crowns of virtue, having gone through the seven great struggles of chastity. For incontinence and luxury is a head of the dragon; and whoever bruises this is wreathed with the crown of temperance. Cowardice and weakness is also a head; and he who treads upon this carries off the crown of martyrdom. Unbelief and folly, and other similar fruits of wickedness, is another head; and he who has overcome these and destroyed them carries off the honours connected with them, the power of the dragon being in many ways rooted up. Moreover, the ten horns and stings which he was said to have upon his heads are the ten opposites, O virgins, to the Decalogue, by which he was accustomed to gore and cast down the souls of many imagining and contriving things in opposition to the law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," [2745] and to the other precepts which follow. Consider now the fiery and bitter horn of fornication, by which he casts down the incontinent; consider adultery, consider falsehood, covetousness, theft, and the other sister and related vices, which flourish by nature around his murderous heads, which if you root out with the aid of Christ, you will receive, as it were, divine heads, and will bloom with the crowns gained from the dragon. For it is our duty to prefer and to set forward the best things, who have received, above the earth-born, a commanding and voluntary mind, and one free from all necessity, so as to make choice like masters of the things which please us, not being in bondage to fate or fortune. And so no man would be master of himself and good, unless selecting the human example of Christ, and bringing himself to the likeness of Him, he should imitate Him in his manner of life. For of all evils the greatest which is implanted in many is that which refers the causes of sins to the motions of the stars, and says that our life is guided by the necessities of fate, as those say who study the stars, with much insolence. For they, trusting more in guessing than in prudence, that is, in something between truth and falsehood, go far astray from the sight of things as they are. Whence, if you permit me, O Arete, now that I have completed the discourse which you, my mistress, appointed to be spoken, I will endeavour, with your assistance and favour, to examine carefully the position of those who are offended, and deny that we speak the truth, when we say that man is possessed of free-will, and prove that "They perish self-destroyed, By their own fault," [2746] choosing the pleasant in preference to the expedient. Arete. I do permit you and assist you; for your discourse will be perfectly adorned when you have added this to it.

Chapter XIV.--The Doctrine of Mathematicians Not Wholly to Be Despised, When They are Concerned About the Knowledge of the Stars; The Twelve Signs of the Zodiac Mythical Names.

Thekla. Resuming then, let us first lay bare, in speaking of those things according to our power, the imposture of those who boast as though they alone had comprehended from what forms the heaven is arranged, in accordance with the hypothesis of the Chaldeans and Egyptians. For they say that the circumference of the world is likened to the turnings of a well-rounded globe, the earth having a central point. For its outline being spherical, it is necessary, they say, since there are the same distances of the parts, that the earth should be the centre of the universe, around which, as being older, the heaven is whirling. For if a circumference is described from the central point, which seems to be a circle, -- for it is impossible for a circle to be described without a point, and it is impossible for a circle to be without a point, -- surely the earth consisted before all, they say, in a state of chaos and disorganization. Now certainly the wretched ones were overwhelmed in the chaos of error, "because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened;" [2747] and their wise men said that nothing earth-born was more honourable or more ancient than the Olympians. Whence they are not mere children who know Christ, like the Greeks, who, burying the truth in fables and fictions, rather than in artistic words, ascribing human calamities to the heavens, are not ashamed to describe the circumference of the world by geometrical theorems and figures, and explain that the heaven is adorned with the images of birds and of animals that live in water and on dry land, and that the qualities of the stars were made from the calamities of the men of old, so that the movements of the planets, in their opinion, depended upon the same kind of bodies. And they say that the stars revolve around the nature of the twelve signs of the Zodiac, being drawn along by the passage of the circle of the Zodiac, so that through their intermingling they see the things which happen to many, according to their conjunctions and departures, their rising and setting. For the whole heaven being spherical, and having the earth for its central point, as they think, [2748] because all the straight lines from the circumference falling upon the earth are equal to one another, holds back from the circles which surround it, of which the meridian is the greatest; and the second, which divides it into two equal parts, is the horizon; and the third, which separates these, the equinoctial; and on each side of this the two tropics, the summer and the winter -- the one on the north, and the other on the south. Beyond is that which is called the axis, around which are the greater and lesser Bears, and beyond them is the tropic. And the Bears, turning about themselves, and weighing upon the axis, which passes through the poles, produce the motion of the whole world, having their heads against each other's loins, and being untouched by our horizon. Then they say that the Zodiac touches all the circles, making its movements diagonally, and that there are in it a number of signs, which are called the twelve signs of the Zodiac, beginning with the Ram, and going on to the Fishes, which, they say, were so determined from mythical causes; saying that it was the Ram that conveyed Helle, the daughter of Athamas, and her brother Phryxos into Scythia; and that the head of the Ox is in honour of Zeus,

who, in the form of a Bull, carried over Europe into Crete; and they say the circle called the Galaxy, or milky way, which reaches from the Fishes to the Ram, was poured forth for Herakles from the breasts of Hera, by the commands of Zeus. And thus, according to them, there was no natal destiny before Europe or Phryxos, and the Dioscuroi, [2749] and the other signs of the Zodiac, which were placed among the constellations, from men and beasts. But our ancestors lived without destiny. Let us endeavour now to crush falsehood, like physicians, taking its edge off, and quenching it with the healing medicine of words, here considering the truth.

Chapter XV.--Arguments from the Novelty of Fate and Generation; That Golden Age, Early Men; Solid Arguments Against the Mathematicians.

If it were better, O wretched ones, that man should be subject to the star of his birth, than that he should not, why was not his generation and birth from the very time when the race of man began to be? And if it was, what is the need of those which had lately been placed among the stars, of the Lion, the Crab, the Twins, the Virgin, the Bull, the Balance, the Scorpion, the Ram, the Archer, the Fishes, the Goat, the Watercarrier, Perseus, Cassiopeia, Cepheus, Pegasus, Hydra, the Raven, the Cup, the Lyre, the Dragon, and others, from which you introduce, by your instructions, many to the knowledge of mathematics, or, rather, to a knowledge which is anathema? [2750] Well, then, either there was generation among those before, and the removal of these creatures above was absurd; or else there was not, and God changed human life into a better state and government than that of those who before that lived an inferior life. But the ancients were better than those of the present time; whence theirs was called the golden age. There was then no natal destiny. If the sun, driving through the circles and passing along the signs of the Zodiac in his annual periods, accomplishes the changes and turnings of the seasons, how did those who were born before the signs of the Zodiac were placed among the stars, and the heaven was adorned with them, continue to exist, when summer, autumn, winter, and spring, were not as yet separated from each other, by means of which the body is increased and strengthened? But they did exist, and were longer lived and stronger than those who live now, since God then disposed the seasons in the same manner. The heaven was not then diversified by such shapes. If the sun and the moon and the other stars were made for the division and protection of the members of the time, [2751] and for the adornment of the heaven, and the changes of the seasons, they are divine, and better than men; for these must needs pass a better life, and a blessed and peaceful one, and one which far exceeds our own life in righteousness and virtue, observing a motion which is well-ordered and happy. But if they are the causes of the calamities and mischief of mortals, and busy themselves in working the lasciviousness, and the changes and vicissitudes of life, then they are more miserable than men, looking upon the earth, and their weak and lawless actions, and doing nothing better than men, if at least our life depends upon their revolutions and movements.

