

THE CONFERENCES OF JOHN CASSIAN

by John Cassian

Cassian's comprehensive monastic spiritual guide presenting teachings from desert fathers on love, grace, free will, spiritual knowledge, temptation, friendship, patience, penitence, and the pursuit of Christian perfection.

268 Chapters

Table of Contents

0. The Conferences Of John Cassian
1. Part II.
2. Preface.
3. The Second Part of the Conferences
4. XI. The First Conference of Abbot Chæremon.
5. Chapter I. Description of the town of Thennesus.
6. Chapter II. Of Bishop Archebius.
7. Chapter III. Description of the desert where Chæremon, Nesteros, and Josep...
8. Chapter IV. Of Abbot Chæremon and his excuse about the teaching which we a...
9. Chapter V. Of our answer to his excuse.
10. Chapter VI. Abbot Chæremon's statement that faults can be overcome in thre...
11. Chapter VII. By what steps we can ascend to the heights of love and what permane...
12. Chapter VIII. How greatly those excel who depart from sin through the feeling of...
13. Chapter IX. That love not only makes sons out of servants, but also bestows the ...
14. Chapter X. How it is the perfection of love to pray for one's enemies and by wha...
15. Chapter XI. A question why he has called the feeling of fear and hope imperfect....
16. Chapter XII. The answer on the different kinds of perfection.
17. Chapter XIII. Of the fear which is the outcome of the greatest love.
18. Chapter XIV. A question about complete chastity.
19. Chapter XV. The postponement of the explanation which is asked for.
20. XII. The Second Conference of Abbot Chæremon.
21. XIII. The Third Conference of Abbot Chæremon.
22. Chapter I. Introduction.
23. Chapter II. A question why the merit of good deeds may not be ascribed to the ex...
24. Chapter III. The answer that without God's help not only perfect chastity but al...
25. Chapter IV. An objection, asking how the Gentiles can be said to have chastity w...
26. Chapter V. The answer on the imaginary chastity of the philosophers.
27. Chapter VI. That without the grace of God we cannot make any diligent efforts.
28. Chapter VII. Of the main purpose of God and His daily Providence.
29. Chapter VIII. Of the grace of God and the freedom of the will.
30. Chapter IX. Of the power of our good will, and the grace of God.
31. Chapter X. On the weakness of free will.
32. Chapter XI. Whether the grace of God precedes or follows our good will.
33. Chapter XII. That a good will should not always be attributed to grace, nor alwa...
34. Chapter XIII. How human efforts cannot be set against the grace of God.
35. Chapter XIV. How God makes trial of the strength of man's will by means of his t...
36. Chapter XV. Of the manifold grace of men's calls.
37. Chapter XVI. Of the grace of God; to the effect that it transcends the narrow li...
38. Chapter XVII. Of the inscrutable providence of God.

39. Chapter XVIII. The decision of the fathers that free will is not equal to save a...
40. XIV. The First Conference of Abbot Nesteros.
41. Chapter I. The words of Abbot Nesteros on the knowledge of the religious.
42. Chapter II. On grasping the knowledge of spiritual things.
43. Chapter III. How practical perfection depends on a double system.
44. Chapter IV. How practical life is distributed among many different professions a...
45. Chapter V. On perseverance in the line that has been chosen.
46. Chapter VI. How the weak are easily moved.
47. Chapter VII. An instance of chastity which teaches us that all men should not be...
48. Chapter VIII. Of spiritual knowledge.
49. Chapter IX. How from practical knowledge we must proceed to spiritual.
50. Chapter X. How to embrace the system of true knowledge.
51. Chapter XI. Of the manifold meaning of the Holy Scriptures.
52. Chapter XII. A question how we can attain to forgetfulness of the cares of this ...
53. Chapter XIII. Of the method by which we can remove the dross from our memory.
54. Chapter XIV. How an unclean soul can neither give nor receive spiritual knowledg...
55. Chapter XV. An objection owing to the fact that many impure persons have knowled...
56. Chapter XVI. The answer to the effect that bad men cannot possess true knowledge...
57. Chapter XVII. To whom the method of perfection should be laid open.
58. Chapter XVIII. Of the reasons for which spiritual learning is unfruitful.
59. Chapter XIX. How often even those who are not worthy can receive the grace of th...
60. XV. The Second Conference of Abbot Nesteros.
61. Chapter I. Discourse of Abbot Nesteros on the threefold system of gifts.
62. Chapter II. Wherein one ought to admire the saints.
63. Chapter III. Of a dead man raised to life by Abbot Macarius.
64. Chapter IV. Of the miracle which Abbot Abraham wrought on the breasts of a woman...
65. Chapter V. Of the cure of a lame man which the same saint wrought.
66. Chapter VI. How the merits of each man should not be judged by his miracles.
67. Chapter VII. How the excellence of gifts consists not in miracles but in humilit...
68. Chapter VIII. How it is more wonderful to have cast out one's faults from one's ...
69. Chapter IX. How uprightness of life is of more importance than the working of mi...
70. Chapter X. A revelation on the trial of perfect chastity.
71. XVI. The First Conference of Abbot Joseph.
72. Chapter I. What Abbot Joseph asked us in the first instance.
73. Chapter II. Discourse of the same elder on the untrustworthy sort of friendship....
74. Chapter III. How friendship is indissoluble.
75. Chapter IV. A question whether anything that is really useful should be performe...
76. Chapter V. The answer, how a lasting friendship can only exist among those who a...
77. Chapter VI. By what means union can be preserved unbroken.
78. Chapter VII. How nothing should be put before love, or after anger.
79. Chapter VIII. On what grounds a dispute can arise among spiritual persons.
80. Chapter IX. How to get rid even of spiritual grounds of discord.

81. Chapter X. On the best tests of truth.
82. Chapter XI. How it is impossible for one who trusts to his own judgment to escap...
83. Chapter XII. Why inferiors should not be despised in Conference.
84. Chapter XIII. How love does not only belong to God but is God.
85. Chapter XIV. On the different grades of love.
86. Chapter XV. Of those who only increase their own or their brother's grievances b...
87. Chapter XVI. How it is that, if our brother has any grudge against us, the gifts...
88. Chapter XVII. Of those who hold that patience should be shown to worldly people ...
89. Chapter XVIII. Of those who pretend to patience but excite their brethren to ang...
90. Chapter XIX. Of those who fast out of rage.
91. Chapter XX. Of the feigned patience of some who offer the other cheek to be smit...
92. Chapter XXI. A question how if we obey the commands of Christ we can fail of eva...
93. Chapter XXII. The answer that Christ looks not only at the action but also at th...
94. Chapter XXIII. How he is the strong and vigorous man, who yields to the will of ...
95. Chapter XXIV. How the weak are harmful and cannot bear wrongs.
96. Chapter XXV. A question how he can be strong who does not always support the wea...
97. Chapter XXVI. The answer that the weak does not always allow himself to be borne...
98. Chapter XXVII. How anger should be repressed.
99. Chapter XXVIII. How friendships entered upon by conspiracy cannot be lasting one...
100. XVII. The Second Conference of Abbot Joseph.
101. Chapter I. Of the vigils which we endured.
102. Chapter II. Of the anxiety of Abbot Germanus at the recollection of our promise....
103. Chapter III. My ideas on this subject.
104. Chapter IV. Abbot Joseph's question and our answer on the origin of our anxiety....
105. Chapter V. The explanation of Abbot Germanus why we wanted to stay in Egypt, and...
106. Chapter VI. Abbot Joseph's question whether we got more good in Egypt than in Sy...
107. Chapter VII. The answer on the difference of customs in the two countries.
108. Chapter VIII. How those who are perfect ought not to make any promises absolutel...
109. Chapter IX. How it is often better to break one's engagements than to fulfil the...
110. Chapter X. Our question about our fear of the oath which we gave in the monaster...
111. Chapter XI. The answer that we must take into account the purpose of the doer ra...
112. Chapter XII. How a fortunate issue will be of no avail to evil doers, while bad ...
113. Chapter XIII. Our answer as to the reason which demanded an oath from us.
114. Chapter XIV. The discourse of the Elder showing how the plan of action may be ch...
115. Chapter XV. A question whether it can be without sin that our knowledge affords ...
116. Chapter XVI. The answer that Scripture truth is not to be altered on account of ...
117. Chapter XVII. How the saints have profitably employed a lie like hellebore.
118. Chapter XVIII. An objection that only those men employed lies with impunity, who...
119. Chapter XIX. The answer, that leave to lie, which was not even granted under the...
120. Chapter XX. How even Apostles thought that a lie was often useful and the truth ...
121. Chapter XXI. Whether secret abstinence ought to be made known, without telling a...
122. Chapter XXII. An objection, that abstinence ought to be concealed, but that thin...

123. Chapter XXIII. The answer that obstinacy in this decision is unreasonable.
124. Chapter XXIV. How Abbot Piamun chose to hide his abstinence.
125. Chapter XXV. The evidence of Scripture on changes of determination.
126. Chapter XXVI. How saintly men cannot be hard and obstinate.
127. Chapter XXVII. A question whether the saying: |I have sworn and am purposed| is ...
128. Chapter XXVIII. The answer telling in what cases the determination is to be kept...
129. Chapter XXIX. How we ought to do those things which are to be kept secret.
130. Chapter XXX. That no determination should be made on those things which concern ...
131. Part III.
132. Preface.
133. The Third Part of the Conferences
134. XVIII. Conference of Abbot Piamun.
135. Chapter I. How we came to Diolcos and were received by Abbot Piamun.
136. Chapter II. The words of Abbot Piamun, how monks who were novices ought to be ta...
137. Chapter III. How the juniors ought not to discuss the orders of the seniors.
138. Chapter IV. Of the three sorts of monks which there are in Egypt.
139. Chapter V. Of the founders who originated the order of Coenobites.
140. Chapter VI. Of the system of the Anchorites and its beginning.
141. Chapter VII. Of the origin of the Sarabaites and their mode of life.
142. Chapter VIII. Of a fourth sort of monks.
143. Chapter IX. A question as to what is the difference between a Coenobium and a mo...
144. Chapter X. The answer.
145. Chapter XI. Of true humility, and how Abbot Serapion exposed the mock humility o...
146. Chapter XII. A question how true patience can be gained.
147. Chapter XIII. The answer.
148. Chapter XIV. Of the example of patience given by a certain religious woman.
149. Chapter XV. Of the example of patience given by Abbot Paphnutius.
150. Chapter XVI. On the perfection of patience.
151. XIX. Conference of Abbot John.
152. Chapter I. Of the Coenobium of Abbot Paul and the patience of a certain brother....
153. Chapter II. Of Abbot John's humility and our question.
154. Chapter III. Abbot John's answer why he had left the desert.
155. Chapter IV. Of the excellence which the aforesaid old man showed in the system o...
156. Chapter V. Of the advantages of the desert.
157. Chapter VI. Of the conveniences of the Coenobium.
158. Chapter VII. A question on the fruits of the Coenobium and the desert.
159. Chapter VIII. The answer to the question proposed.
160. Chapter IX. Of true and complete perfection.
161. Chapter X. Of those who while still imperfect retire into the desert.
162. Chapter XI. A question how to cure those who have hastily left the congregation ...
163. Chapter XII. The answer telling how a solitary can discover his faults.
164. Chapter XIII. A question how a man can be cured who has entered on solitude with...

165. Chapter XIV. The answer on their remedies.
166. Chapter XV. A question whether chastity ought to be ascertained just as the othe...
167. Chapter XVI. The answer giving the proofs by which it can be recognized.
168. XX. Conference of Abbot Pinufius.
169. Chapter I. Of the humility of Abbot Pinufius, and of his hiding-place.
170. Chapter II. Of our coming to him.
171. Chapter III. A question on the end of penitence and the marks of satisfaction.
172. Chapter IV. The answer on the humility shown by our request.
173. Chapter V. Of the method of penitence and the proof of pardon.
174. Chapter VI. A question whether our sins ought to be remembered out of contrition...
175. Chapter VII. The answer showing how far we ought to preserve the recollection of...
176. Chapter VIII. Of the various fruits of penitence.
177. Chapter IX. How valuable to the perfect is the forgetfulness of sin.
178. Chapter X. How the recollection of our sins should be avoided.
179. Chapter XI. Of the marks of satisfaction, and the removal of past sins.
180. Chapter XII. Wherein we must do penance for a time only; and wherein it can have...
181. XXI. The First Conference of Abbot Theonas.
182. Chapter I. How Theonas came to Abbot John.
183. Chapter II. The exhortation of Abbot John to Theonas and the others who had come...
184. Chapter III. Of the offering of tithes and firstfruits.
185. Chapter IV. How Abraham, David, and other saints went beyond the requirement of ...
186. Chapter V. How those who live under the grace of the Gospel ought to go beyond t...
187. Chapter VI. How the grace of the gospel supports the weak so that they can obtai...
188. Chapter VII. How it lies in our own power to choose whether to remain under the ...
189. Chapter VIII. How Theonas exhorted his wife that she too should make her renunci...
190. Chapter IX. How he fled to a monastery when his wife would not consent.
191. Chapter X. An explanation that we may not appear to recommend separation from wi...
192. Chapter XI. An inquiry why in Egypt they do not fast during all the fifty days (...)
193. Chapter XII. The answer on the nature of things good, bad, and indifferent.
194. Chapter XIII. What kind of good fasting is.
195. Chapter XIV. How fasting is not good in its own nature.
196. Chapter XV. How a thing that is good in its own nature ought not to be done for ...
197. Chapter XVI. How what is good in its own nature can be distinguished from other ...
198. Chapter XVII. Of the reason for fasting and its value.
199. Chapter XVIII. How fasting is not always suitable.
200. Chapter XIX. A question why we break the fast all through Eastertide.
201. Chapter XX. The answer.
202. Chapter XXI. A question whether the relaxation of the fast is not prejudicial to...
203. Chapter XXII. The answer on the way to keep control over abstinence.
204. Chapter XXIII. Of the time and measure of refreshment.
205. Chapter XXIV. A question on the different ways of keeping Lent.
206. Chapter XXV. The answer to the effect that the fast of Lent has reference to the...

207. Chapter XXVI. How we ought also to offer our firstfruits to the Lord.
208. Chapter XXVII. Why Lent is kept by very many with a different number of days.
209. Chapter XXVIII. Why it is called Quadragesima, when the fast is only kept for th...
210. Chapter XXIX. How those who are perfect go beyond the fixed rule of Lent.
211. Chapter XXX. Of the origin and beginning of Lent.
212. Chapter XXXI. A question, how we ought to understand the Apostle's words: |Sin s...
213. Chapter XXXII. The answer on the difference between grace and the commands of th...
214. Chapter XXXIII. Of the fact that the precepts of the gospel are milder than thos...
215. Chapter XXXIV. How a man can be shown to be under grace.
216. Chapter XXXV. A question, why sometimes when we are fasting more strictly than u...
217. Chapter XXXVI. The answer, telling that this question should be reserved for a f...
218. XXII. The Second Conference of Abbot Theonas.
219. XXIII. The Third Conference of Abbot Theonas.
220. Chapter I. Discourse of Abbot Theonas on the Apostle's words: |For I do not the ...
221. Chapter II. How the Apostle completed many good actions.
222. Chapter III. What is really the good which the Apostle testifies that he could n...
223. Chapter IV. How man's goodness and righteousness are not good if compared with t...
224. Chapter V. How no one can be continually intent upon that highest good.
225. Chapter VI. How those who think that they are without sin are like purblind peop...
226. Chapter VII. How those who maintain that a man can be without sin are charged wi...
227. Chapter VIII. How it is given to but few to understand what sin is.
228. Chapter IX. Of the care with which a monk should preserve the recollection of Go...
229. Chapter X. How those who are on the way to perfection are truly humble, and feel...
230. Chapter XI. Explanation of the phrase: |For I delight in the law of God after th...
231. Chapter XII. Of this also: |But we know that the law is spiritual,| etc.
232. Chapter XIII. Of this also: |But I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwellet...
233. Chapter XIV. An objection, that the saying: |For I do not the good that I would,...
234. Chapter XV. The answer to the objection raised.
235. Chapter XVI. What is the body of sin.
236. Chapter XVII. How all the saints have confessed with truth that they were unclea...
237. Chapter XVIII. That even good and holy men are not without sin.
238. Chapter XIX. How even in the hour of prayer it is almost impossible to avoid sin...
239. Chapter XX. From whom we can learn the destruction of sin and perfection of good...
240. Chapter XXI. That although we acknowledge that we cannot be without sin, yet sti...
241. XXIV. Conference of Abbot Abraham.
242. Chapter I. How we laid bare the secrets of our thoughts to Abbot Abraham.
243. Chapter II. How the old man exposed our errors.
244. Chapter III. Of the character of the districts which anchorites ought to seek.
245. Chapter IV. What sorts of work should be chosen by solitaries.
246. Chapter V. That anxiety of heart is made worse rather than better by restlessnes...
247. Chapter VI. A comparison showing how a monk ought to keep guard over his thought...
248. Chapter VII. A question why the neighbourhood of our kinsfolk is considered to i...

249. Chapter VIII. The answer that all things are not suitable for all men.
250. Chapter IX. That those need not fear the neighbourhood of their kinsfolk, who ca...
251. Chapter X. A question whether it is bad for a monk to have his wants supplied by...
252. Chapter XI. The answer stating what Saint Antony laid down on this matter.
253. Chapter XII. Of the value of work and the harm of idleness.
254. Chapter XIII. A story of a barber's payments, introduced for the sake of recogni...
255. Chapter XIV. A question how such wrong notions can creep into us.
256. Chapter XV. The answer on the threefold movement of the soul.
257. Chapter XVI. That the rational part of our soul is corrupt.
258. Chapter XVII. How the weaker part of the soul is the first to yield to the devil...
259. Chapter XVIII. A question whether we should be drawn back to our country by a pr...
260. Chapter XIX. The answer on the devil's illusion, because he promises us the peac...
261. Chapter XX. How useful is relaxation on the arrival of brethren.
262. Chapter XXI. How the Evangelist John is said to have shown the value of relaxati...
263. Chapter XXII. A question how we ought to understand what the gospel says |My yok...
264. Chapter XXIII. The answer with the explanation of the saying.
265. Chapter XXIV. Why the Lord's yoke is felt grievous and His burden heavy.
266. Chapter XXV. Of the good which an attack of temptation brings about.
267. Chapter XXVI. How the promise of an hundredfold in this life is made to those wh...

The Conferences Of John Cassian

Part II.

Containing Conferences XI-XVII.

Preface.

Although many of the saints who are taught by your example can scarcely emulate the greatness of your perfection, with which you shine like great luminaries with marvellous brightness in this world, yet still you, O holy brothers Honoratus and Eucherius, [1682] are so stirred by the great glory of those splendid men from whom we received the first principles of monasticism, that one of you, presiding as he does over a large monastery of the brethren, is hoping that his congregation, which learns a lesson from the daily sight of your saintly life, may be instructed in the precepts of those fathers, while the other has been anxious to make his way to Egypt to be edified by the sight of these in the flesh, that he might leave this province that is frozen as it were with the cold of Gaul, and like some pure turtle dove fly to those lands on which the sun of righteousness looks and to which it approaches nearest, and which abound with the ripe fruits of virtues. As a matter of course the greatness of my love wrings this from me; viz., that considering the desire of the one and the labour of the other, I should not decline the danger and peril of writing, if only to the one there may be added authority among his children, and from the other may be removed the necessity for so risky a journey. Further since neither the Institutes of the Coenobia which we wrote to the best of our ability in twelve books for Bishop Castor of blessed memory, nor the ten Conferences of the fathers living in the desert of Scete, which we composed somehow or other at the bidding of Saints Helladius and Leontius the Bishops, [1683] were able to satisfy your faith and zeal, now in order that the reason for our journey may be also known, I have thought that seven Conferences of the three fathers whom we first saw living in another desert, might be written in the same style and dedicated to you, in which whatever has been in our previous works perhaps obscurely explained or even omitted on the subject of perfection, may be supplied. But if even this is not enough to satisfy the holy thirst of your desires, seven other Conferences, which are to be sent to the holy brethren living in the islands of the Stoechades, [1684] will, I fancy, satisfy your wants and your ardour.

The Second Part of the Conferences

of John Cassian.

XI. The First Conference of Abbot Chæremon.

On Perfection.

Chapter I. Description of the town of Thennesus.

When we were living in a monastery in Syria after our first infancy in the faith, and when after we had grown somewhat we had begun to long for some greater grace of perfection, we determined straightway to seek Egypt and penetrating even to the remotest desert of the Thebaid, [1685] to visit very many of the saints, whose glory and fame had spread abroad everywhere, with the wish if not to emulate them at any rate to know them. And so we came by a very lengthy voyage to a town of Egypt named Thennesus, [1686] whose inhabitants are so surrounded either by the sea or by salt lakes that they devote themselves to business alone and get their wealth and substance by naval commerce as the land fails them, so that indeed when they want to build houses, there is no soil sufficient for this, unless it is brought by boat from a distance.