Chapter XVI.--Several Other Things Turned Against the Same Mathematicians.

If no action is performed without a previous desire, and there is no desire without a want, yet the Divine Being has no wants, and therefore has no conception of evil. And if the nature of the stars be nearer in order to that of God, being better than the virtue of the best men, then the stars also are neither productive of evil, nor in want. And besides, every one of those who are persuaded that the sun and moon and stars are divine, will allow that they are far removed from evil, and incapable of human actions which spring from the sense of pleasure and pain; for such abominable desires are unsuitable to heavenly beings. But if they are by nature exempt from these, and in no want of anything, how should they be the causes to men of those things which they do not will themselves, and from which they are exempt? Now those who decide that man is not possessed of free-will, and affirm that he is governed by the unavoidable necessities of fate, and her unwritten commands, are guilty of impiety towards God Himself, making Him out to be the cause and author of human evils. For if He harmoniously orders the whole circular motion of the stars, with a wisdom which man can neither express nor comprehend, directing the course of the universe; and the stars produce the qualities of virtue and vice in human life, dragging men to these things by the chains of necessity; then they declare God to be the Cause and Giver of evils. But God is the cause of injury to no one; therefore fate [2752] is not the cause of all things. Whoever has the least intelligence will confess that God is good, righteous, wise, true, helpful, not the cause of evils, free from passion, and everything of that kind. And if the righteous be better than the unrighteous, and unrighteousness be abominable to them, God, being righteous, rejoices in righteousness, and unrighteousness is hateful to Him, being opposed and hostile to righteousness. Therefore God is not the author of unrighteousness. If that which profits is altogether good, and temperance is profitable to one's house and life and friends, then temperance is good. And if temperance be in its nature good, and licentiousness be opposed to temperance, and that which is opposed to good be evil, then licentiousness is evil. And if licentiousness be in its nature evil, and out of licentiousness come adulteries, thefts, quarrels, and murders, then a licentious life is in its nature evil. But the Divine Being is not by nature implicated in evils. Therefore our birth is not the cause of these things. If the temperate are better than the incontinent, and incontinence is abominable to them, and God rejoices in temperance, being free from the knowledge of passions, then incontinence is hateful also to God. Moreover, that the action which is in accordance with temperance, being a virtue, is better than that which is in accordance with incontinence, which is a vice, we may learn from kings and rulers, and commanders, and women, and children, and citizens, and masters, and servants, and pedagogues, and teachers; for each of these is useful to himself and to the public when he is temperate; but when he is licentious he is injurious to himself and to the public. And if there be any difference between a filthy man and a noble man, a licentious and a temperate; and if the character of the noble and the temperate be the better, and that of the opposite the worse; and if those of the better character be near to God and His friends, and those of the worse be far from

Him and His enemies, those who believe in fate make no distinction between righteousness and unrighteousness, between filthiness and nobility, between licentiousness and temperance, which is a contradiction. For if good be opposed to evil, and unrighteousness be evil, and this be opposed to righteousness and righteousness be good, and good be hostile to evil, and evil be unlike to good, then righteousness is different from unrighteousness. And therefore God is not the cause of evils, nor does He rejoice in evils. Nor does reason commend them, being good. If, then, any are evil, they are evil in accordance with the wants and desires of their minds, and not by necessity. "They perish self-destroyed, By their own fault." [2753] If destiny [2754] leads one on to kill a man, and to stain his hands with murder, and the law forbids this, punishing criminals, and by threats restrains the decrees of destiny, such as committing injustice, adultery, theft, poisoning, then the law is in opposition to destiny; for those things which destiny appointed the law prohibits, and those things which the law prohibits destiny compels men to do. Hence law is hostile to destiny. But if it be hostile, then lawgivers do not act in accordance with destiny; for by passing decrees in opposition to destiny they destroy destiny. Either, then, there is destiny and there was no need of laws; or there are laws and they are not in accordance with destiny. But it is impossible that anyone should be born or anything done apart from destiny; for they say it is not lawful for anyone even to move a finger apart from fate. And therefore it was in accordance with destiny that Minos and Dracon, and Lycurgus, and Solon, and Zaleukos were law-givers and appointed laws, prohibiting adulteries, murders, violence, rape, thefts, as things which neither existed nor took place in accordance with destiny. But if these things were in accordance with destiny, then the laws were not in accordance with destiny. For destiny itself would not be destroyed by itself, cancelling itself, and contending against itself; here appointing laws forbidding adultery and murders, and taking vengeance upon and punishing the wicked, and there producing murders and adulteries. But this is impossible: for nothing is alien and abhorrent to itself, and self-destructive, and at variance with itself. And, therefore, there is no destiny. If everything in the world falls out in accordance with destiny, and nothing without it, then the law must needs be produced by destiny. But the law destroys destiny, teaching that virtue should be learnt, and diligently performed; and that vice should be avoided, and that it is produced by want of discipline. Therefore there is no destiny. If destiny makes men to injure one another, and to be injured by one another, what need is there of laws? But if laws are made that they may check the sinful, God having a care for those who are injured, it were better that the evil should not act in accordance with Fate, than that they should be set right, after having acted. But God is good and wise, and does what is best. Therefore there is no fixed destiny. Either education and habit are the cause of sins, or the passions of the soul, and those desires which arise through the body. But whichever of these be the cause, God is not the cause. If it is better to be righteous than to be unrighteous, why is not man made so at once from his birth? But if afterwards he is tempered by instruction and laws, that he may become better, he is so tempered as possessing free-will, and not by nature evil. If the evil are evil in accordance with destiny, by the decrees of Providence, they are not blameworthy and deserving of the punishment which is inflicted by the laws, since they live according to their own nature, and are not capable of being changed. And, again, if the good, living according to their own proper nature, are praiseworthy, their natal destiny being the cause of their goodness; yet the wicked, living according to their own proper nature, are not blamable in the eye of a righteous judge. For, if we must speak plainly, he who lives according to the nature which belongs to him, in no way sins. For he did not make himself thus, but Fate; and he lives according to its motion, being

urged on by unavoidable necessity. Then no one is bad. But some men are bad: and vice is blameworthy, and hostile to God, as reason has shown. But virtue is lovable and praiseworthy, God having appointed a law for the punishment of the wicked. Therefore there is no Fate.

Chapter XVII.--The Lust of the Flesh and Spirit: Vice and Virtue.

But why do I draw out my discourse to such length, spending the time with arguments, having set forth the things which are most necessary for persuasion, and to gain approval for that which is expedient; and having made manifest to all, by a few words, the inconsistency of their trick, so that it is now possible even for a child to see and perceive their error; and that to do good or evil is in our own power, and not decided by the stars. For there are two motions in us, the lust of the flesh and that of the soul, differing from each other, [2755] whence they have received two names, that of virtue and that of vice. And we ought to obey the most noble and most useful leading of virtue, choosing the best in preference to the base. But enough on these points. I must come to the end of my discourse; for I fear, and am ashamed, after these discourses on chastity, that I should be obliged to introduce the opinions of men who study the heavens, or rather who study nonsense, who waste their life with mere conceits, passing it in nothing but fabulous figments. And now may these offerings of ours, composed from the words which are spoken by God, be acceptable to thee, O Arete, my mistress. Euboulios. How bravely and magnificently, O Gregorion, has Thekla debated! Gregorion. What, then, would you have said, if you had listened to herself, speaking fluently, and with easy expression, with much grace and pleasure? So that she was admired by every one who attended, her language blossoming with words, as she set forth intelligently, and in fact picturesquely, the subjects on which she spoke, her countenance suffused with the blush of modesty; for she is altogether brilliant in body and soul. Euboulios. Rightly do you say this, Gregorion, and none of these things is false; for I knew her wisdom also from other noble actions, and what sort of things she succeeded in speaking, giving proof of supreme love to Christ; and how glorious she often appeared in meeting the chief conflicts of the martyrs, procuring for herself a zeal equal to her courage, and a strength of body equal to the wisdom of her counsels. Gregorion. Most truly do you also speak. But let us not waste time; for we shall often be able to discuss these and other subjects. But I must now first relate to you the discourses of the other virgins which followed, as I promised; and chiefly those of Tusiane and Domnina; for these still remain. When, then, Thekla ceased speaking these things, Theopatra said that Arete directed Tusiane to speak; and that she, smiling, passed before her and said.

Chapter I.--Chastity the Chief Ornament of the True Tabernacle; Seven

Days Appointed to the Jews for Celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles: What They Signify; The Sum of This Septenary Uncertain; Not Clear to Any One When the Consummation of the World Will Be; Even Now the Fabric of the World Completed. O Arete, thou dearest boast to the lovers of virginity, I also implore thee to afford me thine aid, lest I should be wanting in words, the subject having been so largely and variously handled. Wherefore I ask to be excused exordium and introductions, lest, whilst I delay in embellishments suitable to them, I depart from the subject: so glorious, and honourable, and renowned a thing is virginity. God, when He appointed to the true Israelites the legal rite of the true feast of the tabernacles, directed, in Leviticus, how they should keep and do honour to the feast; above all things, saying that each one should adorn his tabernacle with chastity. I will add the words themselves of Scripture, from which, without any doubt, it will be shown how agreeable to God, and acceptable to Him, is this ordinance of virginity: "In the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days: on the first day shall be a Sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a Sabbath. And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows [2756] of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the Lord seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations; ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths; that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." [2757] Here the Jews, fluttering about the bare letter of Scripture, like drones about the leaves of herbs, but not about flowers and fruits as the bee, fully believe that these words and ordinances were spoken concerning such a tabernacle as they erect; as if God delighted in those trivial adornments which they, preparing, fabricate from trees, not perceiving the wealth of good things to come; whereas these things, being like air and phantom shadows, foretell the resurrection and the putting up of our tabernacle that had fallen upon the earth, which at length, in the seventh thousand of years, resuming again immortal, we shall celebrate the great feast of true tabernacles in the new and indissoluble creation, the fruits of the earth having been gathered in, and men no longer begetting and begotten, but God resting from the works of creation. [2758] For since in six days God made the heaven and the earth, and finished the whole world, and rested on the seventh day from all His works which He had made, and blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, [2759] so by a figure in the seventh month, when the fruits of the earth have been gathered in, we are commanded to keep the feast to the Lord, which signifies that, when this world shall be terminated at the seventh thousand years, when God shall have completed the world, He shall rejoice in us. [2760] For now to this time all things are created by His all-sufficient will and inconceivable power; the earth still yielding its fruits, and the waters being gathered together in their receptacles; and the light still severed from darkness, and the allotted number of men not yet being complete; and the sun arising to rule the day, and the

moon the night; and four-footed creatures, and beasts, and creeping things arising from the earth, and winged creatures, and creatures that swim, from the water. Then, when the appointed times shall have been accomplished, and God shall have ceased to form this creation, in the seventh month, the great resurrection-day, it is commanded that the Feast of our Tabernacles shall be celebrated to the Lord, of which the things said in Leviticus are symbols and figures, which things, carefully investigating, we should consider the naked truth itself, for He saith, "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: to understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings." [2761]Wherefore let it shame the Jews that they do not perceive the deep things of the Scriptures, thinking that nothing else than outward things are contained in the law and the prophets; for they, intent upon things earthly, have in greater esteem the riches of the world than the wealth which is of the soul. For since the Scriptures are in this way divided that some of them give the likeness of past events, some of them a type of the future, the miserable men, going back, deal with the figures of the future as if they were already things of the past. As in the instance of the immolation of the Lamb, the mystery of which they regard as solely in remembrance of the deliverance of their fathers from Egypt, when, although the first-born of Egypt were smitten, they themselves were preserved by marking the door-posts of their houses with blood. Nor do they understand that by it also the death of Christ is personified, by whose blood souls made safe and sealed shall be preserved from wrath in the burning of the world; whilst the first-born, the sons of Satan, shall be destroyed with an utter destruction by the avenging angels, who shall reverence the seal of the Blood impressed upon the former.

Chapter II.--Figure, Image, Truth: Law, Grace, Glory; Man Created Immortal: Death Brought in by Destructive Sin.

And let these things be said for the sake of example, showing that the Jews have wonderfully fallen from the hope of future good, because they consider things present to be only signs of things already accomplished; whilst they do not perceive that the figures represent images, and images are the representatives of truth. For the law is indeed the figure and the shadow of an image, that is, of the Gospel; but the image, namely, the Gospel, is the representative of truth itself. For the men of olden time and the law foretold to us the characteristics of the Church, and the Church represents those of the new dispensation which is to come. Whence we, having received Christ, saying, "I am the truth," [2762] know that shadows and figures have ceased; and we hasten on to the truth, proclaiming its glorious images. For now we know "in part," and as it were "through a glass," [2763] since that which is perfect has not yet come to us; namely, the kingdom of heaven and the resurrection, when "that which is in part shall be done away." [2764] For then will all our tabernacles be firmly set up, when again the body shall rise, with bones again joined and compacted with flesh. Then shall we celebrate truly to the Lord a glad festal-day, when we shall receive eternal tabernacles, no more to perish or be dissolved into the dust of the tomb. Now, our tabernacle was at first fixed in an immoveable state, but was moved by transgression and bent to the earth, God putting an end to sin by means of death, lest man immortal, living a sinner, and sin living in him, should be liable to eternal curse. Wherefore he died, although he had not been created liable to death or corruption, and the soul was separated from the flesh, that sin might perish by death, not being able to live longer in one dead. Whence sin being dead and destroyed, again I shall rise immortal; and I praise God who by means of death frees His sons from death, and I celebrate lawfully to His honour a festal-day, adorning my tabernacle, that is my flesh, with good works, as there did the five virgins with the five-lighted lamps.

Chapter III.--How Each One Ought to Prepare Himself for the Future Resurrection.