Chapter II. Of Bishop Archebius.

And when we arrived there, God gratified our wishes, and had brought about the arrival of that most blessed and excellent man Bishop Archebius, [1687] who had been carried off from the assembly of anchorites and given as Bishop to the town of Panephysis, [1688] and who kept all his life long to his purpose of solitude with such strictness that he relaxed nothing of the character of his former humility, nor flattered himself on the honour that had been added to him (for he vowed that he had not been summoned to that office as fit for it, but complained that he had been expelled from the monastic system as unworthy of it because though he had spent thirty-seven years in it he had never been able to arrive at the purity so high a profession demands); he then when he had received us kindly and most graciously in the aforesaid Thennesus whither the business of electing a Bishop there had brought him, as soon as he heard of our wish and desire to inquire of the holy fathers even in still more remote parts of Egypt: "Come," said he, "see in the meanwhile the old men who live not far from our monastery, the length of whose service is shown by their bent bodies, as their holiness shines forth in their appearance, so that even the mere sight of them will give a great lesson to those who see them: and from them you can learn not so much by their words as by the actual example of their holy life, what I grieve that I have lost, and having lost cannot give to you. But I think that my poverty will be somewhat lessened by this zeal of mine, if when you are seeking that pearl of the Gospel which I have not, I at least provide where you can conveniently procure it."

Chapter III. Description of the desert where Chæremon, Nesteros, and Joseph lived.

And so he took his staff and scrip, as is there the custom for all monks starting on a journey, and himself led us as guide of our road to his own city, i.e., Panephrisis, the lands of which and indeed the greater part of the neighbouring region (formerly an extremely rich one since from it, as report says, everything was supplied for the royal table), had been covered by the sea which was disturbed by a sudden earthquake and overflowed its banks, and so (almost all the villages being in ruins) covered what were formerly rich lands with salt marshes, so that you might think that what is spiritually sung in the psalm was a literal prophecy of that region. "He hath turned rivers into a wilderness; and the springs of waters into a thirsty land: a fruitful land into saltness for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." [1689] In these districts then many towns perched in this way on the higher hills were deserted by their inhabitants and turned by the inundation into islands, and these afforded the desired solitude to the holy anchorites, among whom three old men; viz., Chæremon, Nesteros and Joseph, stood out as anchorites of the longest standing.

Chapter IV. Of Abbot Chæremon and his excuse about the teaching which we asked for.

And so the blessed Archebius thought it best to take us first to Chæremon, [1690] because he was nearer to his monastery, and because he was more advanced than the other two in age: for he had passed the hundredth year of his life, vigorous only in spirit, but with his back bowed with age and constant prayer, so that, as if he were once more in his childhood he crawled with his hands hanging down and resting on the ground. Gazing then at one and the same time on this man's wonderful face and on his walk (for though all his limbs had already failed and were dead yet he had lost none of the severity of his previous strictness) when we humbly asked for the word and doctrine, and declared that longing for spiritual instruction was the only reason for our coming, he sighed deeply and said: What doctrine can I teach you, I in whom the feebleness of age has relaxed my former strictness, as it has also destroyed my confidence in speaking? For how could I presume to teach what I do not do, or instruct another in what I know I now practise but feebly and coldly? Wherefore I do not allow any of the younger men to live with me now that I am of such an advanced age, lest the other's strictness should be relaxed owing to my example. For the authority of a teacher will never be strong unless he fixes it in the heart of his hearer by the actual performance of his duty.

Chapter V. Of our answer to his excuse.

At this we were overwhelmed with no slight confusion and replied as follows: Although both the difficulty of the place and the solitary life itself, which even a robust youth could scarcely put up with, ought to be sufficient to teach us everything (and indeed without your saying anything they do teach and impress us a very great deal) yet still we ask you to lay aside your silence for a little and in a more worthy manner implant in us those principles by which we may be able to embrace, not so much by imitating it as by admiring it, that goodness which we see in you. For even if our coldness is known to you, and does not deserve to obtain what we are asking for, yet at least the trouble of so long a journey ought to be repaid by it, as we made haste to come here after our first beginning in the monastery of Bethlehem, owing to a longing for your instruction, and a yearning for our own good.

Chapter VI. Abbot Chæremon's statement that faults can be overcome in three ways.

Then the blessed Chæremon: There are, said he, three things which enable men to control their faults; viz., either the fear of hell or of laws even now imposed; or the hope and desire of the kingdom of heaven; or a liking for goodness itself and the love of virtue. For then we read that the fear of evil loathes contamination: "The fear of the Lord hateth evil." [1691] Hope also shuts out the assaults of all faults: for "all who hope in Him shall not fail." [1692] Love also fears no destruction from sins, for "love never faileth;" [1693] and again: "love covers a multitude of sins." [1694] And therefore the blessed Apostle confines the whole sum of salvation in the attainment of those three virtues, saying "Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three." [1695] For faith is what makes us shun the stains of sin from fear of future judgment and punishment; hope is what withdraws our mind from present things, and despises all bodily pleasures from its expectation of heavenly rewards; love is what inflames us with keenness of heart for the love of Christ and the fruit of spiritual goodness, and makes us hate with a perfect hatred whatever is opposed to these. And these three things although they all seem to aim at one and the same end (for they incite us to abstain from things unlawful) yet they differ from each other greatly in the degrees of their excellence. For the two former belong properly to those men who in their aim at goodness have not yet acquired the love of virtue, and the third belongs specially to God and to those who have received into themselves the image and likeness of God. For He alone does the things that are good, with no fear and no thanks or reward to stir Him up, but simply from the love of goodness. For, as Solomon says, "The Lord hath made all things for Himself." [1696] For under cover of His own goodness He bestows all the fulness of good things on the worthy and the unworthy because He cannot be wearied by wrongs, nor be moved by passions at the sins of men, as He ever remains perfect goodness and unchangeable in His nature.

Chapter VII. By what steps we can ascend to the heights of love and what permanence there is in it.

If then any one is aiming at perfection, from that first stage of fear which we rightly termed servile (of which it is said: "When ye have done all things say: we are unprofitable servants," [1697]) he should by advancing a step mount to the higher path of hope -- which is compared not to a slave but to a hireling, because it looks for the payment of its recompense, and as if it were free from care concerning absolution of its sins and fear of punishment, and conscious of its own good works, though it seems to look for the promised reward, yet it cannot attain to that love of a son who, trusting in his father's kindness and liberality, has no doubt that all that the father has is his, to which also that prodigal who together with his father's substance had lost the very name of son, did not venture to aspire, when he said: "I am no more worthy to be called thy son;" for after those husks which the swine ate, satisfaction from which was denied to him, i.e., the disgusting food of sin, as he "came to himself," and was overcome by a salutary fear, he already began to loathe the uncleanness of the swine, and to dread the punishment of gnawing hunger, and as if he had already been made a servant, desires the condition of a hireling and thinks about the remuneration, and says: "How many hired servants of my father have abundance of bread, and I perish here with hunger. I will then return to my father and will say unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." [1698] But those words of humble penitence his father who ran to meet him received with greater affection than that with which they were spoken, and was not content to allow him lesser things, but passing through the two stages without delay restored him to his former dignity of sonship. We also ought forthwith to hasten on that by means of the indissoluble grace of love we may mount to that third stage of sonship, which believes that all that the father has is its own, and so we may be counted worthy to receive the image and likeness of our heavenly Father, and be able to say after the likeness of the true son: "All that the Father hath is mine." [1699] Which also the blessed Apostle declares of us, saying: "All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours." [1700] And to this likeness the commands of our Saviour also summon us: "Be ye," says He, "perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." [1701] For in these persons sometimes the love of goodness is found to be interrupted, when the vigour of the soul is relaxed by some coldness or joy or delight, and so loses either the fear of hell for the time, or the desire of future blessings. And there is indeed in these a stage leading to some advance, which affects us so that when from fear of punishment or from hope of reward we begin to avoid sin we are enabled to pass on to the stage of love, for "fear," says one, "is not in love, but perfect love casteth out fear: for fear hath torment, but he who fears is not perfect in love. We therefore love because God first loved us." [1702] We can then only ascend to that true perfection when, as He first loved us for the grace of nothing but our salvation, we also have loved Him for the sake of nothing but His own love alone. Wherefore we must do our best to mount with perfect ardour of mind from this fear to hope, from hope to the love of God, and the love of the virtues themselves, that as we steadily pass on to

the love of goodness itself, we may, as far as it is possible for human nature, keep firm hold of what is good.

Chapter VIII. How greatly those excel who depart from sin through the feeling of love.

For there is a great difference between one who puts out the fire of sin within him by fear of hell or hope of future reward, and one who from the feeling of divine love has a horror of sin itself and of uncleanness, and keeps hold of the virtue of purity simply from the love and longing for purity, and looks for no reward from a promise for the future, but, delighted with the knowledge of good things present, does everything not from regard to punishment but from delight in virtue. For this condition can neither abuse an opportunity to sin when all human witnesses are absent, nor be corrupted by the secret allurements of thoughts, while, keeping in its very marrow the love of virtue itself, it not only does not admit into the heart anything that is opposed to it, but actually hates it with the utmost horror. For it is one thing for a man in his delight at some present good to hate the stains of sins and of the flesh, and another thing to check unlawful desires by contemplating the future reward; and it is one thing to fear present loss and another to dread future punishment. Lastly it is a much greater thing to be unwilling to forsake good for good's own sake, than it is to withhold consent from evil for fear of evil. For in the former case the good is voluntary, but in the latter it is constrained and as it were violently forced out of a reluctant party either by fear of punishment or by greed of reward. For one who abstains from the allurements of sin owing to fear, will whenever the obstacle of fear is removed, once more return to what he loves and thus will not continually acquire any stability in good, nor will he ever rest free from attacks because he will not secure the sure and lasting peace of chastity. For where there is the disturbance of warfare there cannot help being the danger of wounds. For one who is in the midst of the conflict, even though he is a warrior and by fighting bravely inflicts frequent and deadly wounds on his foes, must still sometimes be pierced by the point of the enemy's sword. But one who has defeated the attack of sins and is now in the enjoyment of the security of peace, and has passed on to the love of virtue itself, will keep this condition of good continually, as he is entirely wrapped up in it, because he believes that nothing can be worse than the loss of his inmost chastity. For he deems nothing dearer or more precious than present purity, to whom a dangerous departure from virtue or a poisonous stain of sin is a grievous punishment. To such an one, I say, neither will regard for the presence of another add anything to his goodness nor will solitude take anything away from it: but as always and everywhere he bears about with him his conscience as a judge not only of his actions but also of his thoughts, he will especially try to please it, as he knows that it cannot be cheated nor deceived, and that he cannot escape it.

Chapter IX. That love not only makes sons out of servants, but also bestows the image and likeness of God.

And if to anyone relying on the help of God and not on his own efforts, it has been vouchsafed to acquire this state, from the condition of a servant, wherein is fear, and from a mercenary greed of hope, whereby there is sought not so much the good of the donor as the recompense of reward, he will begin to pass on to the adoption of sons, where there is no longer fear, nor greed, but that love which never faileth continually endures. Of which fear and love the Lord in chiding some shows what is befitting for each one: "A son knoweth his own father, and a servant feareth his lord: And if I be a Father, where is My honour: and if I be a Lord, where is my fear?" [1703] For one who is a servant must needs fear because "if knowing his lord's will he has done things worthy of stripes, he shall be beaten with many stripes." [1704] Whoever then by this love has attained the image and likeness of God, will now delight in goodness for the pleasure of goodness itself, and having somehow a like feeling of patience and gentleness will henceforth be angered by no faults of sinners, but in his compassion and sympathy will rather ask for pardon for their infirmities, and, remembering that for so long he himself was tried by the stings of similar passions till by the Lord's mercy he was saved, will feel that, as he was saved from carnal attacks not by the teaching of his own exertions but by God's protection, not anger but pity ought to be shown to those who go astray; and with full peace of mind will he sing to God the following verse: "Thou hast broken my chains. I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of praise;" and: "except the Lord had helped me, my soul had almost dwelt in hell." [1705] And while he continues in this humility of mind he will be able even to fulfil this Evangelic command of perfection: "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute you and slander you." [1706] And so it will be vouchsafed to us to attain that reward which is subjoined, whereby we shall not only bear the image and likeness of God, but shall even be called sons: "that ye may be," says He "sons of your Father which is in heaven, Who maketh His sun to rise on the good and evil, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust:" [1707] and this feeling the blessed John knew that he had attained when he said: "that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because as He is so are we also in this world." [1708] For in what can a weak and fragile human nature be like Him, except in always showing a calm love in its heart towards the good and evil, the just and the unjust, in imitation of God, and by doing good for the love of goodness itself, arriving at that true adoption of the sons of God, of which also the blessed Apostle speaks as follows: "Every one that is born of God doeth not sin, for His seed is in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God;" and again: "We know that every one who is born of God sinneth not, but his birth of God preserves him, and the wicked one toucheth him not?" [1709] And this must be understood not of all kinds of sins, but only of mortal sins: and if any one will not extricate and cleanse himself from these, for him the aforesaid Apostle tells us in another place that we ought not even to pray, saying: "If a man knows his brother to be sinning a sin not unto death, let him ask, and He will give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he should ask for it." [1710] But of those which he says are not unto death, from which even those who serve Christ faithfully cannot, with whatever care

they keep themselves, be free, of these he says: "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us;" and again: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." [1711] For it is an impossibility for any one of the saints not to fall into those trivial faults which are committed by word, and thought, and ignorance, and forgetfulness, and necessity, and will, and surprise: which though quite different from that sin which is said to be unto death, still cannot be free from fault and blame.

Chapter X. How it is the perfection of love to pray for one's enemies and by what signs we may recognize a mind that is not yet purified.

When then any one has acquired this love of goodness of which we have been speaking, and the imitation of God, then he will be endowed with the Lord's heart of compassion, and will pray also for his persecutors, saying in like manner: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." [1712] But it is a clear sign of a soul that is not yet thoroughly purged from the dregs of sin, not to sorrow with a feeling of pity at the offences of others, but to keep to the rigid censure of the judge: for how will he be able to obtain perfection of heart, who is without that by which, as the Apostle has pointed out, the full requirements of the law can be fulfilled, saying: "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ," [1713] and who has not that virtue of love, which "is not grieved, is not puffed up, thinketh no evil," which "endureth all things, beareth all things." [1714] For "a righteous man pitieth the life of his beasts: but the heart of the ungodly is without pity." [1715] And so a monk is quite certain to fall into the same sins which he condemns in another with merciless and inhuman severity, for "a stern king will fall into misfortunes," and "one who stops his ears so as not to hear the weak, shall himself cry, and there shall be none to hear him." [1716]

Chapter XI. A question why he has called the feeling of fear and hope imperfect.

Germanus: You have indeed spoken powerfully and grandly of the perfect love of God. But still this fact disturbs us; viz., that while you were exalting it with such praise, you said that the fear of God and the hope of eternal reward were imperfect, though the prophet seems to have thought quite differently about them, where he said: "Fear the Lord, all ye His saints, for they that fear Him lack nothing." [1717] And again in the matter of observing God's righteous acts he admits that he has done them from consideration of the reward, saying: "I have inclined my heart to do thy righteous acts forever, for the reward." [1718] And the Apostle says: "By faith Moses when he was grown up, denied himself to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to be afflicted with the people of God than to have the pleasure of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasure of the Egyptians; for he looked unto the reward." [1719] How then can we think that they are imperfect, if the blessed David boasted that he did the righteous acts of God in hope of a recompense, and the giver of the Law is said to have looked for a future reward and so to have despised the adoption to royal dignity, and to have preferred the most terrible affliction to the treasures of the Egyptians?

Chapter XII. The answer on the different kinds of perfection.

Chæremon: In accordance with the condition and measure of every mind Holy Scripture summons our free wills to different grades of perfection. For no uniform crown of perfection can be offered to all men, because all have not the same virtue, or purpose, or fervour, and so the Divine Word has in some way appointed different ranks and different measures of perfection itself. And that this is so the variety of beatitudes in the gospel clearly shows. For though they are called blessed, whose is the kingdom of heaven, and blessed are they who shall possess the earth, and blessed are they who shall receive their consolation, and blessed are they who shall be filled, yet we believe that there is a great difference between the habitations of the kingdom of heaven, and the possession of the earth, whatever it be, and also between the reception of consolation and the fulness and satisfaction of righteousness; and that there is a great distinction between those who shall obtain mercy, and those who shall be deemed worthy to enjoy the most glorious vision of God. "For there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for star differeth from star in glory, so also is the resurrection of the dead." [1720] While therefore in accordance with this rule holy Scripture praises those who fear God, and says "Blessed are all they that fear the Lord," [1721] and promises them for this a full measure of bliss, yet it says again: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear: for fear hath torment. But he that feareth is not yet perfect in love." [1722] And again, though it is a grand thing to serve God, and it is said: "Serve the Lord in fear;" and: "It is a great thing for thee to be called My servant;" and: "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when He cometh, shall find so doing," [1723] yet it is said to the Apostles: "I no longer call you servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I call you friends, for all things whatsoever I have heard from my Father, I have made known unto you." [1724] And once more: "Ye are My friends, if ye do whatever I command you." [1725] You see then that there are different stages of perfection, and that we are called by the Lord from high things to still higher in such a way that he who has become blessed and perfect in the fear of God; going as it is written "from strength to strength," [1726] and from one perfection to another, i.e., mounting with keenness of soul from fear to hope, is summoned in the end to that still more blessed stage, which, is love, and he who has been "a faithful and wise servant" [1727] will pass to the companionship of friendship and to the adoption of sons. So then our saying also must be understood according to this meaning: not that we say that the consideration of that enduring punishment or of that blessed recompense which is promised to the saints is of no value, but because, though they are useful and introduce those who pursue them to the first beginning of blessedness, yet again love, wherein is already fuller confidence, and a lasting joy, will remove them from servile fear and mercenary hope to the love of God, and carry them on to the adoption of sons, and somehow make them from being perfect still more perfect. For the Saviour says that in His Father's house are "many mansions," [1728] and although all the stars seem to be in the sky, yet there is a mighty difference between the brightness of the sun and of the moon, and between that of the morning star and the rest of the stars. And therefore the blessed Apostle prefers it not only above fear and hope but also above all gifts which are counted great and wonderful, and shows the way of love still more excellent than all. For when after finishing his list

of spiritual gifts of virtues he wanted to describe its members, he began as follows: "And yet I show unto you a still more excellent way. Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and though I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I can remove mountains, and though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing." You see then that nothing more precious, nothing more perfect, nothing more sublime, and, if I may say so, nothing more enduring can be found than love. For "whether there be prophecies, they shall fail, whether there be tongues, they shall cease, whether there be knowledge, it shall be destroyed," but "love never faileth," [1729] and without it not only those most excellent kinds of gifts, but even the glory of martyrdom itself will fail.

Chapter XIII. Of the fear which is the outcome of the greatest love.