In the first day of the resurrection I am examined whether I bring these things which are commanded, whether I am adorned with virtuous works, whether I am overshadowed by the boughs of chastity. For account the resurrection to be the erection of the tabernacle. Account that the things which are taken for the putting together of the tabernacle are the works of righteousness. I take, therefore, on the first day the things which are set down, that is, on the day in which I stand to be judged, whether I have adorned my tabernacle with the things commanded; if those things are found on that day which here in time we are commanded to prepare, and there to offer to God. But come, let us consider what follows. "And ye shall take you," He says, "on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows (and the tree of chastity) of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God." [2765] The Jews, uncircumcised in heart, think that the most beautiful fruit of wood is the citron wood, on account of its size; nor are they ashamed to say that God is worshipped with cedar, to whom not all the quadrupeds of the earth would suffice as a burnt-offering or as incense for burning. And moreover, O hard breasts, if the citron appear beautiful to you, why not the pomegranate, and other fruits of trees, and amongst them apples, which much surpass the citron? Indeed, in the Song of Songs, [2766] Solomon having made mention of all these fruits, passes over in silence the citron only. But this deceives the unwary, for they have not understood that the tree of life [2767] which Paradise once bore, now again the Church has produced for all, even the ripe and comely fruit of faith. Such fruit it is necessary that we bring when we come to the judgment-seat of Christ, on the first day of the feast; for if we are without it we shall not be able to feast with God, nor to have part, according to John, [2768] in the first resurrection. For the tree of life is wisdom first begotten of all. "She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her," says the prophet; [2769] "and happy is every one that retaineth her." "A tree planted by the waterside, that will bring forth his fruit in due season;" [2770] that is, learning and charity and discretion are imparted in due time to those who come to the waters of redemption. He that hath not believed in Christ, nor hath understood that He is the first principle and the tree of life, since he cannot show to God his tabernacle adorned with the most goodly of fruits, how shall he celebrate the feast? How shall he rejoice? Desirest thou to know the goodly fruit of the tree? Consider the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, how pleasant they are beyond the children of men. Good fruit came by Moses, that is the Law, but not so goodly as the Gospel. For the Law is a kind of figure and shadow of things to come, but the Gospel is truth and the grace of life. Pleasant was the fruit of the prophets, but not so pleasant as the fruit of immortality which is plucked from the Gospel.

Chapter IV.--The Mind Clearer When Cleansed from Sin; The Ornaments of the Mind and the Order of Virtue; Charity Deep and Full; Chastity the Last Ornament of All; The Very Use of Matrimony to Be Restrained.

"And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees." [2771] This signifies the exercise of divine discipline, by which the mind that subdues the passions is cleansed and adorned by the sweeping out and ejection from it of sins. For it is necessary to come cleansed and adorned to the feast, arrayed, as by a decorator, in the discipline and exercise of virtue. For the mind being cleansed by laborious exercises from the distracting thoughts which darken it, quickly perceives the truth; as the widow in the Gospels [2772] found the piece of money after she had swept the house and cast out the dirt, that is, the passions which obscure and cloud the mind, which increase in us from our luxuriousness and carelessness. Whoso, therefore, desires to come to that Feast of Tabernacles, to be numbered with the saints, let him first procure the goodly fruit of faith, then palm branches, that is, attentive meditation upon and study of the Scriptures, afterwards the far-spreading and thickly-leaved branches of charity, which He commands us to take after the palm branches; most fitly calling charity dense boughs, because it is all thick and close and very fruitful, not having anything bare or empty, but all full, both branches and trunks. Such is charity, having no part void or unfruitful. For "though I sell all my goods and give to the poor, and though I yield up my body to the fire, and though I have so great faith that I can remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing." [2773] Charity, therefore, is a tree the thickest and most fruitful of all, full and abounding copiously abounding in graces. After this, what else does He will that we should take? Willow branches; by that figure indicating righteousness, because "the just," according to the prophet, shall spring up "as grass in the midst of the waters, as willows by the watercourses," [2774] flourishing in the word. Lastly, to crown all, it is commanded that the bough of the Agnos tree be brought to decorate the Tabernacle, because it is by its very name the tree of chastity, by which those already named are adorned. Let the wanton now be gone, who, through their love of pleasure, reject chastity. How shall they enter into the feast with Christ who have not adorned their tabernacle with boughs of chastity, that God-making and blessed tree with which all who are hastening to that assembly and nuptial banquet ought to be begirt, and to cover their loins? For come, fair virgins, consider the Scripture itself, and its commands, how the Divine word has assumed chastity to be the crown of those virtues and duties that have been mentioned, showing how becoming and desirable it is for the resurrection, and that without it no one will obtain the promises which we who profess virginity supremely cultivate and offer to the Lord. They also possess it who live chastely with their wives, and do, as it were about the trunk, yield its lowly branches bearing chastity, not being able like us to reach its lofty and mighty boughs, or even to touch them; yet they, too, offer no less truly, although in a less degree, the branches of chastity. [2775] But those who are goaded on by their lusts, although they do not commit fornication, yet who, even in the things which are permitted with a lawful wife, through the

heat of unsubdued concupiscence are excessive in embraces, how shall they celebrate the feast? how shall they rejoice, who have not adorned their tabernacle, that is their flesh, with the boughs of the Agnos, nor have listened to that which has been said, that "they that have wives be as though they had none?" [2776]

Chapter V.--The Mystery of the Tabernacles.

Wherefore, above all other things, I say to those who love contests, and who are strong-minded, that without delay they should honour chastity, as a thing the most useful and glorious. For in the new and indissoluble creation, whoever shall not be found decorated with the boughs of chastity, shall neither obtain rest, because he has not fulfilled the command of God according to the law, nor shall he enter into the land of promise, because he has not previously celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles. For they only who have celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles come to the Holy Land, setting out from those dwellings which are called tabernacles, until they come to enter into the temple and city of God, advancing to a greater and more glorious joy, as the Jewish types indicate. For like as the Israelites, having left the borders of Egypt, first came to the Tabernacles, [2777] and from hence, having again set forth, came into the land of promise, so also do we. For I also, taking my journey, and going forth from the Egypt of this life, came first to the resurrection, which is the true Feast of the Tabernacles, and there having set up my tabernacle, adorned with the fruits of virtue, on the first day of the resurrection, which is the day of judgment, celebrate with Christ the millennium of rest, which is called the seventh day, even the true Sabbath. Then again from thence I, a follower of Jesus, "who hath entered into the heavens," [2778] as they also, after the rest of the Feast of Tabernacles, came into the land of promise, come into the heavens, not continuing to remain in tabernacles -- that is, my body not remaining as it was before, but, after the space of a thousand years, changed from a human and corruptible form into angelic size and beauty, where at last we virgins, when the festival of the resurrection is consummated, shall pass from the wonderful place of the tabernacle to greater and better things, ascending into the very house of God above the heavens, as, says the Psalmist, "in the voice of praise and thanksgiving, among such as keep holy day." [2779] I, O Arete, my mistress, offer as a gift to thee this robe, adorned according to my ability. Euboulios. I am much moved, O Gregorion, considering within myself in how great anxiety of mind Domnina must be from the character of the discourses, perplexed in heart as she is, and with good cause, fearing lest she should be at a loss for words, and should speak more feebly than the rest of the virgins, since they have spoken on the subject with such ability and variety. If, therefore, she was evidently moved, come and complete this too; for I wonder if she had anything to say, being the last speaker. Gregorion. Theopatra told me, Euboulios, that she was greatly moved, but she was not perplexed from want of words. After, therefore, Tusiane had ceased, Arete looked at her and said, Come, my daughter, do thou also deliver a discourse, that our banquet may be quite complete. At this Domnina, blushing, and after a long delay, scarcely looking up, rose to pray, and turning round, invoked Wisdom to be her present helper. And when she had prayed, Theopatra said that suddenly courage came to her, and a certain divine confidence possessed her, and she said: --

Chapter I.--Chastity Alone Aids and Effects the Most Praiseworthy

Government of the Soul. O Arete, I also, omitting the long preludes of exordiums, will endeavour according to my ability to enter upon the subject, lest, by delaying upon those matters which are outside the subject in hand, I should speak of them at greater length than their importance would warrant. For I account it a very great part of prudence not to make long speeches, which merely charm the ears, before coming to the main question, but to begin forthwith at the point in debate. So I will begin from thence, for it is time. Nothing can so much profit a man, O fair virgins, with respect to moral excellence, as chastity; for chastity alone accomplishes and brings it about that the soul should be governed in the noblest and best way, and should be set free, pure from the stains and pollutions of the world. For which reason, when Christ taught us to cultivate it, and showed its unsurpassable beauty, the kingdom of the Evil One was destroyed, who aforetime led captive and enslaved the whole race of men, so that none of the more ancient people pleased the Lord, but all were overcome by errors, since the law was not of itself sufficient to free the human race from corruption, until virginity, succeeding the law, governed men by the precepts of Christ. Nor truly had the first men so often run headlong into combats and slaughter, into lust and idolatry, if the righteousness that is by the law had been to them sufficient for salvation. Now truly they were then confused by great and frequent calamities; but from the time when Christ was incarnate, and armed and adorned His flesh with virginity, the savage tyrant who was master of incontinence was taken away, and peace and faith have dominion, men no longer turning so much as before to idolatry.

Chapter II.--The Allegory of the Trees Demanding a King, in the Book of Judges, Explained.

But lest I should appear to some to be sophisticated, and to conjecture these things from mere probabilities, and to babble, I will bring forward to you, O virgins, from the Old Testament, written prophecy from the Book of Judges, to show that I speak the truth, where the future reign of chastity was already clearly foretold. For we read: "The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive-tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive-tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? And the trees said to the fig-tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig-tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow; and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon." Now, that these things are not said of trees growing out of the earth, is clear. For inanimate trees cannot be assembled in council to choose a king, inasmuch as they firmly fixed by deep roots to the earth. But altogether are these things narrated concerning souls which, before the incarnation of Christ, too deeply luxuriating in transgressions, approach to God as suppliants, and ask His mercy, and that they may be governed by His pity and compassion, which Scripture expresses under the figure of the olive, because oil is of great advantage to our bodies, and takes away our fatigues and ailments, and affords light. For all lamp-light increases when nourished by oil. So also the mercies of God entirely dissolve death, and assist the human race, and nourish the light of the heart. [2781] And consider whether the laws, from the first created man until Christ in succession, were not set forth in these words by the Scripture by figments, in opposition to which the devil has deceived the human race. And it has likened the fig-tree to the command given to man in paradise, because, when he was deceived, he covered his nakedness with the leaves of a fig-tree; [2782] and the vine to the precept given to Noah at the time of the deluge, because, when overpowered by wine, he was mocked. [2783] The olive signifies the law given to Moses in the desert, because the prophetic grace, the holy oil, had failed from their inheritance when they broke the law. Lastly, the bramble not inaptly refers to the law which was given to the apostles for the salvation of the world; because by their instruction we have been taught virginity, of which alone the devil has not been able to make a deceptive image. For which cause, also, four Gospels have been given, because God has four times given the Gospel [2784] to the human race, and has instructed them by four laws, the times of which are clearly known by the diversity of the fruits. For the fig-tree, on account of its sweetness and richness, represents the delights of man, which he had in paradise before the fall. Indeed, not rarely, as we shall afterwards show, the Holy Spirit [2785] takes the fruit of the fig-tree as an emblem of goodness. But the vine, on account of the gladness produced by wine, and the joy of those who were saved from wrath and from the deluge, signifies the change

produced from fear and anxiety into joy. [2786] Moreover, the olive, on account of the oil which it produces, indicates the compassion of God, who again, after the deluge, bore patiently when men turned aside to ungodliness, so that He gave them the law and manifested Himself to some, and nourished by oil the light of virtue, now almost extinguished.

Chapter III.--The Bramble and the Agnos the Symbol of Chastity; The Four Gospels, that Is, Teachings or Laws, Instructing to Salvation.

Now the bramble commends chastity, for the bramble and the agnos is the same tree: by some it is called bramble, by others agnos. [2787] Perhaps it is because the plant is akin to virginity that it is called bramble and agnos; bramble, because of its strength and firmness against pleasures; agnos, because it always continues chaste. Hence the Scripture relates that Elijah, fleeing from the face of the woman Jezebel, [2788] at first came under a bramble, and there, having been heard, received strength and took food; signifying that to him who flies from the incitements of lust, and from a woman -- that is, from pleasure -- the tree of chastity is a refuge and a shade, ruling men from the coming of Christ, the chief of virgins. For when the first laws, which were published in the times of Adam and Noah and Moses, were unable to give salvation to man, the evangelical law alone has saved all. And this is the cause why the fig-tree may be said not to have obtained the kingdom over trees, which, in a spiritual sense, mean men; and the fig-tree the command, because man desired, even after the fall, again to be subject to the dominion of virtue, and not to be deprived of the immortality of the paradise of pleasure. But, having transgressed, he was rejected and cast far away, as one who could no longer be governed by immortality, nor was capable of receiving it. And the first message to him after the transgression was preached by Noah, [2789] to which, if he had applied his mind, he might have been saved from sin; for in it he promised both happiness and rest from evils, if he gave heed to it with all his might, just as the vine promises to yield wine to those who cultivate it with care and labour. But neither did this law rule mankind, for men did not obey it, although zealously preached by Noah. But, after they began to be surrounded and drowning by the waters, they began to repent, and to promise that they would obey the commandments. Wherefore with scorn they are rejected as subjects; that is, they are contemptuously told that they cannot be helped by the law; the Spirit answering them back and reproaching them because they had deserted those men whom God had commanded to help them, and to save them, and make them glad; such as Noah and those with him. "Even to you, O rebellious," said he, "I come, to bring help to you who are destitute of prudence, and who differ in nothing from dry trees, and who formerly did not believe me when I preached that you ought to flee from present things."

Chapter IV.--The Law Useless for Salvation; The Last Law of Chastity Under the Figure of the Bramble.

And so those men, having been thus rejected from the divine care, and the human race having again given themselves up to error, again God sent forth, by Moses, a law to rule them and recall them to righteousness. But these, thinking fit to bid a long farewell to this law, turned to idolatry. Hence God gave them up to mutual slaughters, to exiles, and captivities, the law itself confessing, as it were, that it could not save them. Therefore, worn out with ills and afflicted, they again promised that they would obey the commandments; until God, pitying man the fourth time, sent chastity to rule over them, which Scripture consequently called the bramble. And she consuming pleasures threatens besides, that unless all undoubtingly obey her, and truly come to her, she will destroy all with fire, since there will be hereafter no other law or doctrine but judgment and fire. For this reason, man henceforth began to do righteousness, and firmly to believe in God, and to separate himself from the devil. Thus chastity was sent down, as being most useful and helpful to men. For of her alone was the devil unable to forge an imitation to lead men astray, as is the case with the other precepts.