Whoever then has been established in this perfect love is sure to mount by a higher stage to that still more sublime fear belonging to love, which is the outcome of no dread of punishment or greed of reward, but of the greatest love; whereby a son fears with earnest affection a most indulgent father, or a brother fears his brother, a friend his friend, or a wife her husband, while there is no dread of his blows or reproaches, but only of a slight injury to his love, and while in every word as well as act there is ever care taken by anxious affection lest the warmth of his love should cool in the very slightest degree towards the object of it. And one of the prophets has finely described the grandeur of this fear, saying: "Wisdom and knowledge are the riches of salvation: the fear of the Lord is his treasure." [1730] He could not describe with greater clearness the worth and value of that fear than by saying that the riches of our salvation, which consist in true wisdom and knowledge of God, can only be preserved by the fear of the Lord. To this fear then not sinners but saints are invited by the prophetic word where the Psalmist says: "O fear the Lord, all ye His Saints: for they that fear Him lack nothing." [1731] For where a man fears the Lord with this fear it is certain that nothing is lacking to his perfection. For it was clearly of that other penal fear that the Apostle John said that "He who feareth is not made perfect in love, for fear hath punishment." [1732] There is then a great difference between this fear, to which nothing is lacking, which is the treasure of wisdom and knowledge, and that imperfect fear which is called "the beginning of wisdom," [1733] and which has in it punishment and so is expelled from the hearts of those who are perfect by the incoming of the fulness of love. For "there is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear." [1734] And in truth if the beginning of wisdom consists in fear, what will its perfection be except in the love of Christ which, as it contains in it the fear which belongs to perfect love, is called not the beginning but the treasure of wisdom and knowledge? And therefore there is a twofold stage of fear. The one for beginners, i.e., for those who are still subject to the yoke and to servile terror; of which we read: "And the servant shall fear his Lord;" [1735] and in the gospel: "I no longer call you servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth;" and therefore "the servant," He tells us, "abideth not in the house for ever, but the Son abideth for ever." [1736] For He is instructing us to pass on from that penal fear to the fullest freedom of love, and the confidence of the friends and sons of God. Finally the blessed Apostle, who had by the power of the Lord's love already passed through the servile stage of fear, scorns lower things and declares that he has been enriched with good things by the Lord, "for God hath not given us" he says "a spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind." [1737] Those also who are inflamed with a perfect love of their heavenly Father, and whom the Divine adoption has already made sons instead of servants, he addresses in these words: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." [1738] It is of this fear too, that the prophet spoke when he would describe that sevenfold spirit, which according to the mystery of the Incarnation, full surely descended on the God man: [1739] "And there shall rest upon Him the Spirit of the Lord: the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of knowledge and of true godliness," and in the last place he adds as something special these words: "And the Spirit of the fear of the Lord shall fill Him." [1740] ^

Where we must in the first place notice carefully that he does not say "and there shall rest upon Him the Spirit of fear," as he said in the earlier cases, but he says "there shall fill Him the Spirit of the fear of the Lord." For such is the greatness of its richness that when once it has seized on a man by its power, it takes possession not of a portion but of his whole mind. And not without good reason. For as it is closely joined to that love which "never faileth," it not only fills the man, but takes a lasting and inseparable and continual possession of him in whom it has begun, and is not lessened by any allurements of temporal joy or delights, as is sometimes the case with that fear which is cast out. This then is the fear belonging to perfection, with which we are told that the God-man, [1741] who came not only to redeem mankind, but also to give us a pattern of perfection and example of goodness, was filled. For the true Son of God "who did no sin neither was guile found in His mouth," [1742] could not feel that servile fear of punishment.

Chapter XIV. A question about complete chastity.

Germanus: Now that you have finished your discourse on perfect chastity, we want also to ask somewhat more freely about the end of chastity. For we do not doubt that those lofty heights of love, by which, as you have hitherto explained, we mount to the image and likeness of God, cannot possibly exist without perfect purity. But we should like to know whether a lasting grant of it can be secured so that no incitement to lust may ever disturb the serenity of our heart, and that thus we may be enabled to pass the time of our sojourning in the flesh free from this carnal passion, so as never to be inflamed by the fire of excitement.

Chapter XV. The postponement of the explanation which is asked for.

Chæremon: It is indeed a sign of the utmost blessedness and of singular goodness both continually to learn and to teach that love by which we cling to the Lord, so that meditation on Him may, as the Psalmist says, occupy all the days and nights of our life, [1743] and may support our soul, which insatiably hungers and thirsts after righteousness, by continually chewing the cud of this heavenly food. But we must also, in accordance with the kindly forethought of our Saviour, make some provision for the food of the body, that we faint not by the way, [1744] for "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." [1745] And this we must now secure by taking a little food, so that after supper, the mind may be rendered more attentive for the careful tracing out of what you want.

XII. The Second Conference of Abbot Chæremon.

On Chastity. Not translated.

XIII. The Third Conference of Abbot Chæremon.

On the Protection of God. [1746]

Chapter I. Introduction.

When after a short sleep we returned for morning service and were waiting for the old man, Abbot Germanus was troubled by great scruples because in the previous discussion, the force of which had inspired us with the utmost longing for this chastity which was till now unknown to us, the blessed old man had by the addition of a single sentence broken down the claims of man's exertions, adding that man even though he strive with all his might for a good result, yet cannot become master of what is good unless he has acquired it simply by the gift of Divine bounty and not by the efforts of his own toil. While then we were puzzling over this question the blessed Chæremon arrived at the cell, and as he saw that we were whispering together about something, he cut the service of prayers and Psalms shorter than usual, and asked us what was the matter.

Chapter II. A question why the merit of good deeds may not be ascribed to the exertions of the man who does them.

Then Germanus: As we are almost shut out, so to speak, by the greatness of that splendid virtue, which was described in last night's discussion, from believing in the possibility of it, so, if you will pardon my saying so, it seems to us absurd for the reward of our efforts, i.e., perfect chastity, which is gained by the earnestness of one's own toil, not to be ascribed chiefly to the exertions of the man who makes the effort. For it is foolish, if, when for example, we see a husbandman taking the utmost pains over the cultivation of the ground, we do not ascribe the fruits to his exertions.

Chapter III. The answer that without God's help not only perfect chastity but all good of every kind cannot be performed.

Chæremon: By this very instance which you bring forward we can still more clearly prove that the exertions of the worker can do nothing without God's aid. For neither can the husbandman, when he has spent the utmost pains in cultivating the ground, forthwith ascribe the produce of the crops and the rich fruits to his own exertions, as he finds that these are often in vain unless opportune rains and a quiet and calm winter aids them, so that we have often seen fruits already ripe and set and thoroughly matured snatched as it were from the hands of those who were grasping them; and their continuous and earnest efforts were of no use to the workers because they were not under the guidance of the Lord's assistance. As then the Divine goodness does not grant these rich crops to idle husbandmen who do not till their fields by frequent ploughing, so also toil all night long is of no use to the workers unless the mercy of the Lord prospers it. But herein human pride should never try to put itself on a level with the grace of God or to intermingle itself with it, so as to fancy that its own efforts were the cause of Divine bounty, or to boast that a very plentiful crop of fruits was an answer to the merits of its own exertions. For a man should consider and with a most careful scrutiny weigh the fact that he could not by his own strength apply those very efforts which he has earnestly used in his desire for wealth, unless the Lord's protection and pity had given him strength for the performance of all agricultural labours; and that his own will and strength would have been powerless unless Divine compassion had supplied the means for the completion of them, as they sometimes fail either from too much or from too little rain. For when vigour has been granted by the Lord to the oxen, and bodily health and the power to do all the work, and prosperity in undertakings, still a man must pray lest there come to him, as Scripture says, "a heaven of brass and an earth of iron," and "the cankerworm eat what the locust hath left, and the palmerworm eat what the cankerworm hath left, and the mildew destroys what the palmerworm hath left." [1747] Nor is it only in this that the efforts of the husbandman in his work need God's help, unless it also averts unlooked for accidents by which, even when the field is rich with the expected fruitful crops, not only is the man deprived of what he has vainly hoped and looked for, but actually loses the abundant fruits which he has already gathered and stored up in the threshing floor or in the barn. From which we clearly infer that the initiative not only of our actions but also of good thoughts comes from God, who inspires us with a good will to begin with, and supplies us with the opportunity of carrying out what we rightly desire: for "every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from above, from the Father of lights," [1748] who both begins what is good, and continues it and completes it in us, as the Apostle says: "But He who giveth seed to the sower will both provide bread to eat and will multiply your seed and make the fruits of your righteousness to increase." [1749] But it is for us, humbly to follow day by day the grace of God which is drawing us, or else if we resist with "a stiff neck," and (to use the words of Scripture) "uncircumcised ears," [1750] we shall deserve to hear the words of Jeremiah: "Shall he that falleth, not rise again? and he that is turned away, shall he not turn again? Why then is this people in Jerusalem turned away with a stubborn revolting? They have stiffened their necks and refused to return." [1751]

Chapter IV. An objection, asking how the Gentiles can be said to have chastity without the grace of God.

Germanus: To this explanation, the excellence of which we cannot hastily disprove, it seems a difficulty that it tends to destroy free will. For as we see that many of the heathen to whom the assistance of Divine grace has certainly not been vouchsafed, are eminent not only in the virtues of frugality and patience, but (which is more remarkable) in that of chastity, how can we think that the freedom of their will is taken captive and that these virtues are granted to them by God's gift, especially as in following after the wisdom of this world, and in their utter ignorance not only of God's grace but even of the existence of the true God, as we have known Him by the course of our reading and the teaching of others -- they are said to have gained the most perfect purity of chastity by their own efforts and exertions.

Chapter V. The answer on the imaginary chastity of the philosophers.

Chæremon: I am pleased that, though you are fired with the greatest longing to know the truth, yet you bring forward some foolish points, as by your raising these objections the value of the Catholic faith may seem better established, and if I may use the expression, more thoroughly explored. For what wise man would make such contradictory statements as yesterday to maintain that the heavenly purity of chastity could not possibly even by God's grace be bestowed on any mortals, and now to hold that it was obtained even by the heathen by their own strength? But as you have certainly, as I said, made these objections from the desire of getting at the truth, consider what we hold on these points. First we certainly must not think that the philosophers attained such chastity of soul, as is required of us, on whom it is enjoined that not fornication only, but uncleanness be not so much as named among us. But they had a sort of merike, i.e., some particle of chastity; viz. continence of the flesh, by which they could restrain their lust from carnal intercourse: but this internal purity of mind and continual purity of body they could not attain, I will not say, in act, but even in thought. Finally Socrates, the most famous of them all, as they themselves esteem him, was not ashamed to profess this of himself. For when one who judged a man's character by his looks (psusiognomoin) looked at him, and said ommata paid erastou, i.e., "the eyes of a corrupter of boys," and his scholars rushed at him, and brought him to their master and wanted to avenge the insult, it is said that he checked their indignation with these words: pausaothe, etairoi ; eimi gar, epeko de, i.e., Stop, my friends, for I am, but I restrain myself. It is then quite clearly shown not only by our assertions but actually by their own admissions that it was only the performance of indecent acts, i.e., the disgrace of intercourse, that was by force of necessity checked by them, and that the desire and delight in this passion was not shut out from their hearts. But with what horror must one bring forward this saying of Diogenes? For a thing which the philosophers of this world were not ashamed to bring forward as something remarkable, cannot be spoken or heard by us without shame: for to one to be punished for the crime of adultery they relate that he said to dorean poloumenon thanato me agoraze, i.e., you should not buy with your death what is sold for nothing. [1752] It is clear then that they did not recognize the virtue of the true chastity which we seek for, and so it is quite certain that our circumcision which is in the spirit cannot be acquired save only by the gift of God, and that it belongs only to those who serve God with full contrition of their spirit.

Chapter VI. That without the grace of God we cannot make any diligent efforts.

And therefore though in many things, indeed in everything, it can be shown that men always have need of God's help, and that human weakness cannot accomplish anything that has to do with salvation by itself alone, i.e., without the aid of God, yet in nothing is this more clearly shown than in the acquisition and preservation of chastity. For as the discussion on the difficulty of its perfection is put off for so long, let us meanwhile discourse briefly on the instruments of it. Who, I ask, could, however fervent he might be in spirit, relying on his own strength with no praise from men endure the squalor of the desert, and I will not say the daily lack but the supply of dry bread? Who without the Lord's consolation, could put up with the continual thirst for water, or deprive his human eyes of that sweet and delicious morning sleep, and regularly compress his whole time of rest and repose into the limits of four hours? Who would be sufficient without God's grace to give continual attendance to reading and constant earnestness in work, receiving no advantage of present gain? And all these matters, as we cannot desire them continuously without divine inspiration, so in no respect whatever can we perform them without His help. And that we may ensure that these things are not only proved to us by the teaching of experience, but also made still clearer by sure proof and arguments, does not some weakness intervene in the case of many things which we wish usefully to perform, and though the full keenness of our desire and the perfection of our will be not wanting, yet interfere with the wish we have conceived, so that there is no carrying out of our purpose, unless the power to perform it has been granted by the mercy of the Lord, so that, although there are countless swarms of people who are anxious to stick faithfully to the pursuit of virtue, you can scarcely find any who are able to carry it out and endure it, to say nothing of the fact that, even when no weakness at all hinders us, the opportunity for doing everything that we wish does not lie in our own power. For it is not in our power to secure the silence of solitude and severe fasts and undisturbed study even when we could use such opportunities, but by a chapter of accidents we are often very much against our will kept away from the salutary ordinances so that we have to pray to the Lord for opportunities of place or time in which to practise them. And it is clear that the ability for these is not sufficient for us unless there be also granted to us by the Lord an opportunity of doing what we are capable of (as the Apostle also says: "For we wanted to come to you once and again, but Satan hindered us" [1753]), so that sometimes we find for our advantage we are called away from these spiritual exercises in order that while without our own consent the regularity of our routine is broken and we yield something to weakness of the flesh, we may even against our will be brought to a salutary patience. Of which providential arrangement of God the blessed Apostle says something similar: "For which I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me. And He said to me: My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness:" and again: "For we know not what to pray for as we ought." [1754]

Chapter VII. Of the main purpose of God and His daily Providence.

For the purpose of God whereby He made man not to perish but to live for ever, stands immovable. And when His goodness sees in us even the very smallest spark of good will shining forth, which He Himself has struck as it were out of the hard flints of our hearts, He fans and fosters it and nurses it with His breath, as He "willeth all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth," for as He says, "it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish," and again it says: "Neither will God have a soul to perish, but recallesh," meaning that he that is cast off should not altogether perish. [1755] For He is true, and lieth not when He lays down with an oath: "As I live, saith the Lord God, for I will not the death of a sinner, but that he should turn from his way and live." [1756] For if He willeth not that one of His little ones should perish, how can we imagine without grievous blasphemy that He does not generally will all men, but only some instead of all to be saved? Those then who perish, perish against His will, as He testifies against each one of them day by day: "Turn from your evil ways, and why will ye die, O house of Israel?" [1757] And again: "How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not;" and: "Wherefore is this people in Jerusalem turned away with a stubborn revolting? They have hardened their faces and refused to return." [1758] The grace of Christ then is at hand every day, which, while it "willeth all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth," calleth all without any exception, saying: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." [1759] But if He calls not all generally but only some, it follows that not all are heavy laden either with original or actual sin, and that this saying is not a true one: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God;" nor can we believe that "death passed on all men." [1760] And so far do all who perish, perish against the will of God, that God cannot be said to have made death, as Scripture itself testifies: "For God made not death, neither rejoiceth in the destruction of the living." [1761] And hence it comes that for the most part when instead of good things we ask for the opposite, our prayer is either heard but tardily or not at all; and again the Lord vouchsafes to bring upon us even against our will, like some most beneficent physician, for our good what we think is opposed to it, and sometimes He delays and hinders our injurious purposes and deadly attempts from having their horrible effects, and, while we are rushing headlong towards death, draws us back to salvation, and rescues us without our knowing it from the jaws of hell.

Chapter VIII. Of the grace of God and the freedom of the will.

And this care of His and providence with regard to us the Divine word has finely described by the prophet Hosea under the figure of Jerusalem as an harlot, and inclining with disgraceful eagerness to the worship of idols, where when she says: "I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread, and my water, and my wool, and my flax, and my oil, and my drink;" the Divine consideration replies having regard to her salvation and not to her wishes: "Behold I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and I will stop it up with a wall, and she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, and shall not overtake them: and she shall seek them, and shall not find them, and shall say: I will return to my first husband, because it was better with me than now." [1762] And again our obstinacy, and scorn, with which we in our rebellious spirit disdain Him when He urges us to a salutary return, is described in the following comparison: He says: "And I said thou shalt call Me Father, and shalt not cease to walk after Me. But as a woman that despiseth her lover, so hath the house of Israel despised Me, saith the Lord." [1763] Aptly then, as He has compared Jerusalem to an adulteress forsaking her husband, He compares His own love and persevering goodness to a man who is dying of love for a woman. For the goodness and love of God, which He ever shows to mankind, -- since it is overcome by no injuries so as to cease from caring for our salvation, or be driven from His first intention, as if vanquished by our iniquities, -- could not be more fitly described by any comparison than the case of a man inflamed with most ardent love for a woman, who is consumed by a more burning passion for her, the more he sees that he is slighted and despised by her. The Divine protection then is inseparably present with us, and so great is the kindness of the Creator towards His creatures, that His Providence not only accompanies it, but actually constantly precedes it, as the prophet experienced and plainly confessed, saying: "My God will prevent me with His mercy." [1764] And when He sees in us some beginnings of a good will, He at once enlightens it and strengthens it and urges it on towards salvation, increasing that which He Himself implanted or which He sees to have arisen from our own efforts. For He says "Before they cry, I will hear them: While they are still speaking I will hear them;" and again: "As soon as He hears the voice of thy crying, He will answer thee." [1765] And in His goodness, not only does He inspire us with holy desires, but actually creates occasions for life and opportunities for good results, and shows to those in error the direction of the way of salvation.

Chapter IX. Of the power of our good will, and the grace of God.

Whence human reason cannot easily decide how the Lord gives to those that ask, is found by those that seek, and opens to those that knock, and on the other hand is found by those that sought Him not, appears openly among those who asked not for Him, and all the day long stretches forth His hands to an unbelieving and gainsaying people, calls those who resist and stand afar off, draws men against their will to salvation, takes away from those who want to sin the faculty of carrying out their desire, in His goodness stands in the way of those who are rushing into wickedness. But who can easily see how it is that the completion of our salvation is assigned to our own will, of which it is said: "If ye be willing, and hearken unto Me, ye shall eat the good things of the land," [1766] and how it is "not of him that willeth or runneth, but of God that hath mercy?" [1767] What too is this, that God "will render to every man according to his works;" [1768] and "it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do, of His good pleasure;" [1769] and "this is not of yourselves but it is the gift of God: not of works, that no man may boast?" [1770] What is this too which is said: "Draw near to the Lord, and He will draw near to you," [1771] and what He says elsewhere: "No man cometh unto Me except the Father who sent Me draw Him?" [1772] What is it that we find: "Make straight paths for your feet and direct your ways," [1773] and what is it that we say in our prayers: "Direct my way in Thy sight," and "establish my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps be not moved?" [1774] What is it again that we are admonished: "Make you a new heart and a new spirit," [1775] and what is this which is promised to us: "I will give them one heart and will put a new spirit within them:" and "I will take away the stony heart from their flesh and will give them an heart of flesh that they may walk in Thy statutes and keep My judgments?" [1776] What is it that the Lord commands, where He says: "Wash thine heart of iniquity, O Jerusalem, that thou mayest be saved," [1777] and what is it that the prophet asks for from the Lord, when he says "Create in me a clean heart, O God," and again: "Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow?" [1778] What is it that is said to us: "Enlighten yourselves with the light of knowledge;" [1779] and this which is said of God: "Who teacheth man knowledge;" [1780] and: "the Lord enlightens the blind," [1781] or at any rate this, which we say in our prayers with the prophet: "Lighten mine eyes that I sleep not in death," [1782] unless in all these there is a declaration of the grace of God and the freedom of our will, because even of his own motion a man can be led to the quest of virtue, but always stands in need of the help of the Lord? For neither does anyone enjoy good health whenever he will, nor is he at his own will and pleasure set free from disease and sickness. But what good is it to have desired the blessing of health, unless God, who grants us the enjoyments of life itself, grant also vigorous and sound health? But that it may be still clearer that through the excellence of nature which is granted by the goodness of the Creator, sometimes first beginnings of a good will arise, which however cannot attain to the complete performance of what is good unless it is guided by the Lord, the Apostle bears witness and says: "For to will is present with me, but to perform what is good I find not." [1783]

Chapter X. On the weakness of free will.

For Holy Scripture supports the freedom of the will where it says: "Keep thy heart with all diligence," [1784] but the Apostle indicates its weakness by saying "The Lord keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." [1785] David asserts the power of free will, where he says "I have inclined my heart to do Thy righteous acts," [1786] but the same man in like manner teaches us its weakness, by praying and saying, "Incline my heart unto Thy testimonies and not to covetousness:" [1787] Solomon also: "The Lord incline our hearts unto Himself that we may walk in all His ways and keep His commandments, and ordinances and judgments." [1788] The Psalmist denotes the power of our will, where he says: "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips that they speak no guile," [1789] our prayer testifies to its weakness, when we say: "O Lord, set a watch before my mouth, and keep the door of my lips." [1790] The importance of our will is maintained by the Lord, when we find "Break the chains of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion:" [1791] of its weakness the prophet sings, when he says: "The Lord looseth them that are bound:" and "Thou hast broken my chains: To Thee will I offer the sacrifice of praise." [1792] We hear in the gospel the Lord summoning us to come speedily to Him by our free will: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you," [1793] but the same Lord testifies to its weakness, by saying: "No man can come unto Me except the Father which sent Me draw him." [1794] The Apostle indicates our free will by saying: "So run that ye may obtain:" [1795] but to its weakness John Baptist bears witness where he says: "No man can receive anything of himself, except it be given him from above." [1796] We are commanded to keep our souls with all care, when the Prophet says: "Keep your souls," [1797] but by the same spirit another Prophet proclaims: "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." [1798] The Apostle writing to the Philippians, to show that their will is free, says "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," but to point out its weakness, he adds: "For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." [1799]

Chapter XI. Whether the grace of God precedes or follows our good will.