Chapter V.--The Malignity of the Devil as an Imitator in All Things; Two Kinds of Fig-Trees and Vines.

The fig-tree, as I said, from the sweetness and excellence of its fruit, being taken as a type of the delights of paradise, the devil, having beguiled the man by its imitations, led him captive, persuading him to conceal the nakedness of his body by fig-leaves; that is, by their friction he excited him to sexual pleasure. Again, those that had been saved from the deluge, he intoxicated with a drink which was an imitation of the vine of spiritual joy; and again he mocked them, having stripped them of virtue. And what I say will hereafter be more clear. The enemy, by his power, always imitates [2790] the forms of virtue and righteousness, not for the purpose of truly promoting its exercise, but for deception and hypocrisy. For in order that those who fly from death he may entice to death, he is outwardly dyed with the colours of immortality. And hence he wishes to seem a fig-tree or vine, and to produce sweetness and joy, and is "transformed into an angel of light," [2791] ensnaring many by the appearance of piety. For we find in the Sacred Writings that there are two kinds of fig-trees and vines, "the good figs, very good; and the evil, very evil;" [2792] "wine that maketh glad the heart of man," [2793] and wine which is the poison of dragons, and the incurable venom of asps. [2794] But from the time when chastity began to rule over men, the fraud was detected and overcome, Christ, the chief of virgins, overturning it. So both the true fig-tree and the true vine yield fruit after that the power of chastity has laid hold upon all men, as Joel the prophet preaches, saying: "Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord will do great things. Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field; for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig-tree and the vine do yield their strength. Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God, for He hath given you food unto righteousness;" [2795] calling the former laws the vine and the fig, trees bearing fruit unto righteousness for the children of the spiritual Zion, which bore fruit after the incarnation of the Word, when chastity ruled over us, when formerly, on account of sin and much error, they had checked and destroyed their buds. For the true vine and the true fig-tree were not able to yield such nourishment to us as would be profitable for life, whilst as yet the false fig-tree, variously adorned for the purpose of fraud, flourished. But when the Lord dried up the false branches, the imitations of the true branches, uttering the sentence against the bitter fig-tree, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever," [2796] then those which were truly fruit-bearing trees flourished and yielded food unto righteousness. The vine, and that not in a few places, refers to the Lord Himself, [2797] and the fig-tree to the Holy Spirit, as the Lord "maketh glad the hearts of men," and the Spirit healeth them. And therefore Hezekiah is commanded [2798] first to make a plaster with a lump of figs -- that is, the fruit of the Spirit -- that he may be healed -- that is, according to the apostle -- by love; for he says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance;" [2799] which, on account of their great pleasantness, the prophet calls figs. Micah also says, "They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid." [2800] Now it is certain that those who have taken refuge and rested under the Spirit, and under the shadow of the Word, shall not be alarmed, nor frightened by him who troubles the

hearts of men.

Chapter VI.--The Mystery of the Vision of Zechariah.

Moreover, Zechariah shows that the olive shadows forth the law of Moses, speaking thus: "And the angel that talked with me came again and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, and said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it....And two olive-trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof." [2801] And after a few words, the prophet, asking what are the olives on the right and left of the candlestick, and what the two olive-boughs in the hands of the two pipes, the angel answered and said: "These are the two sons of fruitfulness [2802] which stand by the Lord of the whole earth," signifying the two first-born virtues that are waiting upon God, which, in His dwelling, supply around the wick, through the boughs, the spiritual oil of God, that man may have the light of divine knowledge. But the two boughs of the two olives are the law and the prophets, around, as it were, the lot [2803] of the inheritance, of which Christ and the Holy Spirit are the authors, we ourselves meanwhile not being able to take the whole fruit and the greatness of these plants, before chastity began to rule the world, but only their boughs -- to wit, the law and the prophets -- did we formerly cultivate, and those moderately, often letting them slip. For who was ever able to receive Christ or the Spirit, unless he first purified himself? For the exercise which prepares the soul from childhood for desirable and delectable glory, and carries this grace safely thither with ease, and from small toils raises up mighty hopes, is chastity, which gives immortality to our bodies; which it becomes all men willingly to prefer in honour and to praise above all things; some, that by its means they may be betrothed to the Word, practising virginity; and others, that by it they may be freed from the curse, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." [2804] This, O Arete, is the discourse on virginity which you required of me, accomplished according to my ability; which I pray, O mistress, although it is mediocre and short, that thou wilt receive with kindness from me who was chosen to speak last.

Chapter I.--The True and Chaste Virgins Few; Chastity a Contest; Thekla

Chief of Virgins. I do accept it, Theopatra related that Arete said, and approve of it all. For it is an excellent thing, even although you had not spoken so clearly, to take up and go through with earnestness those things which have been said, not to prepare a sweet entertainment for those who listen, but for correction, recollection, and abstinence. For whoever teaches that chastity is to be preferred and embraced first of all among my pursuits, rightly advises; which many think that they honour and cultivate, but which few, so to speak, really honour. For it is not one who has studied to restrain his flesh from the pleasure of carnal delight that cultivates chastity, if he do not keep in check the rest of the desires; but rather he dishonours it, and that in no small degree, by base lusts, exchanging pleasures for pleasures. Nor if he have strongly resisted the desires of the senses, but is lifted up with vainglory, and from this cause is able to repress the heats of burning lust, and reckon them all as nothing, can he be thought to honour chastity; for he dishonours it in that he is lifted up with pride, cleansing the outside of the cup and platter, that is, the flesh and the body, but injuring the heart by conceit and ambition. Nor when any one is conceited of riches is he desirous of honouring chastity; he dishonours it more than all, preferring a little gain to that to which nothing is comparable of those things that are in this life esteemed. For all riches and gold "in respect of it are as a little sand." [2805] And neither does he who loves himself above measure, and eagerly considers that which is expedient for himself alone, regardless of the necessities of his neighbour, honour chastity, but he also dishonours it. For he who has repelled from himself charity, mercy, and humanity, is much inferior to those who honourably exercise chastity. Nor is it right, on the one hand, by the use of chastity to keep virginity, and, on the other hand, to pollute the soul by evil deeds and lust; nor here to profess purity and continence, and there to pollute it by indulgence in vices. Nor, again, here to declare that the things of this world bring no care to himself; there to be eager in procuring them, and in concern about them. But all the members are to be preserved intact and free from corruption; not only those which are sexual, but those members also which minister to the service of lusts. For it would be ridiculous to preserve the organs of generation pure, but not the tongue; or to preserve the tongue, but neither the eyesight, the ears, nor the hands; or lastly, to preserve these pure, but not the mind, defiling it with pride and anger. It is altogether necessary for him who has resolved that he will not err from the practice of chastity, to keep all his members and senses clean and under restraint, as is customary with the planks of ships, whose fastenings the ship-masters diligently join together, lest by any means the way and access may lie open for sin to pour itself into the mind. For great pursuits are liable to great falls, and evil is more opposed to that which is really good than to that which is not good. For many who thought that to repress vehement lascivious desires constituted chastity, neglecting other duties connected with it, failed also in this, and have brought blame [2806] upon those endeavouring after it by the right way, as you have proved who are a model in everything, leading a virgin life in deed and word. And now what that is which becomes a virgin state has been described. And you all in my hearing having sufficiently contended in speaking, I pronounce victors

and crown; but Thekla with a larger and thicker chaplet, as the chief of you, and as having shone with greater lustre than the rest.