And so these are somehow mixed up and indiscriminately confused, so that among many persons, which depends on the other is involved in great questionings, i.e., does God have compassion upon us because we have shown the beginning of a good will, or does the beginning of a good will follow because God has had compassion upon us? For many believing each of these and asserting them more widely than is right are entangled in all kinds of opposite errors. For if we say that the beginning of free will is in our own power, what about Paul the persecutor, what about Matthew the publican, of whom the one was drawn to salvation while eager for bloodshed and the punishment of the innocent, the other for violence and rapine? But if we say that the beginning of our free will is always due to the inspiration of the grace of God, what about the faith of Zaccheus, or what are we to say of the goodness of the thief on the cross, who by their own desires brought violence to bear on the kingdom of heaven and so prevented the special leadings of their vocation? But if we attribute the performance of virtuous acts, and the execution of God's commands to our own will, how do we pray: "Strengthen, O God, what Thou hast wrought in us;" and "The work of our hands stablish Thou upon us?" [1800] We know that Balaam was brought to curse Israel, but we see that when he wished to curse he was not permitted to. Abimelech is preserved from touching Rebecca and so sinning against God. Joseph is sold by the envy of his brethren, in order to bring about the descent of the children of Israel into Egypt, and that while they were contemplating the death of their brother provision might be made for them against the famine to come: as Joseph shows when he makes himself known to his brethren and says: "Fear not, neither let it be grievous unto you that ye sold me into these parts: for for your salvation God sent me before you;" and below: "For God sent me before that ye might be preserved upon the earth and might have food whereby to live. Not by your design was I sent but by the will of God, who has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his house, and chief over all the land of Egypt." And when his brethren were alarmed after the death of his father, he removed their suspicions and terror by saying: "Fear not: Can ye resist the will of God? You imagined evil against me but God turned it into good, that He might exalt me, as ye see at the present time, that He might save much people." [1801] And that this was brought about providentially the blessed David likewise declared saying in the hundred and fourth Psalm: "And He called for a dearth upon the land: and brake all the staff of bread. He sent a man before them: Joseph was sold for a slave." [1802] These two then; viz., the grace of God and free will seem opposed to each other, but really are in harmony, and we gather from the system of goodness that we ought to have both alike, lest if we withdraw one of them from man, we may seem to have broken the rule of the Church's faith: for when God sees us inclined to will what is good, He meets, guides, and strengthens us: for "At the voice of thy cry, as soon as He shall hear, He will answer thee;" and: "Call upon Me," He says, "in the day of tribulation and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." [1803] And again, if He finds that we are unwilling or have grown cold, He stirs our hearts with salutary exhortations, by which a good will is either renewed or formed in us.

Chapter XII. That a good will should not always be attributed to grace, nor always to man himself.

For we should not hold that God made man such that he can never will or be capable of what is good: or else He has not granted him a free will, if He has suffered him only to will or be capable of evil, but neither to will or be capable of what is good of himself. And, in this case how will that first statement of the Lord made about men after the fall stand: "Behold, Adam is become as one of us, knowing good and evil?" [1804] For we cannot think that before, he was such as to be altogether ignorant of good. Otherwise we should have to admit that he was formed like some irrational and insensate beast: which is sufficiently absurd and altogether alien from the Catholic faith. Moreover as the wisest Solomon says: "God made man upright," i.e., always to enjoy the knowledge of good only, "But they have sought out many imaginations," [1805] for they came, as has been said, to know good and evil. Adam therefore after the fall conceived a knowledge of evil which he had not previously, but did not lose the knowledge of good which he had before. Finally the Apostle's words very clearly show that mankind did not lose after the fall of Adam the knowledge of good: as he says: "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things of the law, these, though they have not the law, are a law to themselves, as they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness to these, and their thoughts within them either accusing or else excusing them, in the day in which God shall judge the secrets of men." [1806] And with the same meaning the Lord rebukes by the prophet the unnatural but freely chosen blindness of the Jews, which they by their obstinacy brought upon themselves, saying: "Hear ye deaf, and ye blind, behold that you may see. Who is deaf but My servant? and blind, but he to whom I have sent My messengers?" [1807] And that no one might ascribe this blindness of theirs to nature instead of to their own will, elsewhere He says: "Bring forth the people that are blind and have eyes: that are deaf and have ears;" and again: "having eyes, but ye see not; and ears, but ye hear not." [1808] The Lord also says in the gospel: "Because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not neither do they understand." [1809] And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says: "Hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand: and seeing ye shall see and shall not see. For the heart of this people is waxed fat, and their ears are dull of hearing: and they have closed their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart, and be turned and I should heal them." [1810] Finally in order to denote that the possibility of good was in them, in chiding the Pharisees, He says: "But why of your own selves do ye not judge what is right?" [1811] And this he certainly would not have said to them, unless He knew that by their natural judgment they could discern what was fair. Wherefore we must take care not to refer all the merits of the saints to the Lord in such a way as to ascribe nothing but what is evil and perverse to human nature: in doing which we are confuted by the evidence of the most wise Solomon, or rather of the Lord Himself, Whose words these are; for when the building of the Temple was finished and he was praying, he spoke as follows: "And David my father would have built a house to the name of the Lord God of Israel: and the Lord said to David my father: Whereas thou hast thought in thine heart to build a house to My name, thou hast well done in having this

same thing in thy mind. Nevertheless thou shalt not build a house to My name." [1812] This thought then and this purpose of king David, are we to call it good and from God or bad and from man? For if that thought was good and from God, why did He by whom it was inspired refuse that it should be carried into effect? But if it is bad and from man, why is it praised by the Lord? It remains then that we must take it as good and from man. And in the same way we can take our own thoughts today. For it was not given only to David to think what is good of himself, nor is it denied to us naturally to think or imagine anything that is good. It cannot then be doubted that there are by nature some seeds of goodness in every soul implanted by the kindness of the Creator: but unless these are quickened by the assistance of God, they will not be able to attain to an increase of perfection, for, as the blessed Apostle says: "Neither is he that planteth anything nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase." [1813] But that freedom of the will is to some degree in a man's own power is very clearly taught in the book termed the Pastor, [1814] where two angels are said to be attached to each one of us, i.e., a good and a bad one, while it lies at a man's own option to choose which to follow. And therefore the will always remains free in man, and can either neglect or delight in the grace of God. For the Apostle would not have commanded saying: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," had he not known that it could be advanced or neglected by us. But that men might not fancy that they had no need of Divine aid for the work of Salvation, he subjoins: "For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do, of His good pleasure." [1815] And therefore he warns Timothy and says: "Neglect not the grace of God which is in thee;" and again: "For which cause I exhort thee to stir up the grace of God which is in thee." [1816] Hence also in writing to the Corinthians he exhorts and warns them not through their unfruitful works to show themselves unworthy of the grace of God, saying: "And we helping, exhort you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain:" [1817] for the reception of saving grace was of no profit to Simon doubtless because he had received it in vain; for he would not obey the command of the blessed Peter who said: "Repent of thine iniquity, and pray God if haply the thoughts of thine heart may be forgiven thee; for I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity." [1818] It prevents therefore the will of man, for it is said: "My God will prevent me with His mercy;" [1819] and again when God waits and for our good delays, that He may put our desires to the test, our will precedes, for it is said: "And in the morning my prayer shall prevent Thee;" and again: "I prevented the dawning of the day and cried;" and: "Mine eyes have prevented the morning." [1820] For He calls and invites us, when He says: "All the day long I stretched forth My hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people;" [1821] and He is invited by us when we say to Him: "All the day long I have stretched forth My hands unto Thee." [1822] He waits for us, when it is said by the prophet: "Wherefore the Lord waiteth to have compassion upon us;" [1823] and He is waited for by us, when we say: "I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me;" and: "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." [1824] He strengthens us when He says: "And I have chastised them, and strengthened their arms; and they have imagined evil against me;" [1825] and He exhorts us to strengthen ourselves when He says: "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and make strong the feeble knees." [1826] Jesus cries: "If any man thirst let him come unto Me and drink;" [1827] the prophet also cries to Him: "I have laboured with crying, my jaws are become hoarse: mine eyes have failed, whilst I hope in my God." [1828] The Lord seeks us, when He says: "I sought and there was no man. I called, and there was none to answer;" [1829] and He Himself is sought by the bride who mourns with tears: "I sought on my bed by night Him whom my soul loved: I sought Him and found Him not; I called Him, and He gave me no

answer." [1830]

Chapter XIII. How human efforts cannot be set against the grace of God.

And so the grace of God always co-operates with our will for its advantage, and in all things assists, protects, and defends it, in such a way as sometimes even to require and look for some efforts of good will from it that it may not appear to confer its gifts on one who is asleep or relaxed in sluggish ease, as it seeks opportunities to show that as the torpor of man's sluggishness is shaken off its bounty is not unreasonable, when it bestows it on account of some desire and efforts to gain it. And none the less does God's grace continue to be free grace while in return for some small and trivial efforts it bestows with priceless bounty such glory of immortality, and such gifts of eternal bliss. For because the faith of the thief on the cross came as the first thing, no one would say that therefore the blessed abode of Paradise was not promised to him as a free gift, nor could we hold that it was the penitence of King David's single word which he uttered: "I have sinned against the Lord," and not rather the mercy of God which removed those two grievous sins of his, so that it was vouchsafed to him to hear from the prophet Nathan: "The Lord also hath put away thine iniquity: thou shalt not die." [1831] The fact then that he added murder to adultery, was certainly due to free will: but that he was reproved by the prophet, this was the grace of Divine Compassion. Again it was his own doing that he was humbled and acknowledged his guilt; but that in a very short interval of time he was granted pardon for such sins, this was the gift of the merciful Lord. And what shall we say of this brief confession and of the incomparable infinity of Divine reward, when it is easy to see what the blessed Apostle, as he fixes his gaze on the greatness of future remuneration, announced on those countless persecutions of his? "for," says he, "our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh in us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," [1832] of which elsewhere he constantly affirms, saying that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the future glory which shall be revealed in us." [1833] However much then human weakness may strive, it cannot come up to the future reward, nor by its efforts so take off from Divine grace that it should not always remain a free gift. And therefore the aforesaid teacher of the Gentiles, though he bears his witness that he had obtained the grade of the Apostolate by the grace of God, saying: "By the grace of God I am what I am," yet also declares that he himself had corresponded to Divine Grace, where he says: "And His Grace in me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: and yet not I, but the Grace of God with me." [1834] For when he says: "I laboured," he shows the effort of his own will; when he says: "yet not I, but the grace of God," he points out the value of Divine protection; when he says: "with me," he affirms that it cooperates with him when he was not idle or careless, but working and making an effort.

Chapter XIV. How God makes trial of the strength of man's will by means of his temptations.

And this too we read that the Divine righteousness provided for in the case of Job His well tried athlete, when the devil had challenged him to single combat. For if he had advanced against his foe, not with his own strength, but solely with the protection of God's grace; and, supported only by Divine aid without any virtue of patience on his own part, had borne that manifold weight of temptations and losses, contrived with all the cruelty of his foe, how would the devil have repeated with some justice that slanderous speech which he had previously uttered: "Doth Job serve God for nought? Hast Thou not hedged him in, and all his substance round about? but take away thine hand," i.e., allow him to fight with me in his own strength, "and he will curse Thee to Thy face." [1835] But as after the struggle the slanderous foe dare not give vent to any such murmur as this, he admired that he was vanquished by his strength and not by that of God; although too we must not hold that the grace of God was altogether wanting to him, which gave to the tempter a power of tempting in proportion to that which it knew that he had of resisting, without protecting him from his attacks in such a way as to leave no room for human virtue, but only providing for this; viz., that the most fierce foe should not drive him out of his mind and overwhelm him when weakened, with unequal thoughts and in an unfair contest. But that the Lord is sometimes wont to tempt our faith that it may be made stronger and more glorious, we are taught by the example of the centurion in the gospel, in whose case though the Lord knew that He would cure his servant by the power of His word, yet He chose to offer His bodily presence, saying: "I will come and heal him:" but when the centurion overcame this offer of His by the ardour of still more fervent faith, and said: "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only and my servant shall be healed," the Lord marvelled at him and praised him, and put him before all those of the people of Israel who had believed, saying: "Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith in Israel." [1836] For there would have been no ground for praise or merit, if Christ had only preferred in him what He Himself had given. And this searching trial of faith we read that the Divine righteousness brought about also in the case of the grandest of the patriarchs; where it is said: "And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham." [1837] For the Divine righteousness wished to try not that faith with which the Lord had inspired him, but that which when called and enlightened by the Lord he could show forth by his own free will. Wherefore the firmness of his faith was not without reason proved, and when the grace of God, which had for a while left him to prove him, came to his aid, it was said: "Lay not thine hand on the lad, and do nothing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest the Lord, and for my sake hast not spared thy beloved son." [1838] And that this kind of temptation can befall us, for the sake of proving us, is sufficiently clearly foretold by the giver of the Law in Deuteronomy: "If there rise in the midst of you a prophet or one that saith he hath seen a dream, and foretell a sign and wonder; and that come to pass which he spoke, and he say to thee: Let us go and serve strange gods which ye know not, thou shalt not hear the words of that prophet or dreamer; for the Lord your God surely trieth thee, whether thou lovest Him with all thine heart, and keepest His Commandments, or no." [1839] What

then follows? When God has permitted that prophet or dreamer to arise, must we hold that He will protect those whose faith He is purposing to try, in such a way as to leave no place for their own free will, where they can fight with the tempter with their own strength? And why is it necessary for them even to be tried if He knows them to be so weak and feeble as not to be able by their own power to resist the tempter? But certainly the Divine righteousness would not have permitted them to be tempted, unless it knew that there was within them an equal power of resistance, by which they could by an equitable judgment be found in either result either guilty or worthy of praise. To the same effect also is this which the Apostle says: "Therefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation make also a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it." [1840] For when he says "Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall" he sets free will on its guard, as he certainly knew that, after grace had been received, it could either stand by its exertions or fall through carelessness. But when he adds: "there hath no temptation taken you but what is common to man" he chides their weakness and the frailty of their heart that is not yet strengthened, as they could not yet resist the attacks of the hosts of spiritual wickedness, against which he knew that he and those who were perfect daily fought; of which also he says to the Ephesians: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places." [1841] But when he subjoins: "But God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able," he certainly is not hoping that the Lord will not suffer them to be tempted, but that they may not be tempted above what they are able to bear. For the one shows the power of man's will, the other denotes the grace of the Lord who moderates the violence of temptations. In all these phrases then there is proof that Divine grace ever stirs up the will of man, not so as to protect and defend it in all things in such a way as to cause it not to fight by its own efforts against its spiritual adversaries, the victor over whom may set it down to God's grace, and the vanquished to his own weakness, and thus learn that his hope is always not in his own courage but in the Divine assistance, and that he must ever fly to his Protector. And to prove this not by our own conjecture but by still clearer passages of Holy Scripture let us consider what we read in Joshua the son of Nun: "The Lord," it says, "left these nations and would not destroy them, that by them He might try Israel, whether they would keep the commandments of the Lord their God, and that they might learn to fight with their enemies." [1842] And if we may illustrate the incomparable mercy of our Creator from something earthly, not as being equal in kindness, but as an illustration of mercy: if a tender and anxious nurse carries an infant in her bosom for a long time in order sometime to teach it to walk, and first allows it to crawl, then supports it that by the aid of her right hand it may lean on its alternate steps, presently leaves it for a little and if she sees it tottering at all, catches hold of it, and grabs at it when falling, when down picks it up, and either shields it from a fall, or allows it to fall lightly, and sets it up again after a tumble, but when she has brought it up to boyhood or the strength of youth or early manhood, lays upon it some burdens or labours by which it may be not overwhelmed but exercised, and allows it to vie with those of its own age; how much more does the heavenly Father of all know whom to carry in the bosom of His grace, whom to train to virtue in His sight by the exercise of free will, and yet He helps him in his efforts, hears him when he calls, leaves him not when he seeks Him, and sometimes snatches him from peril even without his knowing it.

Chapter XV. Of the manifold grace of men's calls.

And by this it is clearly shown that God's "judgments are inscrutable and His ways past finding out," [1843] by which He draws mankind to salvation. And this too we can prove by the instances of calls in the gospels. For He chose Andrew and Peter and the rest of the apostles by the free compassion of His grace when they were thinking nothing of their healing and salvation. Zacchæus, when in his faithfulness he was struggling to see the Lord, and making up for his littleness of stature by the height of the sycamore tree, He not only received, but actually honoured by the blessing of His dwelling with him. Paul even against his will and resisting He drew to Him. Another He charged to cleave to Him so closely that when he asked for the shortest possible delay in order to bury his father He did not grant it. To Cornelius when constantly attending to prayers and alms the way of salvation was shown by way of recompense, and by the visitation of an angel he was bidden to summon Peter, and learn from him the words of salvation, whereby he might be saved with all his. And so the manifold wisdom of God grants with manifold and inscrutable kindness salvation to men; and imparts to each one according to his capacity the grace of His bounty, so that He wills to grant His healing not according to the uniform power of His Majesty but according to the measure of the faith in which He finds each one, or as He Himself has imparted it to each one. For when one believed that for the cure of his leprosy the will of Christ alone was sufficient He healed him by the simple consent of His will, saying: "I will, be thou clean." [1844] When another prayed that He would come and raise his dead daughter by laying His hands on her, He entered his house as he had hoped, and granted what was asked of Him. When another believed that what was essential for his salvation depended on His command, and answered: "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed," [1845] He restored to their former strength the limbs that were relaxed, by the power of a word, saying: "Go thy way, and as thou hast believed so be it unto thee." [1846] To others hoping for restoration from the touch of His hem, He granted rich gifts of healing. To some, when asked, He bestowed remedies for their diseases. To others He afforded the means of healing unasked: others He urged on to hope, saying: "Willest thou to be made whole?" [1847] to others when they were without hope He brought help spontaneously. The desires of some He searched out before satisfying their wants, saying: "What will ye that I should do for you?" [1848] To another who knew not the way to obtain what he desired, He showed it in His kindness, saying: "If thou believest thou shalt see the glory of God." [1849] Among some so richly did He pour forth the mighty works of His cures that of them the Evangelist says: "And He healed all their sick." [1850] But among others the unfathomable depth of Christ's beneficence was so stopped up, that it was said: "And Jesus could do there no mighty works because of their unbelief." [1851] And so the bounty of God is actually shaped according to the capacity of man's faith, so that to one it is said: "According to thy faith be it unto thee:" [1852] and to another: "Go thy way, and as thou hast believed so be it unto thee;" [1853] to another "Be it unto thee according as thou wilt," [1854] and again to another: "Thy faith hath made thee whole." [1855]

Chapter XVI. Of the grace of God; to the effect that it transcends the narrow limits of human faith.

But let no one imagine that we have brought forward these instances to try to make out that the chief share in our salvation rests with our faith, according to the profane notion of some who attribute everything to free will and lay down that the grace of God is dispensed in accordance with the desert of each man: but we plainly assert our unconditional opinion that the grace of God is superabounding, and sometimes overflows the narrow limits of man's lack of faith. And this, as we remember, happened in the case of the ruler in the gospel, who, as he believed that it was an easier thing for his son to be cured when sick than to be raised when dead, implored the Lord to come at once, saying: "Lord, come down ere my child die;" and though Christ reproved his lack of faith with these words: "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe," yet He did not manifest the grace of His Divinity in proportion to the weakness of his faith, nor did He expell the deadly disease of the fever by His bodily presence, as the man believed he would, but by the word of His power, saying: "Go thy way, thy son liveth." [1856] And we read also that the Lord poured forth this superabundance of grace in the case of the cure of the paralytic, when, though he only asked for the healing of the weakness by which his body was enervated, He first brought health to the soul by saying: "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee." After which, when the scribes did not believe that He could forgive men's sins, in order to confound their incredulity, He set free by the power of His word the man's limb, and put an end to his disease of paralysis, by saying: "Why think ye evil in your hearts? Whether is easier to say, thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, arise and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, then saith He to the sick of the palsy: Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house." [1857] And in the same way in the case of the man who had been lying for thirty-eight years near the edge of the pool, and hoping for a cure from the moving of the water, He showed the princely character of His bounty unasked. For when in His wish to arouse him for the saving remedy, He had said to him: "willest thou to be made whole," and when the man complained of his lack of human assistance and said: "I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled," the Lord in His pity granted pardon to his unbelief and ignorance, and restored him to his former health, not in the way which he expected, but in the way which He Himself willed, saying: "Arise, take up thy bed and go unto thine house." [1858] And what wonder if these acts are told of the Lord's power, when Divine grace has actually wrought similar works by means of His servants! For when Peter and John were entering the temple, when the man who was lame from his mother's womb and had no idea how to walk, asked an alms, they gave him not the miserable coppers which the sick man asked for, but the power to walk, and when he was only expecting the smallest of gifts to console him, enriched him with the prize of unlooked for health, as Peter said: "Silver and gold have I none: but such as I have, give I unto thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." [1859]

Chapter XVII. Of the inscrutable providence of God.

By those instances then which we have brought forward from the gospel records we can very clearly perceive that God brings salvation to mankind in diverse and innumerable methods and inscrutable ways, and that He stirs up the course of some, who are already wanting it, and thirsting for it, to greater zeal, while He forces some even against their will, and resisting. And that at one time He gives his assistance for the fulfilment of those things which he sees that we desire for our good, while at another time He puts into us the very beginnings of holy desire, and grants both the commencement of a good work and perseverance in it. Hence it comes that in our prayers we proclaim God as not only our Protector and Saviour, but actually as our Helper and Sponsor. For whereas He first calls us to Him, and while we are still ignorant and unwilling, draws us towards salvation, He is our Protector and Saviour, but whereas when we are already striving, He is wont to bring us help, and to receive and defend those who fly to Him for refuge, He is termed our Sponsor and Refuge. Finally the blessed Apostle when revolving in his mind this manifold bounty of God's providence, as he sees that he has fallen into some vast and boundless ocean of God's goodness, exclaims: "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are the judgments of God and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" [1860] Whoever then imagines that he can by human reason fathom the depths of that inconceivable abyss, will be trying to explain away the astonishment at that knowledge, at which that great and mighty teacher of the gentiles was awed. For if a man thinks that he can either conceive in his mind or discuss exhaustively the dispensation of God whereby He works salvation in men, he certainly impugns the truth of the Apostle's words and asserts with profane audacity that His judgments can be scrutinized, and His ways searched out. This providence and love of God therefore, which the Lord in His unwearied goodness vouchsafes to show us, He compares to the tenderest heart of a kind mother, as He wishes to express it by a figure of human affection, and finds in His creatures no such feeling of love, to which he could better compare it. And He uses this example, because nothing dearer can be found in human nature, saying: "Can a mother forget her child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" But not content with this comparison He at once goes beyond it, and subjoins these words: "And though she may forget, yet will not I forget thee." [1861]

Chapter XVIII. The decision of the fathers that free will is not equal to save a man.

And from this it is clearly gathered by those who, led not by chattering words but by experience, measure the magnitude of grace, and the paltry limits of man's will, that "the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, nor food to the wise, nor riches to the prudent, nor grace to the learned," but that "all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will." [1862] And therefore it is proved by no doubtful faith but by experience which can (so to speak) be laid hold of, that God the Father of all things worketh indifferently all things in all, as the Apostle says, like some most kind father and most benign physician; and that now He puts into us the very beginnings of salvation, and gives to each the zeal of his free will; and now grants the carrying out of the work, and the perfecting of goodness; and now saves men, even against their will and without their knowledge, from ruin that is close at hand, and a headlong fall; and now affords them occasions and opportunities of salvation, and wards off headlong and violent attacks from purposes that would bring death; and assists some who are already willing and running, while He draws others who are unwilling and resisting, and forces them to a good will. But that, when we do not always resist or remain persistently unwilling, everything is granted to us by God, and that the main share in our salvation is to be ascribed not to the merit of our own works but to heavenly grace, we are thus taught by the words of the Lord Himself: "And you shall remember your ways and all your wicked doings with which you have been defiled; and you shall be displeased with yourselves in your own sight for all your wicked deeds which you have committed. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall have done well by you for My own name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your wicked deeds, O house of Israel." [1863] And therefore it is laid down by all the Catholic fathers who have taught perfection of heart not by empty disputes of words, but in deed and act, that the first stage in the Divine gift is for each man to be inflamed with the desire of everything that is good, but in such a way that the choice of free will is open to either side: and that the second stage in Divine grace is for the aforesaid practices of virtue to be able to be performed, but in such a way that the possibilities of the will are not destroyed: the third stage also belongs to the gifts of God, so that it may be held by the persistence of the goodness already acquired, and in such a way that the liberty may not be surrendered and experience bondage. For the God of all must be held to work in all, so as to incite, protect, and strengthen, but not to take away the freedom of the will which He Himself has once given. If however any more subtle inference of man's argumentation and reasoning seems opposed to this interpretation, it should be avoided rather than brought forward to the destruction of the faith (for we gain not faith from understanding, but understanding from faith, as it is written: "Except ye believe, ye will not understand" [1864]) for how God works all things in us and yet everything can be ascribed to free will, cannot be fully grasped by the mind and reason of man. Strengthened by this food the blessed Chæremon prevented us from feeling the toil of so difficult a journey.

XIV. The First Conference of Abbot Nesteros.

On Spiritual Knowledge.

Chapter I. The words of Abbot Nesteros on the knowledge of the religious.

The order of our promise and course demands that there should follow the instruction of Abbot Nesteros, [1865] a man of excellence in all points and of the greatest knowledge: who when he had seen that we had committed some parts of Holy Scripture to memory and desired to understand them, addressed us in these words. There are indeed many different kinds of knowledge in this world, since there is as great a variety of them as there is of the arts and sciences. But, while all are either utterly useless or only useful for the good of this present life, there is yet none which has not its own system and method for learning it, by which it can be grasped by those who seek it. If then those arts are guided by certain special rules for their publication, how much more does the system and expression of our religion, which tends to the contemplation of the secrets of invisible mysteries, and seeks no present gain but the reward of an eternal recompense, depend on a fixed order and scheme. And the knowledge of this is twofold: first, praktike, i.e., practical, which is brought about by an improvement of morals and purification from faults: secondly, theoretike, which consists in the contemplation of things Divine and the knowledge of most sacred thoughts.

Chapter II. On grasping the knowledge of spiritual things.

Whoever then would arrive at this theoretical knowledge must first pursue practical knowledge with all his might and main. For this practical knowledge can be acquired without theoretical, but theoretical cannot possibly be gained without practical. For there are certain stages, so distinct, and arranged in such a way that man's humility may be able to mount on high; and if these follow each other in turn in the order of which we have spoken, man can attain to a height to which he could not fly, if the first step were wanting. In vain then does one strive for the vision of God, who does not shun the stains of sins: "For the spirit of God hates deception, and dwells not in a body subject to sins." [1866]

Chapter III. How practical perfection depends on a double system.

But this practical perfection depends on a double system; for its first method is to know the nature of all faults and the manner of their cure. Its second, to discover the order of the virtues, and form our mind by their perfection so that it may be obedient to them, not as if it were forced and subject to some fierce sway, but as if it delighted in its natural good, and throve upon it, and mounted by that steep and narrow way with real pleasure. For in what way will one, who has neither succeeded in understanding the nature of his own faults, nor tried to eradicate them, be able to gain an understanding of virtues, which is the second stage of practical training, or the mysteries of spiritual and heavenly things, which exist in the higher stage of theoretical knowledge? For it will necessarily be maintained that he cannot advance to more lofty heights who has not surmounted the lower ones, and much less will he be able to grasp those things that are without, who has not succeeded in understanding what is within his comprehension. But you should know that we must make an effort with a twofold purpose in our exertion; both for the expulsion of vice, and for the attainment of virtue. And this we do not gather from our own conjecture, but are taught by the words of Him who alone knows the strength and method of His work: "Behold," He says: "I have set thee this day over the nations and over kingdoms, to root up, and to pull down, and to waste, and to destroy, and to build and to plant." [1867] He points out that for getting rid of noxious things four things are requisite; viz., to root up, to pull down, to waste, and to destroy: but for the performance of what is good, and the acquisition of what pertains to righteousness only to build and to plant. Whence it is perfectly evident that it is a harder thing to tear up and eradicate the inveterate passions of body and soul than to introduce and plant spiritual virtues.

Chapter IV. How practical life is distributed among many different professions and interests.

This practical life then, which as has been said rests on a double system, is distributed among many different professions and interests. For some make it their whole purpose to aim at the secrecy of an anchorite and purity of heart, as we know that in the past Elijah and Elisha, and in our own day the blessed Antony and others who followed with the same object, were joined most closely to God by the silence of solitude. Some have given all their efforts and interests towards the system of the brethren and the watchful care of the Coenobium; as we remember that recently Abbot John, who presided over a big monastery in the neighbourhood of the city Thmuis, [1868] and some other men of like merits were eminent with the signs of Apostles. Some are pleased with the kindly service of the guest house and reception, by which in the past the patriarch Abraham and Lot pleased the Lord, and recently the blessed Macarius, [1869] a man of singular courtesy and patience who presided over the guest house at Alexandria in such a way as to be considered inferior to none of those who aimed at the retirement of the desert. Some choose the care of the sick, others devote themselves to intercession, which is offered up for the oppressed and afflicted, or give themselves up to teaching, or give alms to the poor, and flourish among men of excellence and renown, by reason of their love and goodness.

Chapter V. On perseverance in the line that has been chosen.

Wherefore it is good and profitable for each one to endeavour with all his might and main to attain perfection in the work that has been begun, according to the line which he has chosen as the grace which he has received; and while he praises and admires the virtues of others, not to swerve from his own line which he has once for all chosen, as he knows that, as the Apostle says, the body of the Church indeed is one, but the members many, and that it has "gifts differing according to the grace which is given us, whether prophecy, according to the proportion of the faith, whether ministry, in ministering, or he that teacheth, in doctrine, or he that exhorteth in exhortation, he that giveth, in simplicity, he that ruleth, with carefulness, he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness." [1870] For no members can claim the offices of other members, because the eyes cannot perform the duties of the hands, nor the nostrils of the ears. And so not all are Apostles, not all prophets, not all doctors, not all have the gifts of healing, not all speak with tongues, not all interpret. [1871]

Chapter VI. How the weak are easily moved.

For those who are not yet settled in the line which they have taken up are often, when they hear some praised for different interests and virtues, so excited by the praise of them that they try forthwith to imitate their method: and in this human weakness is sure to expend its efforts to no purpose. For it is an impossibility for one and the same man to excel at once in all those good deeds which I enumerated above. And if anyone is anxious equally to affect them all, he is quite sure to come to this; viz., that while he pursues them all, he will not thoroughly succeed in any one, and will lose more than he will gain from this changing and shifting about. For in many ways men advance towards God, and so each man should complete that one which he has once fixed upon, never changing the course of his purpose, so that he may be perfect in whatever line of life his may be.

Chapter VII. An instance of chastity which teaches us that all men should not be emulous of all things.

For apart from that loss, which we have said that a monk incurs who wants in light-mindedness to pass from one pursuit to another, there is a risk of death that is hence incurred, because at times things which are rightly done by some are wrongly taken by others as an example, and things which turned out well for some, are found to be injurious to others. For, to give an instance, it is as if one wished to imitate the good deed of that man, which Abbot John is wont to bring forward, not for the sake of imitating him but simply out of admiration for him; for one came to the aforesaid old man in a secular dress and when he had brought him some of the first fruits of his crops, he found some one there possessed by a most fierce devil. And this one though he scorned the adjurations and commands of Abbot John, and vowed that he would never at his bidding leave the body which he had occupied, yet was terrified at the coming of this other, and departed with a most humble utterance of his name. And the old man marvelled not a little at his so evident grace and was the more astonished at him because he saw that he had on a secular dress; and so began carefully to ask of him the manner of his life and pursuit. And when he said that he was living in the world and bound by the ties of marriage, the blessed John, considering in his mind the greatness of his virtue and grace, searched out still more carefully what his manner of life might be. He declared that he was a countryman, and that he sought his food by the daily toil of his hands, and was not conscious of anything good about him except that he never went forth to his work in the fields in the morning nor came home in the evening without having returned thanks in Church for the food of his daily life, to God Who gave it; and that he had never used any of his crops without having first offered to God their first fruits and tithes; and that he had never driven his oxen over the bounds of another's harvest without having first muzzled them that his neighbour might not sustain the slightest loss through his carelessness. And when these things did not seem to Abbot John sufficient to procure such grace as that with which he saw that he was endowed, and he inquired of him and investigated what it was which could be connected with the merits of such grace, he was induced by respect for such anxious inquiries to confess that, when he wanted to be professed as a monk, he had been compelled by force and his parents' command, twelve years before to take a wife, who, without any body to that day being aware of it, was kept by him as a virgin in the place of a sister. And when the old man heard this, he was so overcome with admiration that he announced publicly in his presence that it was not without good reason that the devil who had scorned him himself, could not endure the presence of this man, whose virtue he himself, not only in the ardour of youth, but even now, would not dare to aim at without risk of his chastity. And though Abbot John would tell this story with the utmost admiration, yet he never advised any monk to try this plan as he knew that many things which are rightly done by some involved others who imitate them in great danger, and that that cannot be tried by all, which the Lord bestowed upon a few by a special gift.

Chapter VIII. Of spiritual knowledge.

But to return to the explanation of the knowledge from which our discourse took its rise. Thus, as we said above, practical knowledge is distributed among many subjects and interests, but theoretical is divided into two parts, i.e., the historical interpretation and the spiritual sense. Whence also Solomon when he had summed up the manifold grace of the Church, added: "for all who are with her are clothed with double garments." [1872] But of spiritual knowledge there are three kinds, tropological, allegorical, anagogical, [1873] of which we read as follows in Proverbs: "But do you describe these things to yourself in three ways according to the largeness of your heart." [1874] And so the history embraces the knowledge of things past and visible, as it is repeated in this way by the Apostle: "For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondwoman, the other by a free: but he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh, but he who was of the free was by promise." But to the allegory belongs what follows, for what actually happened is said to have prefigured the form of some mystery: "For these," says he, "are the two covenants, the one from Mount Sinai, which gendereth into bondage, which is Agar. For Sinai is a mountain in Arabia, which is compared to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children." But the anagogical sense rises from spiritual mysteries even to still more sublime and sacred secrets of heaven, and is subjoined by the Apostle in these words: "But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not, break forth and cry, thou that travailest not, for many are the children of the desolate more than of her that hath an husband." [1875] The tropological sense is the moral explanation which has to do with improvement of life and practical teaching, as if we were to understand by these two covenants practical and theoretical instruction, or at any rate as if we were to want to take Jerusalem or Sion as the soul of man, according to this: "Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem: praise thy God, O Sion." [1876] And so these four previously mentioned figures coalesce, if we desire, in one subject, so that one and the same Jerusalem can be taken in four senses: historically as the city of the Jews; allegorically as Church of Christ, anagogically as the heavenly city of God "which is the mother of us all," tropologically, as the soul of man, which is frequently subject to praise or blame from the Lord under this title. Of these four kinds of interpretation the blessed Apostle speaks as follows: "But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation or by knowledge or by prophecy or by doctrine?" [1877] For "revelation" belongs to allegory whereby what is concealed under the historical narrative is revealed in its spiritual sense and interpretation, as for instance if we tried to expound how "all our fathers were under the cloud and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea," and how they "all ate the same spiritual meat and drank the same spiritual drink from the rock that followed them. But the rock was Christ." [1878] And this explanation where there is a comparison of the figure of the body and blood of Christ which we receive daily, contains the allegorical sense. But the knowledge, which is in the same way mentioned by the Apostle, is tropological, as by it we can by a careful study see of all things that have to do with practical discernment whether they are useful and good, as in this case, when we are told to judge of our own selves "whether it is fitting for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered." [1879] And this system, as has been said,

contains the moral meaning. So "prophecy" which the Apostle puts in the third place, alludes to the anagogical sense by which the words are applied to things future and invisible, as here: "But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those that sleep: that ye be not sorry as others also who have no hope. For if we believe that Christ died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say to you by the word of God, that we which are alive at the coming of the Lord shall not prevent those that sleep in Christ, for 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." [1880] In which kind of exhortation the figure of anagoge is brought forward. But "doctrine" unfolds the simple course of historical exposition, under which is contained no more secret sense, but what is declared by the very words: as in this passage: "For I delivered unto you first of all what I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again on the third day, and that he was seen of Cephas;" [1881] and: "God sent His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law;" [1882] or this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord the God is one Lord." [1883]

Chapter IX. How from practical knowledge we must proceed to spiritual.

Wherefore if you are anxious to attain to the light of spiritual knowledge, not wrongly for an idle boast but for the sake of being made better men, you are first inflamed with the longing for that blessedness, of which we read: "blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God," [1884] that you may also attain to that of which the angel said to Daniel: "But they that are learned shall shine as the splendor of the firmament: and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever;" and in another prophet: "Enlighten yourselves with the light of knowledge while there is time." [1885] And so keeping up that diligence in reading, which I see that you have, endeavour with all eagerness to gain in the first place a thorough grasp of practical, i.e., ethical knowledge. For without this that theoretical purity of which we have spoken cannot be obtained, which those only, who are perfected not by the words of others who teach them, but by the excellence of their own actions, can after much expenditure of effort and toil attain as a reward for it. For as they gain their knowledge not from meditation on the law but from the fruit of their labour, they sing with the Psalmist: "From Thy commandments I have understanding;" and having overcome all their passions, they say with confidence: "I will sing, and I will understand in the undefiled way." [1886] For he who is striving in an undefiled way in the course of a pure heart, as he sings the Psalm, understands the words which are chanted. And therefore if you would prepare in your heart a holy tabernacle of spiritual knowledge, purge yourselves from the stain of all sins, and rid yourselves of the cares of this world. For it is an impossibility for the soul which is taken up even to a small extent with worldly troubles, to gain the gift of knowledge or to become an author of spiritual interpretation, and diligent in reading holy things. Be careful therefore in the first place, and especially you, John, as your more youthful age requires you the rather to be careful about what I am going to say -- that you may enjoin absolute silence on your lips, in order that your zeal for reading and the efforts of your purpose may not be destroyed by vain pride. For this is the first practical step towards learning, to receive the regulations and opinions of all the Elders with an earnest heart, and with lips that are dumb; and diligently to lay them up in your heart, and endeavour rather to perform than to teach them. For from teaching, the dangerous arrogance of vainglory, but from performing, the fruit of spiritual knowledge will flourish. And so you should never venture to say anything in the conference of the Elders unless some ignorance that might be injurious, or a matter which it is important to know leads you to ask a question; as some who are puffed up with vainglory, pretend that they ask, in order really to show off the knowledge which they perfectly possess. For it is an impossibility for one, who takes to the pursuit of reading with the purpose of gaining the praise of men, to be rewarded with the gift of true knowledge. For one who is bound by the chain of this passion, is sure to be also in bondage to other faults, and especially to that of pride: and so if he is baffled by his encounter with practical and ethical knowledge, he will certainly not attain that spiritual knowledge which springs from it. Be then in all things "swift to hear, but slow to speak," [1887] lest there come upon you that which is noted by Solomon: "If thou seest a man who is quick to speak, know that there is more hope of a fool than

of him;" [1888] and do not presume to teach any one in words what you have not already performed in deed. For our Lord taught us by His own example that we ought to keep to this order, as of Him it is said: "what Jesus began to do and to teach." [1889] Take care then that you do not rush into teaching before doing, and so be reckoned among the number of those of whom the Lord speaks in the gospel to the disciples: "What they say unto you, that observe and do, but not after their words: for they say and do not. But they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers." [1890] For if he who shall "break one of these commands, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven," [1891] it follows that one who has dared to despise many and greater commands and to teach men so, shall certainly be considered not least in the kingdom of heaven, but greatest in the punishment of hell. And therefore you must be careful not to be led on to teach by the example of those who have attained some skill in discussion and readiness in speech and because they can discourse on what they please elegantly and fully, are imagined to possess spiritual knowledge, by those who do not know how to distinguish its real force and character. For it is one thing to have a ready tongue and elegant language, and quite another to penetrate into the very heart and marrow of heavenly utterances and to gaze with pure eye of the soul on profound and hidden mysteries; for this can be gained by no learning of man's, nor condition of this world, only by purity of soul, by means of the illumination of the Holy Ghost.

Chapter X. How to embrace the system of true knowledge.