Chapter II.--Thekla Singing Decorously a Hymn, the Rest of the Virgins Sing with Her; John the Baptist a Martyr to Chastity; The Church the Spouse of God, Pure and Virgin.

Theopatra said that Arete having said these things, commanded them all to rise, and, standing under the Agnos, to send up to the Lord in a becoming manner a hymn of thanksgiving; and that Thekla should begin and should lead the rest. And when they had stood up, she said that Thekla, standing in the midst of the virgins on the right of Arete, decorously sang; but the rest, standing together in a circle after the manner of a chorus, responded to her: "I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee." [2807] Thekla.1. From above, O virgins, the sound of a noise that wakes the dead has come, bidding us all to meet the Bridegroom in white robes, and with torches towards the east. Arise, before the King enters within the gates. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.2. Fleeing from the sorrowful happiness of mortals, and having despised the luxuriant delights of life and its love, I desire to be protected under Thy life-giving arms, and to behold Thy beauty for ever, O blessed One. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.3. Leaving marriage and the beds of mortals and my golden home for Thee, O King, I have come in undefiled robes, in order that I might enter with Thee within Thy happy bridal chamber. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.4. Having escaped, O blessed One, from the innumerable enchanting wiles of the serpent, and, moreover, from the flame of fire, and from the mortal-destroying assaults of wild beasts, I await Thee from heaven. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.5. I forget my own country, O Lord, through desire of Thy grace. [2808] I forget, also, the company of virgins, my fellows, the desire even of mother and of kindred, for Thou, O Christ, art all things to me. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.6. Giver of life art Thou, O Christ. Hail, light that never sets, receive this praise. The company of virgins call upon Thee, Perfect Flower, Love, Joy, Prudence, Wisdom, Word. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.7. With open gates, O beauteously adorned Queen, admit us within thy chambers. O spotless, gloriously triumphant Bride, breathing beauty, we stand by Christ, robed as He is, celebrating thy happy nuptials, O youthful maiden. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.8. The virgins standing without the chamber, [2809] with bitter tears and deep moans, wail and mournfully lament that their lamps are gone out, having failed to enter in due time the chamber of joy. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.9. For turning from the sacred way of life, unhappy ones, they have neglected to prepare sufficiency of oil for the path of life; bearing lamps whose bright light is dead, they groan from the inward recesses of their mind. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.10. Here are cups full of sweet nectar; let us drink, O virgins, for it is celestial drink, which the

Bridegroom hath placed for those duly called to the wedding. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.11. Abel, clearly prefiguring Thy death, [2810] O blessed One, with flowing blood, and eyes lifted up to heaven, said, Cruelly slain by a brother's hand, O Word, I pray Thee to receive me. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.12. Thy valiant son Joseph, [2811] O Word, won the greatest prize of virginity, when a woman heated with desire forcibly drew him to an unlawful bed; but he giving no heed to her fled stripped, and crying aloud: -- Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.13. Jephthah offered his fresh slaughtered virgin daughter a sacrifice to God, like a lamb; and she, nobly fulfilling the type of Thy body, O blessed One, bravely cried: -- Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.14. Daring Judith, [2812] by clever wiles having cut off the head of the leader of the foreign hosts, whom previously she had allured by her beautiful form, without polluting the limbs of her body, with a victor's shout said: -- Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.15. Seeing the great beauty of Susanna, the two Judges, maddened with desire, said, O dear lady, we have come desiring secret intercourse with thee; but she with tremulous cries said: -- Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.16. It is far better for me to die than to betray my nuptials to you, O mad for women, and so to suffer the eternal justice of God in fiery vengeance. Save me now, O Christ, from these evils. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.17. Thy Precursor, washing multitudes of men in flowing lustral water, unjustly by a wicked man, on account of his chastity, was led to slaughter; but as he stained the dust with his life-blood, he cried to Thee, O blessed One: -- Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.18. The parent of Thy life, that unspotted Grace [2813] and undefiled Virgin, bearing in her womb without the ministry of man, by an immaculate conception, [2814] and who thus became suspected of having betrayed the marriage-bed, she, O blessed One, when pregnant, thus spoke: -- Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.19. Wishing to see Thy nuptial day, O blessed One, as many angels as Thou, O King, calledst from above, bearing the best gifts to Thee, came in unsullied robes: -- Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.20. In hymns, O blessed spouse of God, we attendants of the Bride honour Thee, O undefiled virgin Church of snow-white form, dark haired, chaste, spotless, beloved. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.21. Corruption has fled, and the tearful pains of diseases; death has been taken away, all folly has perished, consuming mental grief is no more; for again the grace of the God-Christ has suddenly shone upon mortals. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.22. Paradise is no longer bereft of mortals, for by divine decree he no longer dwells there as formerly, thrust out from thence when he was free from corruption, and from fear by the various wiles of the serpents, O blessed One. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.23. Singing the new song, now the company of virgins attends thee towards the heavens, O Queen, all manifestly crowned with white lilies, and bearing in their hands bright lights. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee. Thekla.24. O blessed One, who inhabited the undefiled

seats of heaven without beginning, who governed all things by everlasting power, O Father, with Thy Son, we are here, receive us also within the gates of life. Chorus. I keep myself pure for Thee, O Bridegroom, and holding a lighted torch I go to meet Thee.

Chapter III.--Which are the Better, the Continent, or Those Who Delight in Tranquillity of Life? Contests the Peril of Chastity: the Felicity of Tranquillity; Purified and Tranquil Minds Gods: They Who Shall See God; Virtue Disciplined by Temptations.