You must then, if you want to get at the true knowledge of the Scriptures, endeavour first to secure steadfast humility of heart, to carry you on by the perfection of love not to the knowledge which puffeth up, but to that which enlightens. For it is an impossibility for an impure mind to gain the gift of spiritual knowledge. And therefore with every possible care avoid this, lest through your zeal for reading there arise in you not the light of knowledge nor the lasting glory which is promised through the light that comes from learning but only the instruments of your destruction from vain arrogance. Next you must by all means strive to get rid of all anxiety and worldly thoughts, and give yourself over assiduously or rather continuously, to sacred reading, until continual meditation fills your heart, and fashions you so to speak after its own likeness, making of it, in a way, an ark of the testimony, [1892] which has within it two tables of stone, i.e., the constant assurance of the two testaments; [1893] and a golden pot, i.e., a pure and undefiled memory which preserves by a constant tenacity the manna stored up in it, i.e., the enduring and heavenly sweetness of the spiritual sense and the bread of angels; moreover also the rod of Aaron, i.e., the saving standard of Jesus Christ our true High Priest, that ever buds with the freshness of immortal memory. For this is the rod which after it had been cut from the root of Jesse, died and flourished again with a more vigorous life. But all these are guarded by two Cherubim, i.e., the fulness of historical and spiritual knowledge. For the Cherubim mean a multitude of knowledge: and these continually protect the mercy seat of God, i.e., the peace of your heart, and overshadow it from all the assaults of spiritual wickedness. And so your soul will be carried forward not only to the ark of the Divine Covenant, but also to the priestly kingdom, and owing to its unbroken love of purity being as it were engrossed in spiritual studies, will fulfil the command given to the priests, enjoined as follows by the giver of the Law: "And he shall not go forth from the sanctuary, lest he pollute the Sanctuary of God," [1894] i.e., his heart, in which the Lord promised that he would ever dwell, saying: "I will dwell in them and will walk among them." [1895] Wherefore the whole series of the Holy Scriptures should be diligently committed to memory and ceaselessly repeated. For this continual meditation will bring us a twofold fruit: first, that while the attention of the mind is taken up in reading and preparing the lessons it cannot possibly be taken captive in any snares of bad thoughts: next that those things which were conned over and frequently repeated and which while we were trying to commit them to memory we could not understand as the mind was at that time taken up, we can afterward see more clearly, when we are free from the distraction of all acts and visions, and especially when we reflect on them in silence in our meditation by night. So that when we are at rest, and as it were plunged in the stupor of sleep, there is revealed to us the understanding of the most secret meanings, of which in our waking hours we had not the remotest conception.

Chapter XI. Of the manifold meaning of the Holy Scriptures.

But as the renewal of our soul grows by means of this study, Scripture also will begin to put on a new face, and the beauty of the holier meanings will somehow grow with our growth. For their form is adapted to the capacity of man's understanding, and will appear earthly to carnal people, and divine to spiritual ones, so that those to whom it formerly appeared to be involved in thick clouds, cannot apprehend its subtleties nor endure its light. But to make this which we are aiming at somewhat clearer by an instance, it will be enough to produce a single passage of the law, by which we can prove that all the heavenly commands as well are applied to men in accordance with the measure of our state. For it is written in the law: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." [1896] This is rightly observed according to the simple meaning of the letter, by a man who is still in bondage to foul passions. But by one who has already forsaken these dirty acts and impure affections, it must be observed in the spirit, so that he may forsake not only the worship of idols but also all heathen superstitions and the observance of auguries and omens and all signs and days and times, or at any rate that he be not entangled in the conjectures of words and names which destroy the simplicity of our faith. For by fornication of this kind we read that Jerusalem was defiled, as she committed adultery "on every high hill and under every green tree," [1897] whom also the Lord rebuked by the prophet, saying: "Let now the astrologers stand and save thee, they that gazed at the stars and counted the months, that from them they might tell the things that shall come to thee," [1898] of which fornication elsewhere also the Lord says in rebuking them: "The spirit of fornication deceived them, and they went a whoring from their God." [1899] But one who has forsaken both these kinds of fornication, will have a third kind to avoid, which is contained in the superstitions of the law and of Judaism; of which the Apostle says: "Ye observe days and months and times and years;" and again: Touch not, taste not, handle not." [1900] And there is no doubt that this is said of the superstitions of the law, into which one who has fallen has certainly gone a whoring from Christ, and is not worthy to hear this from the Apostle: "For I have espoused you to one husband, to exhibit you as a chaste virgin to Christ." [1901] But this that follows will be directed to him by the words of the same Apostle: "But I am afraid lest as the serpent by his cunning deceived Eve, so your minds should be corrupted and fall from the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus." [1902] But if one has escaped the uncleanness even of this fornication there will still be a fourth, which is committed by adulterous intercourse with heretical teaching. Of which too the blessed Apostle speaks: "I know that after my departure grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock, and of yourselves also shall arise men speaking perverse things so as to lead astray the disciples after them." [1903] But if a man has succeeded in avoiding even this, let him beware lest he fall by a more subtle sin into the guilt of fornication. I mean that which consists in wandering thoughts, because every thought which is not only shameful but even idle, and departing in however small a degree from God is regarded by the perfect man as the foulest fornication.

Chapter XII. A question how we can attain to forgetfulness of the cares of this world.

Upon this I was at first moved by a secret emotion, and then groaned deeply and said, All these things which you have set forth so fully have affected me with still greater despair than that which I had previously endured: as besides those general captivities of the soul whereby I doubt not that weak people are smitten from without, a special hindrance to salvation is added by that knowledge of literature which I seem already to have in some slight measure attained, in which the efforts of my tutor, or my attention to continual reading have so weakened me that now my mind is filled with those songs of the poets so that even at the hour of prayer it is thinking about those trifling fables, and the stories of battles with which from its earliest infancy it was stored by its childish lessons: and when singing Psalms or asking forgiveness of sins either some wanton recollection of the poems intrudes itself or the images of heroes fighting presents itself before the eyes, and an imagination of such phantoms is always tricking me and does not suffer my soul to aspire to an insight into things above, so that this cannot be got rid of by my daily lamentations.

Chapter XIII. Of the method by which we can remove the dross from our memory.

Nesteros: From this very fact, from which there springs up for you the utmost despair of your purification, a speedy and effectual remedy may arise if only you will transfer to the reading of and meditation upon the writings of the Spirit, the same diligence and earnestness which you say that you showed in those secular studies of yours. For your mind is sure to be taken up with those poems until it is gaining with the same zeal and assiduity other matters for it to reflect upon, and is in labour with spiritual and divine things instead of unprofitable earthly ones. But when these are thoroughly and entirely conceived and it has been nourished upon them, then by degrees the former thoughts can be expelled and utterly got rid of. For the mind of man cannot be emptied of all thoughts, and so as long as it is not taken up with spiritual interests, is sure to be occupied with what it learnt long since. For as long as it has nothing to recur to and exercise itself upon unweariedly, it is sure to fall back upon what it learnt in childhood, and ever to think about what it took in by long use and meditation. In order then that this spiritual knowledge may be strengthened in you with a lasting steadfastness, and that you may not enjoy it only for a time like those who just touch it not by their own exertions but at the recital of another, and if I may use the expression, perceive its scent in the air; but that it may be laid up in your heart, and deeply noted in it, and thoroughly seen and handled, it is well for you to use the utmost care in securing that, even if perhaps you hear things that you know very well produced in the Conference, you do not regard them in a scornful and disdainful way because you already know them, but that you lay them to your heart with the same eagerness, with which the words of salvation which we are longing for ought to be constantly poured into our ears or should ever proceed from our lips. For although the narration of holy things be often repeated, yet in a mind that feels a thirst for true knowledge the satiety will never create disgust, but as it receives it every day as if it were something new and what it wanted however often it may have taken it in, it will so much the more eagerly either hear or speak, and from the repetition of these things will gain confirmation of the knowledge it already possesses, rather than weariness of any sort from the frequent Conference. For it is a sure sign of a mind that is cold and proud, if it receives with disdain and carelessness the medicine of the words of salvation, although it be offered with the zeal of excessive persistence. For "a soul that is full jeers at honeycomb: but to a soul that is in want even little things appear sweet." [1904] And so if these things have been carefully taken in and stored up in the recesses of the soul and stamped with the seal of silence, afterwards like some sweet scented wine that maketh glad the heart of man, they will, when mellowed by the antiquity of the thoughts and by long-standing patience, be brought forth from the jar of your heart with great fragrance, and like some perennial fountain will flow abundantly from the veins of experience and irrigating channels of virtue and will pour forth copious streams as if from some deep well in your heart. For that will happen in your case, which is spoken in Proverbs to one who has achieved this in his work: "Drink waters from your own cisterns and from the fount of your own wells. Let waters from your own fountain flow in abundance for you, but let your waters pass through into your streets." [1905] And according to the

prophet Isaiah: "Thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a fountain of water whose waters shall not fail. And the places that have been desolate for ages shall be built in thee; thou shalt raise up the foundations of generation and generation; and thou shalt be called the repairer of the fences, turning the paths into rest." [1906] And that blessedness shall come upon thee which the same prophet promises: "And the Lord will not cause thy teacher to flee away from thee any more, and thine eyes shall see thy teacher. And thine ears shall hear the word of one admonishing thee behind thy back: This is the way, walk ye in it, and go not aside either to the right hand or to the left." [1907] And so it will come to pass that not only every purpose and thought of your heart, but also all the wanderings and roving of your imagination will become to you a holy and unceasing pondering of the Divine law.

Chapter XIV. How an unclean soul can neither give nor receive spiritual knowledge.

But it is, as we have already said, impossible for a novice either to understand or to teach this. For if one is incapable of receiving it how can he be fit to pass it on to another? But if he has had the audacity to teach anything on these matters, most certainly his words will be idle and useless and only reach the ears of his hearers, without being able to touch their hearts, uttered as they were in sheer idleness and unfruitful vanity, for they do not proceed from the treasure of a good conscience, but from the empty impertinence of boastfulness. For it is impossible for an impure soul (however earnestly it may devote itself to reading) to obtain spiritual knowledge. For no one pours any rich ointment or fine honey or any precious liquid into a dirty and stinking vessel. For a jar that has once been filled with foul odours spoils the sweetest myrrh more readily than it receives any sweetness or grace from it, for what is pure is corrupted much more quickly than what is corrupt is purified. And so the vessel of our bosom unless it has first been purified from all the foul stains of sin will not be worthy to receive that blessed ointment of which it is said by the prophet: "Like the ointment upon the head, which ran down upon the beard of Aaron, which ran down upon the edge of his garment," [1908] nor will it keep undefiled that spiritual knowledge and the words of Scripture which are "sweeter than honey and the honeycomb." [1909] "For what share hath righteousness with iniquity? or what agreement hath light with darkness? or what concord has Christ with Belial?" [1910]

Chapter XV. An objection owing to the fact that many impure persons have knowledge while saints have not.

Germanus: This assertion does not seem to us founded on truth, or based on solid reasoning. For if it is clear that all who either never receive the faith of Christ at all or who corrupt it by the wicked sin of heresy, are of unclean hearts, how is it that many Jews and heretics, and Catholics also who are entangled in various sins, have acquired perfect knowledge of the Scriptures and boast of the greatness of their spiritual learning, and on the other hand countless swarms of saintly men, whose heart has been purified from all stain of sin, are content with the piety of simple faith and know nothing of the mysteries of a deeper knowledge? How then will that opinion stand, which attributes spiritual knowledge solely to purity of heart?

Chapter XVI. The answer to the effect that bad men cannot possess true knowledge.

Nesteros: One who does not carefully weigh every word of the opinions uttered cannot rightly discover the value of the assertion. For we said to begin with that men of this sort only possess skill in disputation and ornaments of speech; but cannot penetrate to the very heart of Scripture and the mysteries of its spiritual meanings. For true knowledge is only acquired by true worshippers of God; and certainly this people does not possess it to whom it is said: "Hear, O, foolish people, thou who hast no heart: ye who having eyes see not, and having ears, hear not." And again: "Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I also will reject thee from acting as My priest." [1911] For as it is said that in Christ "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid," [1912] how can we hold that he who has scorned to find Christ, or, when He is found blasphemes Him with impious lips, or at least defiles the Catholic faith by his impure deeds, has acquired spiritual knowledge? "For the Spirit of God will avoid deception, and dwelleth not in a body that is subject to sin." [1913] There is then no way of arriving at spiritual knowledge but this which one of the prophets has finely described: "Sow to yourselves for righteousness: reap the hope of life. Enlighten yourselves with the light of knowledge." [1914] First then we must sow for righteousness, i.e., by works of righteousness we must extend practical perfection; next we must reap the hope of life, i.e., by the expulsion of carnal sins must gather the fruits of spiritual virtues: and so we shall succeed in enlightening ourselves with the light of knowledge. And the Psalmist also sees that this system ought to be followed, when he says: "Blessed are they that are undefiled in the way: who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that seek His testimonies." [1915] For he does not say in the first place: "Blessed are they that seek His testimonies, and afterwards add: Blessed are they that are undefiled in the way;" but he begins by saying: "Blessed are they that are undefiled in the way;" and by this clearly shows that no one can properly come to seek God's testimonies unless he first walks undefiled in the way of Christ by his practical life. Those therefore whom you mentioned do not possess that knowledge which the impure cannot attain, but pseudonumon , i.e., what is falsely so called, of which the blessed Apostle speaks: "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thee, avoiding profane novelties of words, and oppositions of the knowledge that is falsely so called;" [1916] which is in the Greek *tas antitheseis tes pseudonumou gnoseos*. Of those then who seem to acquire some show of knowledge or of those who while they devote themselves diligently to reading the sacred volume and to committing the Scriptures to memory, yet forsake not carnal sins, it is well said in Proverbs: "Like as a golden ring in a swine's snout so is the beauty of an evil-disposed woman." [1917] For what does it profit a man to gain the ornaments of heavenly eloquence and the most precious beauty of the Scriptures if by clinging to filthy deeds and thoughts he destroys it by burying it in the foulest ground, or defiles it by the dirty wallowing of his own lusts? For the result will be that which is an ornament to those who rightly use it, is not only unable to adorn them, but actually becomes dirty by the increased filth and mud. For "from the mouth of a sinner praise is not comely;" [1918] as to him it is said by the prophet: "Wherefore dost thou declare My righteous acts, and takest My covenant in

thy lips?" [1919] of souls like this, who never possess in any lasting fashion the fear of the Lord of which it is said: "the fear of the Lord is instruction and wisdom," [1920] and yet try to get at the meaning of Scripture by continual meditation on them, it is appropriately asked in Proverbs: "What use are riches to a fool? For a senseless man cannot possess wisdom." [1921] But so far is this true and spiritual knowledge removed from that worldly erudition, which is defiled by the stains of carnal sins, that we know that it has sometimes flourished most grandly in some who were without eloquence and almost illiterate. And this is very clearly shown by the case of the Apostles and many holy men, who did not spread themselves out with an empty show of leaves, but were bowed down by the weight of the true fruits of spiritual knowledge: of whom it is written in the Acts of the Apostles: "But when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were ignorant and unlearned men, they were astonished." [1922] And therefore if you are anxious to attain to that never-failing fragrance, you must first strive with all your might to obtain from the Lord the purity of chastity. For no one, in whom the love of carnal passions and especially of fornication still holds sway, can acquire spiritual knowledge. For "in a good heart wisdom will rest;" and: "He that feareth the Lord shall find knowledge with righteousness." [1923] But that we must attain to spiritual knowledge in the order of which we have already spoken, we are taught also by the blessed Apostle. For when he wanted not merely to draw up a list of all his own virtues, but rather to describe their order, that he might explain which follows what, and which gives birth to what, after some others he proceeds as follows: "In watchings, in fastings, in chastity, in knowledge, in long suffering, in gentleness, in the Holy Ghost, in love unfeigned." [1924] And by this enumeration of virtues he evidently meant to teach us that we must come from watchings and fastings to chastity, from chastity to knowledge, from knowledge to long suffering, from long suffering to gentleness, from gentleness to the Holy Ghost, from the Holy Ghost to the rewards of love unfeigned. When then by this system and in this order you too have come to spiritual knowledge, you will certainly have, as we said, not barren or idle learning but what is vigorous and fruitful; and the seed of the word of salvation which has been committed by you to the hearts of your hearers, will be watered by the plentiful showers of the Holy Ghost that will follow; and, according to this that the prophet promised, "the rain will be given to your seed, wherever you shall sow in the land, and the bread of the corn of the land shall be most plentiful and fat." [1925]

Chapter XVII. To whom the method of perfection should be laid open.

Take care too, when your riper age leads you to teach, lest you be led astray by the love of vainglory, and teach at random to the most impure persons these things which you have learnt not so much by reading as by the effects of experience, and so incur what Solomon, that wisest of men, denounced: "Attach not a wicked man to the pastures of the just, and be not led astray by the fulness of the belly," for "delicacies are not good for a fool, nor is there room for wisdom where sense is wanting: for folly is the more led on, because a stubborn servant is not improved by words, for even though he understands, he will not obey." And "Do not say anything in the ears of an imprudent man, lest haply he mock at thy wise speeches." [1926] And "give not that which is holy to dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest haply they trample them under foot and turn again and rend you." [1927] It is right then to hide the mysteries of spiritual meanings from men of this sort, that you may effectually sing: "Thy words have I hid within my heart: that I should not sin against Thee." [1928] But you will perhaps say: And to whom are the mysteries of Holy Scripture to be dispensed? Solomon, the wisest of men, shall teach you: "Give, says he, strong drink to those who are in sorrow, and give wine to drink, to those who are in pain, that they may forget their poverty, and remember their pain no more," [1929] i.e., to those who in consequence of the punishment of their past actions are oppressed with grief and sorrow, supply richly the joys of spiritual knowledge like "wine that maketh glad the heart of man," [1930] and restore them with the strong drink of the word of salvation, lest haply they be plunged in continual sorrow and a despair that brings death, and so those who are of this sort be "swallowed up in overmuch sorrow." [1931] But of those who remain in coldness and carelessness, and are smitten by no sorrow of heart we read as follows: "For one who is kindly and without sorrow, shall be in want." [1932] With all possible care therefore avoid being puffed up with the love of vainglory, and so failing to become a partaker with him whom the prophet praises, "who hath not given his money upon usury." [1933] For every one who, from love of the praise of men dispenses the words of God, of which it is said "the words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried by the fire, purged from the earth, refined seven times," [1934] puts out his money upon usury, and will deserve for this not merely no reward, but rather punishment. For this reason he chose to use up his Lord's money that he might be the garner from a temporal profit, and not that the Lord, as it is written, might "when He comes, receive His own with usury." [1935]

Chapter XVIII. Of the reasons for which spiritual learning is unfruitful.

But it is certain that for two reasons the teaching of spiritual things is ineffectual. For either the teacher is commending what he has no experience of, and is trying with empty-sounding words to instruct his hearer, or else the hearer is a bad man and full of faults and cannot receive in his hard heart the holy and saving doctrine of the spiritual man; and of these it is said by the prophet: "For the heart of this people is blinded, and their ears are dull of hearing and their eyes have they closed: lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and be converted and I should heal them." [1936]

Chapter XIX. How often even those who are not worthy can receive the grace of the saving word.

But sometimes in the lavish generosity of God in His Providence, "Who willeth all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth," [1937] it is granted that one who has not shown himself by an irreproachable life to be worthy of the preaching of the gospel attains the grace of spiritual teaching for the good of many. But by what means the gifts of healing are granted by the Lord for the expulsion of devils it follows that we must in a similar discussion explain, which as we are going to rise for supper we will keep for the evening, because that is always more effectually grasped by the heart which is taken in by degrees and without excessive bodily efforts.

XV. The Second Conference of Abbot Nesteros.

On Divine Gifts.

Chapter I. Discourse of Abbot Nesteros on the threefold system of gifts.

After evening service we sat down together on the mats as usual ready for the promised narration: and when we had kept silence for some little time out of reverence for the Elder, he anticipated the silence of our respect by such words as these. The previous order of our discourse had brought us to the exposition of the system of spiritual gifts, which we have learnt from the tradition of the Elders is a threefold one. The first indeed is for the sake of healing, when the grace of signs accompanies certain elect and righteous men on account of the merits of their holiness, as it is clear that the apostles and many of the saints wrought signs and wonders in accordance with the authority of the Lord Who says: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give." [1938] The second when for the edification of the church or on account of the faith of those who bring their sick, or of those who are to be cured, the virtue of health proceeds even from sinners and men unworthy of it. Of whom the Saviour says in the gospel: "Many shall say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name cast out devils, and in Thy name done many mighty works? And then I will confess to them, I never knew you: Depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity." [1939] And on the other hand, if the faith of those who bring them or of the sick is wanting, it prevents those on whom the gifts of healing are conferred from exercising their powers of healing. On which subject Luke the Evangelist says: "And Jesus could not there do any mighty work because of their unbelief." [1940] Whence also the Lord Himself says: "Many lepers were in Israel in the days of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed but Naaman the Syrian." [1941] The third method of healing is copied by the deceit and contrivance of devils, that, when a man who is enslaved to evident sins is out of admiration for his miracles regarded as a saint and a servant of God, men may be persuaded to copy his sins and thus an opening being made for cavilling, the sanctity of religion may be brought into disgrace, or else that he, who believes that he possesses the gift of healing, may be puffed up by pride of heart and so fall more grievously. Hence it is that invoking the names of those, who, as they know, have no merits of holiness or any spiritual fruits, they pretend that by their merits they are disturbed and made to flee from the bodies they have possessed. Of which it says in Deuteronomy: "If there rise up in the midst of thee a prophet, or one who says that he has seen a dream, and declare a sign and a wonder, and that which he hath spoken cometh to pass, and he say to thee: Let us go and follow after other gods whom thou knowest not, and let us serve them: thou shalt not hear the words of that prophet or of that dreamer, for the Lord thy God is tempting thee that it may appear whether thou lovest Him or not, with all thy heart and with all thy soul." [1942] And in the gospel it says: "There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall give great signs and wonders, so that, if it were possible, even the elect should be led astray." [1943]

Chapter II. Wherein one ought to admire the saints.

Wherefore we never ought to admire those who affect these things, for these powers, but rather to look whether they are perfect in driving out all sins, and amending their ways, for this is granted to each man not for the faith of some other, or for a variety of reasons, but for his own earnestness, by the action of God's grace. For this is practical knowledge which is termed by another name by the Apostle; viz., love, and is by the authority of the Apostle preferred to all tongues of men and of angels, and to full assurance of faith which can even remove mountains, and to all knowledge, and prophecy, and to the distribution of all one's goods, and finally to the glory of martyrdom itself. For when he had enumerated all kinds of gifts and had said: "To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge, to another faith, to another the gift of healing, to another the working of miracles, etc.:" [1944] when he was going to speak about love notice how in a few words he put it before all gifts: "And yet," he says, "I show unto you a still more excellent way." [1945] By which it is clearly shown that the height of perfection and blessedness does not consist in the performance of those wonderful works but in the purity of love. And this not without good reason. For all those things are to pass away and be destroyed, but love is to abide for ever. And so we have never found that those works and signs were affected by our fathers: nay, rather when they did possess them by the grace of the Holy Spirit they would never use them, unless perhaps extreme and unavoidable necessity drove them to do so.

Chapter III. Of a dead man raised to life by Abbot Macarius.

As also we remember that a dead man was raised to life by Abbot Macarius who was the first to find a home in the desert of Scete. [1946] For when a certain heretic who followed the error of Eunomius was trying by dialectic subtlety to destroy the simplicity of the Catholic faith, and had already deceived a large number of men, the blessed Macarius was asked by some Catholics, who were terribly disturbed by the horror of such an upset, to set free the simple folk of all Egypt from the peril of infidelity, and came for this purpose. And when the heretic had approached him with his dialectic art, and wanted to drag him away in his ignorance to the thorns of Aristotle, the blessed Macarius put a stop to his chatter with apostolic brevity, saying: "the kingdom of God is not in word but in power." [1947] Let us go therefore to the tombs, and let us invoke the name of the Lord over the first dead man we find, and let us, as it is written, "show our faith by our works," [1948] that by His testimony the manifest proofs of a right faith may be shown, and we may prove the clear truth not by an empty discussion of words but by the power of miracles and that judgment which cannot be deceived. And when he heard this the heretic was overwhelmed with shame before the people who were present, and pretended for the moment that he consented to the terms proposed, and promised that he would come on the morrow, but the next day when they were all in expectation who had come together with greater eagerness to the appointed place, owing to their desire for the spectacle, he was terrified by the consciousness of his want of faith, and fled away, and at once escaped out of all Egypt. And when the blessed Macarius had waited together with the people till the ninth hour, and saw that he had owing to his guilty conscience avoided him, he took the people, who had been perverted by him and went to the tombs determined upon. Now in Egypt the overflow of the river Nile has introduced this custom that, since the whole breadth of that country is covered for no small part of the year by the regular flood of waters like a great sea so that there is no means of getting about except by a passage in boats, the bodies of the dead are embalmed and stored away in cells an good height up. For the soil of that land being damp from the continual moisture prevents them from burying them. For if it receives any bodies buried in it, it is forced by the excessive inundations to cast them forth on its surface. When then the blessed Macarius had taken up his position by a most ancient corpse, he said "O man, if that heretic and son of perdition had come hither with me, and, while he was standing by, I had exclaimed and invoked the name of Christ my God, say in the presence of these who were almost perverted by his fraud, whether you would have arisen." Then he arose and replied with words of assent. And then Abbot Macarius asked him what he had formerly been when he enjoyed life here, or in what age of men he had lived, or if he had then known the name of Christ, and he replied that he had lived under kings of most ancient date, and declared that in those days he had never heard the name of Christ. To whom once more Abbot Macarius: "Sleep," said he, "in peace with the others in your own order, to be roused again by Christ in the end." All this power then and grace of his which was in him would perhaps have always been hidden, unless the needs of the whole province which was endangered, and his entire devotion to Christ, and unfeigned love, had forced him to perform this miracle. And certainly it was not the ostentation of glory but the love of Christ and the good of all the people that wrung from him the performance

of it. As the passage in the book of Kings shows us that the blessed Elijah also did, who asked that fire might descend from heaven on the sacrifices laid on the pyre, for this reason that he might set free the faith of the whole people which was endangered by the tricks of the false prophets.

Chapter IV. Of the miracle which Abbot Abraham wrought on the breasts of a woman.

Why also need I mention the acts of Abbot Abraham, [1949] who was surnamed haplous, i.e., the simple, from the simplicity of his life and his innocence. This man when he had gone from the desert to Egypt for the harvest in the season of Quinquagesima [1950] was pestered with tears and prayers by a woman who brought her little child, already pining away and half dead from lack of milk; he gave her a cup of water to drink signed with the sign of the cross; and when she had drunk it at once most marvellously her breasts that had been till then utterly dry flowed with a copious abundance of milk.

Chapter V. Of the cure of a lame man which the same saint wrought.

Or when the same man as he went to a village was surrounded by mocking crowds, who sneered at him and showed him a man who was for many years deprived of the power of walking from a contracted knee, and crawled from a weakness of long standing, they tempted him and said, "Show us, father Abraham, if you are the servant of God, and restore this man to his former health, that we may believe that the name of Christ, whom you worship, is not vain." Then he at once invoked the name of Christ, and stooped down and laid hold of the man's withered foot and pulled it. And immediately at his touch the dried and bent knee was straightened, and he got back the use of his legs, which he had forgotten how to use in his long years of weakness, and went away rejoicing.

Chapter VI. How the merits of each man should not be judged by his miracles.

And so these men gave no credit to themselves for their power of working such wonders, because they confessed that they were done not by their own merits but by the compassion of the Lord and with the words of the Apostle they refused the human honour offered out of admiration for their miracles: "Men and brethren, why marvel ye at this, or why look ye on us as though by our own power or holiness we had caused this man to walk." [1951] Nor did they think that any one should be renowned for the gifts and marvels of God, but rather for the fruits of his own good deeds, which are brought about by the efforts of his mind and the power of his works. For often, as was said above, men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the truth, both cast out devils and perform the greatest miracles in the name of the Lord. Of whom when the Apostles complained and said: "Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and we forbade him because he followeth not with us," though for the present Christ replied to them "Forbid him not, for he that is not against you is for you," [1952] still when they say at the end: "Lord, Lord, have we not in Thy name prophesied, and in Thy name cast out devils, and in Thy name done many mighty works?" He testifies that then He will answer: "I never knew you: depart from me, ye workers of iniquity." [1953] And therefore He actually warns those, to whom He Himself has given this glory of miracles and mighty works because of their holiness, that they be not puffed up by them, saying: "Rejoice not because the devils are subject to you, but rejoice rather because your names are written in heaven." [1954]

Chapter VII. How the excellence of gifts consists not in miracles but in humility.

Finally the Author Himself of all miracles and mighty works, when He called His disciples to learn His teaching, clearly showed what those true and specially chosen followers ought chiefly to learn from Him, saying: "Come and learn of Me," not chiefly to cast out devils by the power of heaven, not to cleanse the lepers, not to give sight to the blind, not to raise the dead: for even though I do these things by some of My servants, yet man's estate cannot insert itself into the praises of God, nor can a minister and servant gather hereby any portion for himself there where is the glory of Deity alone. But do ye, says He, learn this of Me, "for I am meek and lowly of heart." [1955] For this it is which it is possible for all men generally to learn and practise, but the working of miracles and signs is not always necessary, nor good for all, nor granted to all. Humility therefore is the mistress of all virtues, it is the surest foundation of the heavenly building, it is the special and splendid gift of the Saviour. For he can perform all the miracles which Christ wrought, without danger of being puffed up, who follows the gentle Lord not in the grandeur of His miracles, but in the virtues of patience and humility. But he who aims at commanding unclean spirits, or bestowing gifts of healing, or showing some wonderful miracle to the people, even though when he is showing off he invokes the name of Christ, yet he is far from Christ, because in his pride of heart he does not follow his humble Teacher. For when He was returning to the Father, He prepared, so to speak, His will and left this to His disciples: "A new commandment," said He, "give I unto you that ye love one another; as I have loved you, so do ye also love one another:" and at once He subjoined: "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love to one another." [1956] He says not: "if ye do signs and miracles in the same way," but "if ye have love to one another;" and this it is certain that none but the meek and humble can keep. Wherefore our predecessors never reckoned those as good monks or free from the fault of vainglory, who professed themselves exorcists among men, and proclaimed with boastful ostentation among admiring crowds the grace which they had either obtained or which they claimed. But in vain, for "he who trusteth in lies feedeth the winds: and the same runneth after birds that fly away." [1957] For without doubt that will happen to them which we find in Proverbs: "As the winds and clouds and rain are very clear so are these who boast of a fictitious gift." [1958] And so if any one does any of these things in our presence, he ought to meet with commendation from us not from admiration of his miracles, but from the beauty of his life, nor should we ask whether the devils are subject to him, but whether he possesses those features of love which the Apostle describes.

Chapter VIII. How it is more wonderful to have cast out one's faults from one's self than devils from another.

And in truth it is a greater miracle to root out from one's own flesh the incentives to wantonness than to cast out unclean spirits from the bodies of others, and it is a grander sign to restrain the fierce passions of anger by the virtue of patience than to command the powers of the air, and it is a greater thing to have shut out the devouring pangs of gloominess from one's own heart than to have expelled the sickness of another and the fever of his body. Finally it is in many ways a grander virtue and a more splendid achievement to cure the weaknesses' of one's own soul than those of the body of another. For just as the soul is higher than the flesh, so is its salvation of more importance, and as its nature is more precious and excellent, so is its destruction more grievous and dangerous.

Chapter IX. How uprightness of life is of more importance than the working of miracles.

And of those cures it was said to the blessed Apostles: "Rejoice not that the devils are subject to you." [1959] For this was wrought not by their own power, but by the might of the name invoked. And therefore they are warned not to presume to claim for themselves any blessedness or glory on this account as it was done simply by the power and might of God, but only on account of the inward purity of their life and heart, for which it was vouchsafed to them to have their names written in heaven.

Chapter X. A revelation on the trial of perfect chastity.

And to prove this that we have said both by the testimony of the ancients and divine oracles, we had better bring forward in his own words and experience what the blessed Paphnutius [1960] felt on the subject of admiration of miracles and the grace of purity, or rather what he learnt from the revelation of an angel. For this man had been famous for many years for his signal strictness so that he fancied that he was completely free from the snares of carnal concupiscence because he felt himself superior to all the attacks of the demons with whom he had fought openly and for a long while; and when some holy men had come to him, he was preparing for them a porridge of lentils which they call Athera, [1961] and his hand, as it happened, was burnt in the oven, by a flame that darted up. And when this happened he was much mortified and began silently to consider with himself, and ask why was not the fire at peace with me, when my more serious contests with demons have ceased? or how will that unquenchable fire which searches out the deserts of all pass me by in that dread day of judgment, and fail to detain me, if this trivial temporal fire from without has not spared me? And as he was troubled by thoughts of this kind and vexation a sudden sleep overcame him and an angel of the Lord came to him and said: "Paphnutius, why are you vexed because that earthly fire is not yet at peace with you, while there still remains in your members some disturbance of carnal motions that is not completely removed? For as long as the roots of this flourish within you, they will not suffer that material fire to be at peace with you. And certainly you could not feel it harmless unless you found by such proofs as these that all these internal motions within you were destroyed. Go, take a naked and most beautiful virgin, and if while you hold her you find that the peace of your heart remains steadfast, and that carnal heat is still and quiet within you, then the touch of this visible flame also shall pass over you gently and without harming you as it did over the three children in Babylon." And so the Elder was impressed by this revelation and did not try the dangers of the experiment divinely shown to him, but asked his own conscience and examined the purity of his heart; and, guessing that the weight of purity was not yet sufficient to outweigh the force of this trial, it is no wonder, said he, if when the battles with unclean spirits come upon me, I still feel the flames of the fire, which I used to think of less importance than the savage attacks of demons, still raging against me. Since it is a greater virtue and a grander grace to extinguish the inward lust of the flesh than by the sign of the Lord [1962] and the power of the might of the Most High to subdue the wicked demons which rush upon one from without, or to drive them by invoking the Divine name from the bodies which they have possessed. So far Abbot Nestoros, finishing the account of the true working of the gifts of grace accompanied us to the cell of the Elder Joseph which was nearly six miles distant from his, as we were eager for instruction in his doctrine.

XVI. The First Conference of Abbot Joseph.

On Friendship.

Chapter I. What Abbot Joseph asked us in the first instance.

The blessed Joseph, [1963] whose instructions and precepts are now to be set forth, and who was one of the three whom we mentioned in the first Conference, [1964] belonged to a most illustrious family, and was the chief man of his city in Egypt, which was named Thmuis, [1965] and so was carefully trained in the eloquence of Greece as well as Egypt, so that he could talk admirably with us or with those who were utterly ignorant of Egyptian, not as the others did through an interpreter, but in his own person. And when he found that we were anxious for instruction from him, he first inquired whether we were own brothers, and when he heard that we were united in a tie of spiritual and not carnal brotherhood, and that from the first commencement of our renunciation of the world we had always been joined together in an unbroken bond as well in our travels, which we had both undertaken for the sake of spiritual service, as also in the pursuits of the monastery, he began his discourse as follows.

Chapter II. Discourse of the same elder on the untrustworthy sort of friendship.

There are many kinds of friendship and companionship which unite men in very different ways in the bonds of love. For some a previous recommendation makes to enter upon an intercourse first of acquaintance and afterwards even of friendship. In the case of others some bargain or an agreement to give and take something has joined them in the bonds of love. Others a similarity and union of business or science or art or study has united in the chain of friendship, by which even fierce souls become kindly disposed to each other, so that those, who in forests and mountains delight in robbery and revel in human bloodshed, embrace and cherish the partners of their crimes. But there is another kind of love, where the union is from the instincts of nature and the laws of consanguinity, whereby those of the same tribe, wives and parents, and brothers and children are naturally preferred to others, a thing which we find is the case not only with mankind but with all birds and beasts. For at the prompting of a natural instinct they protect and defend their offspring and their young ones so that often they are not afraid to expose themselves to danger and death for their sakes. Indeed those kinds of beasts and serpents and birds, which are cut off and separated from all others by their intolerable ferocity or deadly poison, as basilisks, unicorns and vultures, though by their very look they are said to be dangerous to every one, yet among themselves they remain peaceful and harmless owing to community of origin and fellow-feeling. But we see that all these kinds of love of which we have spoken, as they are common both to the good and bad, and to beasts and serpents, certainly cannot last for ever. For often separation of place interrupts and breaks them off, as well as forgetfulness from lapse of time, and the transaction of affairs and business and words. For as they are generally due to different kinds of connexions either of gain, or desires, or kinship, or business, so when any occasion for separation intervenes they are broken off.

Chapter III. How friendship is indissoluble.

Among all these then there is one kind of love which is indissoluble, where the union is owing not to the favour of a recommendation, or some great kindness or gifts, or the reason of some bargain, or the necessities of nature, but simply to similarity of virtue. This, I say, is what is broken by no chances, what no interval of time or space can sever or destroy, and what even death itself cannot part. This is true and unbroken love which grows by means of the double perfection and goodness of friends, and which, when once its bonds have been entered, no difference of liking and no disturbing opposition of wishes can sever. But we have known many set on this purpose, who though they had been joined together in companionship out of their burning love for Christ, yet could not maintain it continually and unbrokenly, because although they relied on a good beginning for their friendship, yet they did not with one and the same zeal maintain the purpose on which they had entered, and so there was between them a sort of love only for a while, for it was not maintained by the goodness of both alike, but by the patience of the one party, and so although it is held to by the one with unwearied heroism, yet it is sure to be broken by the pettiness of the other. For the infirmities of those who are somewhat cold in seeking the healthy condition of perfection, however patiently they may be borne by the strong, are yet not put up with by those who are weaker themselves. For they have implanted within them causes of disturbance which do not allow them to be at ease, just as those, who are affected by bodily weakness, generally impute the delicacy of their stomach and weak health to the carelessness of their cooks and servants, and however carefully their attendants may serve them, yet nevertheless they ascribe the grounds of their upset to those who are in good health, as they do not see that they are really due to the failure of their own health. Wherefore this, as we said, is the sure and indissoluble union of friendship, where the tie consists only in likeness in goodness. For "the Lord maketh men to be of one mind in an house." [1966] And therefore love can only continue undisturbed in those in whom there is but one purpose and mind to will and to refuse the same things. And if you also wish to keep this unbroken, you must be careful that having first got rid of your faults, you mortify your own desires, and with united zeal and purpose diligently fulfil that in which the prophet specially delights: "Behold how good and joyful a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." [1967] Which should be taken of unity of spirit rather than of place. For it is of no use for those who differ in character and purpose to be united in one dwelling, nor is it an hindrance for those who are grounded on equal goodness to be separated by distance of place. For with God the union of character, not of place, joins brethren together in a common dwelling, nor can unruffled peace ever be maintained where difference of will appears.

Chapter IV. A question whether anything that is really useful should be performed even against a brother's wish.

Germanus: What then? If when one party wants to do something which he sees is useful and profitable according to the mind of God, the other does not give his consent, ought it to be performed even against the wish of the brother, or should it be thrown on one side as he wants?

Chapter V. The answer, how a lasting friendship can only exist among those who are perfect.

Joseph: For this reason we said that the full and perfect grace of friendship can only last among those who are perfect and of equal goodness, whose likemindedness and common purpose allows them either never, or at any rate hardly ever, to disagree, or to differ in those matters which concern their progress in the spiritual life. But if they begin to get hot with eager disputes, it is clear that they have never been at one in accordance with the rule which we gave above. But because no one can start from perfection except one who has begun from the very foundation, and your inquiring is not with regard to its greatness, but as to how you can attain to it, I think it well to explain to you, in a few words, the rule for it and the sort of path along which your steps should be directed, that you may be able more easily to secure the blessing of patience and peace.

Chapter VI. By what means union can be preserved unbroken.