Euboulios. Deservedly, O Gregorion, has Thekla borne off the chief prize. Gregorion. Deservedly indeed. Euboulios. But what about the stranger Telmisiake? [2815] Tell me, was she not listening from without? I wonder if she could keep silence on hearing of this banquet, and would not forthwith, as a bird flies to its food, listen to the things which were spoken. Gregorion. The report is that she was present with Methodios [2816] when he inquired respecting these things of Arete. But it is a good as well as a happy thing to have such a mistress and guide as Arete, that is virtue. Euboulios. But, Gregorion, which shall we say are the better, those who without lust govern concupiscence, or those who under the assaults of concupiscence continue pure? Gregorion. For my part, I think those who are free from lust, for they have their mind undefiled, and are altogether uncorrupted, sinning in no respect. Euboulios. Well, I swear by chastity, and wisely, O Gregorion. But lest in any wise I hinder you, if I gainsay your words, it is that I may the better learn, and that no one hereafter may refute me. Gregorion. Gainsay me as you will, you have my permission. For, Euboulios, I think that I know sufficient to teach you that he who is not concupiscent is better than he who is. If I cannot, then there is no one who can convince you. Euboulios. Bless me! I am glad that you answer me so magnanimously, and show how wealthy you are as regards wisdom. Gregorion. A mere chatterer, so you seem to be, O Euboulios. Euboulios. Why so? Gregorion. Because you ask rather for the sake of amusement than of truth. Euboulios. Speak fair, I pray you, my good friend; for I greatly admire your wisdom and renown. I say this because, with reference to the things that many wise men often dispute among themselves, you say that you not only understand them, but also vaunt that you can teach another. Gregorion. Now tell me truly whether it is a difficulty with you to receive the opinion, that they who are not concupiscent excel those who are concupiscent, and yet restrain themselves? or are you joking? Euboulios. How so, when I tell you that I do not know? But, come, tell me, O wisest lady, in what do the non-concupiscent and chaste excel the concupiscent who live chastely? Gregorion. Because, in the first place, they have the soul itself pure, and the Holy Spirit always dwells in it, seeing that it is not distracted and disturbed by fancies and unrestrained thoughts, so as to pollute the mind. But they are in every way inaccessible to lust, both as to their flesh and to their heart, enjoying tranquillity from passions. But they who are allured from without, through the sense of sight, with fancies, and receiving lust flowing like a stream into the heart, are often not less polluted, even when they think that they contend and fight against pleasures, being vanquished in their mind. Euboulios. Shall we then say that they who serenely live and are not disturbed by lusts are pure? Gregorion. Certainly. For these [2817] are they whom God makes gods in the beatitudes; they who believe in Him without doubt. And He says that they shall look upon God with confidence, because they bring in nothing that darkens or confuses the eye of the soul for the beholding of God; but all desire of

things secular being eliminated, they not only, as I said, preserve the flesh pure from carnal connection, but even the heart, in which, especially, as in a temple, the Holy Spirit rests and dwells, is open to no unclean thoughts. Euboulios. Stay now; for I think that from hence we shall the better go on to the discovery of what things are truly the best; and, tell me, do you call anyone a good pilot? Gregorion. I certainly do. Euboulios. Whether is it he that saves his vessel in great and perplexing storms, or is it he who does so in a breathless calm? Gregorion. He that does so in a great and perplexing storm. Euboulios. Shall we not then say that the soul, which is deluged with the surging waves of the passions, and yet does not, on that account, weary or grow faint, but direct her vessel -- that is, the flesh -- nobly into the port of chastity, is better and more estimable than he that navigates in calm weather? Gregorion. We will say so. Euboulios. For to be prepared against the entrance of the gales of the Evil Spirit, and not to be cast away or overcome, but to refer all to Christ, and strongly to contend against pleasures, brings greater praise than he wins who lives a virgin life calmly and with ease. Gregorion. It appears so. Euboulios. And what saith the Lord? Does He not seem to show that he who retains continence, though concupiscent, excels him who, having no concupiscence, leads a virgin life? Gregorion. Where does He say so? Euboulios. Where, comparing a wise man to a house well founded, He declares him immoveable because he cannot be overthrown by rains, and floods, and winds; likening, as it would seem, these storms to lusts, but the immoveable and unshaken firmness of the soul in chastity to the rock. Gregorion. You appear to speak what is true. Euboulios. And what say you of the physician? Do you not call him the best who has been proved in great diseases, and has healed many patients? Gregorion. I do. Euboulios. But the one who has never at any time practised, nor ever had the sick in his hands, is he not still in all respects the inferior? Gregorion. Yes. Euboulios. Then we may certainly say that a soul which is contained by a concupiscent body, and which appeases with the medicaments of temperance the disorders arising from the heat of lusts, carries off the palm for healing, over one to whose lot it has fallen to govern aright a body which is free from lust. [2818] Gregorion. It must be allowed. Euboulios. And how is it in wrestling? Whether is the better wrestler he who has many and strong antagonists, and continually is contending without being worsted, or he who has no opponents? Gregorion. Manifestly he who wrestles. Euboulios. And, in wrestling, is not the athlete who contends the more experienced? Gregorion. It must be granted. Euboulios. Therefore it is clear that he whose soul contends against the impulses of lust, and is not borne down by it, but draws back and sets himself in array against it, appears stronger than he who does not lust. [2819] Gregorion. True. Euboulios. What then? Does it not appear to you, Gregorion, that there is more courage in being valiant against the assaults of base desires? Gregorion. Yes, indeed. Euboulios. Is not this courage the strength of virtue? Gregorion. Plainly so. Euboulios. Therefore, if endurance be the strength of virtue, is not the soul, which is troubled by lusts, and yet perseveres against them, stronger than that which is not so troubled? Gregorion. Yes. Euboulios. And if stronger, then better? Gregorion. Truly. Euboulios. Therefore the soul which is concupiscent, and exercises self-control, as appears from what has been said, is better than that which is not concupiscent, and exercises self-control. [2820] Gregorion. You speak truly, and I shall desire still more fully to discourse with you concerning these things. If, therefore, it pleases you, tomorrow I will come again to hear respecting them. Now, however, as you see, it is time to betake ourselves to the care of the outward man.

Elucidations.

I. (We here behold only shadows, etc., p.335.) Schleiermacher, [2821] in commenting on Plato's Symposium, remarks: "Even natural birth (i.e., in Plato's system) was nothing but a reproduction of the same eternal form and idea....The whole discussion displays the gradation, not only from that pleasure which arises from the contemplation of personal beauty through that which every larger object, whether single or manifold, may occasion, to that immediate pleasure of which the source is in the Eternal Beauty," etc. Our author ennobles such theorizing by mounting up to the great I Am. II. (Christ Himself is the one who is born, p.337.) Wordsworth, and many others of the learned, sustain our author's comment on this passage. [2822] So Aquinas, ad loc., Bede, and many others. Methodius is incorrectly represented as rejecting [2823] the idea that "the woman" is the Blessed Virgin Mary, for no such idea existed for him to reject. He rejects the idea that the man-child is Christ; but that idea was connected with the supposition that the woman was the Church of the Hebrews bringing forth the Messiah. Gregory the Great regards the woman as the Christian Church. So Hippolytus: [2824] "By the woman...is meant most manifestly the Church, endued with the Father's Word, whose brightness is above the sun," etc. Bossuet says candidly, [2825] "C'est l'Église, tout éclatante de la lumière de J. C.," etc. Now, note the progress of corruption, one fable engendering another. The text of Gen. iii.15, contrary to the Hebrew, the Seventy, the Syriac, and the Vulgate itself, in the best mss., is made to read, "She shall bruise thy head," etc. The "woman," therefore, becomes the Mother of our Lord, and the "great red dragon" (of verse 3), from which the woman "fled into the wilderness," is next represented as under her feet (where the moon appears in the sacred narrative); and then the Immaculate Conception of her Holy Seed is transferred back to the mother of Mary, who is indecently discussed, and affirmed to have been blest with an "Immaculate Conception" when, in the ordinary process of nature, she was made the mother of the Virgin. So, then, the bull Ineffabilis -- comes forth, eighteen hundred years after the event, [2826] with the announcement that what thousands of saints and many bishops of Rome have denounced as a fable must be received by all Christians on peril of eternal damnation. [2827] The worst of it all is the fact, that, as the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God has heretofore been the only "Immaculate Conception" known to the faith of Christendom, thousands now imagine that this is what was only so lately set forth, and what we must therefore renounce as false.

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