The first foundation then, of true friendship consists in contempt for worldly substance and scorn for all things that we possess. For it is utterly wrong and unjustifiable if, after the vanity of the world and all that is in it has been renounced, whatever miserable furniture remains is more regarded than what is most valuable; viz., the love of a brother. The second is for each man so to prune his own wishes that he may not imagine himself to be a wise and experienced person, and so prefer his own opinions to those of his neighbour. The third is for him to recognize that everything, even what he deems useful and necessary, must come after the blessing of love and peace. The fourth for him to realize that he should never be angry for any reason good or bad. The fifth for him to try to cure any wrath which a brother may have conceived against him however unreasonably, in the same way that he would cure his own, knowing that the vexation of another is equally bad for him, as if he himself were stirred against another, unless he removes it, to the best of his ability, from his brother's mind. The last is what is undoubtedly generally decisive in regard to all faults; viz., that he should realize daily that he is to pass away from this world; as the realization of this not only permits no vexation to linger in the heart, but also represses all the motions of lusts and sins of all kinds. Whoever then has got hold of this, can neither suffer nor be the cause of bitter wrath and discord. But when this fails, as soon as he who is jealous of love has little by little infused the poison of vexation in the hearts of friends, it is certain that owing to frequent quarrels love will gradually grow cool, and at sometime or other he will part the hearts of the lovers, that have been for a long while exasperated. For if one is walking along the course previously marked out, how can he ever differ from his friend, for if he claims nothing for himself, he entirely cuts off the first cause of quarrel (which generally springs from trivial things and most unimportant matters), as he observes to the best of his power what we read in the Acts of the Apostles on the unity of believers: "But the multitude of believers was of one heart and soul; neither did any of them say that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common." [1968] Then how can any seeds of discussion arise from him who serves not his own but his brother's will, and becomes a follower of his Lord and Master, who speaking in the character [1969] of man which He had taken, said: "I am not come to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me?" [1970] But how can he arouse any incitement to contention, who has determined to trust not so much to his own judgment as to his brother's decision, on his own intelligence and meaning, in accordance with his will either approving or disapproving his discoveries, and fulfilling in the humility of a pious heart these words from the Gospel: "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." [1971] Or in what way will he admit anything which grieves the brother, who thinks that nothing is more precious than the blessing of peace, and never forgets these words of the Lord: "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, that ye love one another;" [1972] for by this, as by a special mark, Christ willed that the flock of His sheep should be known in this world, and be separated from all others by this stamp, so to speak? But on what grounds will he endure either to admit the rancour of vexation in himself or for it to remain in another, if his firm decision is that there cannot be any good ground for anger, as it is dangerous and wrong, and that when his brother is angry with him he cannot pray, in just the same way as when he himself is angry with his

brother, as he ever keeps in an humble heart these words of our Lord and Saviour: "If thou bring thy gift to the altar and there remember that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift at the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." [1973] For it will be of no use for you to declare that you are not angry, and to believe that you are fulfilling the command which says: "Let not the sun go down upon thy wrath;" and: "Whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgment," [1974] if you are with obstinate heart disregarding the vexation of another which you could smooth down by kindness on your part. For in the same way you will be punished for violating the Lord's command. For He who said that you should not be angry with another, said also that you should not disregard the vexations of another, for it makes no difference in the sight of God, "Who willeth all men to be saved," [1975] whether you destroy yourself or someone else. Since the death of any one is equally a loss to God, and at the same time it is equally a gain to him to whom all destruction is delightful, whether it is acquired by your death or by the death of your brother. Lastly, how can he retain even the least vexation with his brother, who realizes daily that he is presently to depart from this world?

Chapter VII. How nothing should be put before love, or after anger.

As then nothing should be put before love, so on the other hand nothing should be put below rage and anger. For all things, however useful and necessary they seem, should yet be disregarded that disturbing anger may be avoided, and all things even which we think are unfortunate should be undertaken and endured that the calm of love and peace may be preserved unimpaired, because we should reckon nothing more damaging than anger and vexation, and nothing more advantageous than love.

Chapter VIII. On what grounds a dispute can arise among spiritual persons.

For as our enemy separates brethren who are still weak and carnal by a sudden burst of rage on account of some trifling and earthly matter, so he sows the seeds of discord even between spiritual persons, on the ground of some difference of thoughts, from which certainly those contentions and strifes about words, which the Apostle condemns, for the most part arise: whereby consequently our spiteful and malignant enemy sows discord between brethren who were of one mind. For these words of wise Solomon are true: "Contention breeds hatred: but friendship will be a defence to all who do not strive." [1976]

Chapter IX. How to get rid even of spiritual grounds of discord.

Wherefore for the preservation of lasting and unbroken love, it is of no use to have removed the first ground of discord, which generally arises from frail and earthly things, or to have disregarded all carnal things, and to have permitted to our brethren an unrestricted share in everything which our needs require, unless too we cut off in like manner the second, which generally arises under the guise of spiritual feelings; and unless we gain in everything humble thoughts and harmonious wills.

Chapter X. On the best tests of truth.

For I remember, that when my youthful age suggested to me to cling to a partner, thoughts of this sort often mingled with our moral training and the Holy Scriptures, so that we fancied that nothing could be truer or more reasonable: but when we came together and began to produce our ideas, in the general discussion which was held, some things were first noted by the others as false and dangerous, and then presently were condemned and pronounced by common consent to be injurious; though before they had seemed to shine as if with a light infused by the devil, so that they would easily have caused discord, had not the charge of the Elders, observed like some divine oracle, restrained us from all strife, that charge; namely, whereby it was ordered by them almost with the force of a law, that neither of us should trust to his own judgments more than his brother's, if he wanted never to be deceived by the craft of the devil.

Chapter XI. How it is impossible for one who trusts to his own judgment to escape being deceived by the devil's illusions.

For often it has been proved that what the Apostle says really takes place. "For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light," [1977] so that he deceitfully sheds abroad a confusing and foul obscuration of the thoughts instead of the true light of knowledge. And unless these thoughts are received in a humble and gentle heart, and kept for the consideration of some more experienced brother or approved Elder, and when thoroughly sifted by their judgment, either rejected or admitted by us, we shall be sure to venerate in our thoughts an angel of darkness instead of an angel of light, and be smitten with a grievous destruction: an injury which it is impossible for any one to avoid who trusts in his own judgment, unless he becomes a lover and follower of true humility and with all contrition of heart fulfils what the Apostle chiefly prays for: "If then there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any bowels of compassion, fulfil ye my joy, that you be of one mind, having the same love, being of one accord, doing nothing by contention, neither by vainglory; but in humility each esteeming others better than themselves;" and this: "in honour preferring one another," [1978] that each may think more of the knowledge and holiness of his partner, and hold that the better part of true discretion is to be found in the judgment of another rather than in his own.

Chapter XII. Why inferiors should not be despised in Conference.

For it often happens either by an illusion of the devil or by the occurrence of a human mistake (by which every man in this life is liable to be deceived) that sometimes one who is keener in intellect and more learned, gets some wrong notion in his head, while he who is duller in wits and of less worth, conceives the matter better and more truly. And therefore no one, however learned he may be, should persuade himself in his empty vanity that he cannot require conference with another. For even if no deception of the devil blinds his judgment, yet he cannot avoid the noxious snares of pride and conceit. For who can arrogate this to himself without great danger, when the chosen vessel in whom, as he maintained, Christ Himself spoke, declares that he went up to Jerusalem simply and solely for this reason, that he might in a secret discussion confer with his fellow-Apostles on the gospel which he preached to the gentiles by the revelation and co-operation of the Lord? By which fact we are shown that we ought not only by these precepts to preserve unanimity and harmony, but that we need not fear any crafts of the devil opposing us, or snares of his illusions.

Chapter XIII. How love does not only belong to God but is God.

Finally so highly is the virtue of love extolled that the blessed Apostle John declares that it not only belongs to God but that it is God, saying: "God is love: he therefore that abideth in love, abideth in God, and God in him." [1979] For so far do we see that it is divine, that we find that what the Apostle says is plainly a living truth in us: "For the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost Who dwelleth in us." [1980] For it is the same thing as if he said that God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost Who dwelleth in us: who also, when we know not what we should pray for, "makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered: But He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what the Spirit desireth, for He asketh for the saints according to God." [1981]

Chapter XIV. On the different grades of love.

It is possible then for all to show that love which is called agape, of which the blessed Apostle says: "While therefore we have time, let us do good unto all men, but specially to them that are of the household of faith." [1982] And this should be shown to all men in general to such an extent that we are actually commanded by our Lord to yield it to our enemies, for He says: "Love your enemies." [1983] But diathesis, i.e., affection is shown to but a few and those who are united to us by kindred dispositions or by a tie of goodness; though indeed affection seems to have many degrees of difference. For in one way we love our parents, in another our wives, in another our brothers, in another our children, and there is a wide difference in regard to the claims of these feelings of affection, nor is the love of parents towards their children always equal. As is shown by the case of the patriarch Jacob, who, though he was the father of twelve sons and loved them all with a father's love, yet loved Joseph with deeper affection, as Scripture clearly shows: "But his brethren envied him, because his father loved him;" [1984] evidently not that that good man his father failed in greatly loving the rest of his children, but that in his affection he clung to this one, because he was a type of the Lord, more tenderly and indulgently. This also, we read, was very clearly shown in the case of John the Evangelist, where these words are used of him: "that disciple whom Jesus loved," [1985] though certainly He embraced all the other eleven, whom He had chosen in the same way, with His special love, as this He shows also by the witness of the gospel, where He says: "As I have loved you, so do ye also love one another;" of whom elsewhere also it is said: "Loving His own who were in the world, He loved them even to the end." [1986] But this love of one in particular did not indicate any coldness in love for the rest of the disciples, but only a fuller and more abundant love towards the one, which his prerogative of virginity and the purity of his flesh bestowed upon him. And therefore it is marked by exceptional treatment, as being something more sublime, because no hateful comparison with others, but a richer grace of superabundant love singled it out. Something of this sort too we have in the character of the bride in the Song of Songs, where she says: "Set in order love in me." [1987] For this is true love set in order, which, while it hates no one, yet loves some still more by reason of their deserving it, and which, while it loves all in general, singles out for itself some from those, whom it may embrace with a special affection, and again among those, who are the special and chief objects of its love, singles out some who are preferred to others in affection.

Chapter XV. Of those who only increase their own or their brother's grievances by hiding them.

On the other hand we know (and O! would that we did not know) some of the brethren who are so hard and obstinate, that when they know that their own feelings are aroused against their brother, or that their brother's are against them, in order to conceal their vexation of mind, which is caused by indignation at the grievance of one or the other, go apart from those whom they ought to smooth down by humbly making up to them and talking with them; and begin to sing some verses of the Psalms. And these while they fancy that they are softening the bitter thoughts which have arisen in their heart, increase by their insolent conduct what they could have got rid of at once if they had been willing to show more care and humility, for a well-timed expression of regret would cure their own feelings and soften their brother's heart. For by that plan they nourish and cherish the sin of meanness or rather of pride, instead of stamping out all inducement to quarrelling, and they forget the charge of the Lord which says: "Whosoever is angry with his brother, is in danger of the judgment;" and: "if thou remember that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." [1988]

Chapter XVI. How it is that, if our brother has any grudge against us, the gifts of our prayers are rejected by the Lord.

So far therefore is our Lord anxious that we should not disregard the vexation of another that He does not accept our offerings if our brother has anything against us, i.e., He does not allow prayers to be offered by us to Him until by speedy amends we remove from his (our brother's) mind the vexation which he whether rightly or wrongly feels. For He does not say: "if thy brother hath a true ground for complaint against thee leave thy gift at the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to him;" but He says: "if thou remember that thy brother hath aught against thee," i.e., if there be anything however trivial or small, owing to which your brother's anger is roused against you, and this comes back to your recollection by a sudden remembrance, you must know that you ought not to offer the spiritual gift of your prayers until by kindly amends you have removed from your brother's heart the vexation arising from whatever cause. If then the words of the Gospel bid us make satisfaction to those who are angry for past and utterly trivial grounds of quarrel, and those which have arisen from the slightest causes, what will become of us wretches who with obstinate hypocrisy disregard more recent grounds of offence, and those of the utmost importance, and due to our own faults; and being puffed up with the devil's own pride, as we are ashamed to humble ourselves, deny that we are the cause of our brother's vexation and in a spirit of rebellion disdaining to be subject to the Lord's commands, contend that they never ought to be observed and never can be fulfilled? And so it comes to pass that as we make up our minds that He has commanded things which are impossible and unsuitable, we become, to use the Apostle's expression, "not doers but judges of the law." [1989]

Chapter XVII. Of those who hold that patience should be shown to worldly people rather than to the brethren.

This too should be bitterly lamented; namely, that some of the brethren, when angered by some reproachful words, if they are besieged by the prayers of some one else who wants to smooth them down, when they hear that vexation ought not to be admitted or retained against a brother, according to what is written: "Whoever is angry with his brother is in danger of the judgment;" and: "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath," [1990] instantly assert that if a heathen or one living in the world had said or done this, it rightly ought to be endured. But who could stand a brother who was accessory to so great a fault, or gave utterance to so insolent a reproach with his lips! As if patience were to be shown only to unbelievers and blasphemers, and not to all in general, or as if anger should be reckoned as bad when it is against a heathen, but good when it is against a brother; whereas certainly the obstinate rage of an angry soul brings about the same injury to one's self whoever may be the subject against whom it is aroused. But how terribly obstinate, aye and senseless is it for them, owing to the stupidity of their dull mind, not to be able to discern the meaning of these words, for it is not said: "Every one who is angry with a stranger shall be in danger of the judgment," which might perhaps according to their interpretation except those who are partners of our faith and life, but the word of the Gospel most significantly expresses it by saying: "Every one who is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgment." And so though we ought according to the rule of truth to regard every man as a brother, yet in this passage one of the faithful and a partaker of our mode of life is denoted by the title of brother rather than a heathen.

Chapter XVIII. Of those who pretend to patience but excite their brethren to anger by their silence.

But what sort of a thing is this, that sometimes we fancy that we are patient because when provoked we scorn to answer, but by sullen silence or scornful motions and gestures so mock at our angry brothers that by our silent looks we provoke them to anger more than angry reproaches would have excited them, meanwhile thinking that we are in no way guilty before God, because we have let nothing fall from our lips which could brand us or condemn us in the judgment of men. As if in the sight of God mere words, and not mainly the will was called in fault, and as if only the actual deed of sin, and not also the wish and purpose, was reckoned as wrong; or as if it would be asked in the judgment only what each one had done and not what he also purposed to do. For it is not only the character of the anger roused, but also the purpose of the man who provokes it which is bad, and therefore the true scrutiny of our judge will ask, not how the quarrel was stirred up but by whose fault it arose: for the purpose of the sin, and not the way in which the fault is committed must be taken into account. For what does it matter whether a man kills a brother with a sword by himself, or drives him to death by some fraud, when it is clear that he is killed by his wiles and crime? As if it were enough not to have pushed a blind man down with one's own hand, though he is equally guilty who scorned to save him, when it was in his power, when fallen and on the point of tumbling into the ditch: or as if he alone were guilty who had caught a man with the hand, and not also the one who had prepared and set the trap for him, or who would not set him free when he might have done so. So then it is of no good to hold one's tongue, if we impose silence upon ourselves for this reason that by our silence we may do what would have been done by an outcry on our part, simulating certain gestures by which he whom we ought to have cured, may be made still more angry, while we are commended for all this, to his loss and damage: as if a man were not for this very reason the more guilty, because he tried to get glory for himself out of his brother's fall. For such a silence will be equally bad for both because while it increases the vexation in the heart of another, so it prevents it from being removed from one's own: and against such persons the prophet's curse is with good reason directed: "Woe to him that giveth drink to his friend, and presenteth his gall, and maketh him drunk, that he may behold his nakedness. He is filled with shame instead of glory." [1991] And this too which is said of such people by another: "For every brother will utterly supplant, and every friend will walk deceitfully. And a man shall mock his brother, and they will not speak the truth, for they have bent their tongue like a bow for lies and not for truth." [1992] But often a feigned patience excites to anger more keenly than words, and a spiteful silence exceeds the most awful insults in words, and the wounds of enemies are more easily borne than the deceitful blandishment of mockers, of which it is well said by the prophet: "Their words are smoother than oil, and yet they are darts:" and elsewhere "the words of the crafty are soft: but they smite within the belly:" to which this also may be finely applied: "With the mouth he speaks peace to his friend, but secretly he layeth snares for him;" with which however the deceiver is rather deceived, for "if a man prepares a net before his friend, it surrounds his own feet;" and: "if a man digs a pit for his neighbour, he shall fall into it himself." [1993] Lastly when a

great multitude had come with swords and staves to take the Lord, none of the murderers of the author of our life stood forth as more cruel than he who advanced before them all with a counterfeit respect and salutation and offered a kiss of feigned love; to whom the Lord said: "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" [1994] i.e., the bitterness of thy persecution and hatred has taken as a cloke this which expresses the sweetness of true love. More openly too and more energetically does He emphasize the force of this grief by the prophet, saying: "For if mine enemy had cursed me, I would have borne it: and if he who hated me had spoken great things against me, I would have hid myself from him. But it was thou, a man of one mind, my guide, and my familiar friend: who didst take sweet meats together with me: in the house of God we walked with consent." [1995]

Chapter XIX. Of those who fast out of rage.

There is too another evil sort of vexation which would not be worth mentioning were it not that we know it is allowed by some of the brethren who, when they have been vexed or enraged actually abstain persistently from food, so that (a thing which we cannot mention without shame) those who when they are calm declare that they cannot possibly put off their refreshment to the sixth or at most the ninth hour, when they are filled with vexation and rage do not feel fasts even for two days, and support themselves, when exhausted by such abstinence, by a surfeit of anger. Wherein they are plainly guilty of the sin of sacrilege, as out of the devil's own rage they endure fasts which ought specially to be offered to God alone out of desire for humiliation of heart and purification from sin: which is much the same as if they were to offer prayers and sacrifices not to God but to devils, and so be worthy of hearing this rebuke of Moses: "They sacrificed to devils and not to God; to gods whom they knew not." [1996]

Chapter XX. Of the feigned patience of some who offer the other cheek to be smitten.

We are not ignorant also of another kind of insanity, which we find in some of the brethren under colour of a counterfeit patience, as in this case it is not enough to have stirred up quarrels unless they incite them with irritating words so as to get themselves smitten, and when they have been touched by the slightest blow, at once they offer another part of their body to be smitten, as if in this way they could fulfil to perfection that command which says: "If a man smite thee on the right cheek, offer him the other also;" [1997] while they totally ignore the meaning and purpose of the passage. For they fancy that they are practising evangelical patience through the sin of anger, for the utter eradication of which not only was the exchange of retaliation and the irritation of strife forbidden, but the command was actually given us to mitigate the wrath of the striker by the endurance of a double wrong.

Chapter XXI. A question how if we obey the commands of Christ we can fail of evangelical perfection.

Germanus: How can we blame one who satisfies the command of the Gospel and not only does not retaliate, but is actually prepared to have a double wrong offered to him?

Chapter XXII. The answer that Christ looks not only at the action but also at the will.

Joseph: As was said a little before, we must look not only at the thing which is done, but also at the character of the mind and the purpose of the doer. And therefore if you weigh with a careful scrutiny of heart what is done by each man and consider with what mind it is done or from what feeling it proceeds, you will see that the virtue of patience and gentleness cannot possibly be fulfilled in the opposite spirit, i.e., that of impatience and rage. Since our Lord and Saviour, when giving us a thorough lesson on the virtue of patience and gentleness (i.e., teaching us not only to profess it with our lips, but to store it up in the inmost recesses of the soul) gave us this summary of evangelical perfection, saying: "If any one smites thee on thy right cheek, offer him the other also" [1998] (doubtless the "right" cheek is mentioned, as another "right" cheek cannot be found except in the face of the inner man, so to speak), as by this He desires entirely to remove all incitement to anger from the deepest recesses of the soul, i.e., that if your external right cheek has received a blow from the striker, the inner man also humbly consenting may offer its right cheek to be smitten, sympathizing with the suffering of the outward man, and in a way submitting and subjecting its own body to wrong from the striker, that the inner man may not even silently be disturbed in itself at the blows of the outward man. You see then that they are very far from evangelical perfection, which teaches that patience must be maintained, not in words but in inward tranquillity of heart, and which bids us preserve it whatever evil happens, that we may not only keep ourselves always from disturbing anger, but also by submitting to their injuries compel those, who are disturbed by their own fault, to become calm, when they have had their fill of blows; and so overcome their rage by our gentleness. And so also we shall fulfil these words of the Apostle: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." [1999] And it is quite clear that this cannot be fulfilled by those who utter words of gentleness and humility in such a spirit and rage that they not only fail to lessen the fire of wrath which has been kindled, but rather make it blaze up the more fiercely both in their own feelings and in those of their enraged brother. But these, even if they could in some way keep calm and quiet themselves, would yet not bear any fruits of righteousness, while they claim the glory of patience on their part by their neighbour's loss, and are thus altogether removed from that Apostolic love which "Seeketh not her own," [2000] but the things of others. For it does not so desire riches in such a way as to make profit for itself out of one's neighbour's loss, nor does it wish to gain anything if it involves the spoiling of another.

Chapter XXIII. How he is the strong and vigorous man, who yields to the will of another.

But you must certainly know that in general he plays a stronger part who subjects his own will to his brother's, than he who is found to be the more pertinacious in defending and clinging to his own decisions. For the former by bearing and putting up with his neighbour gains the character of being strong and vigorous, while the latter gains that of being weak and sickly, who must be pampered and petted so that sometimes for the sake of his peace and quiet it is a good thing to relax something even in necessary matters. And indeed in this he need not fancy that he has lost anything of his own perfection, though by yielding he has given up something of his intended strictness, but on the contrary he may be sure that he has gained much more by his virtue of long-suffering and patience. For this is the Apostle's command: "Ye who are strong should bear the infirmities of the weak;" and: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." [2001] For a weak man will never support a weak man, nor can one who is suffering in the same way, bear or cure one in feeble health, but one who is himself not subject to infirmity brings remedies to one in weak health. For it is rightly said to him: "Physician, heal thyself." [2002]

Chapter XXIV. How the weak are harmful and cannot bear wrongs.

We must note too the fact that the nature of the weak is always such that they are quick and ready to offer reproaches and sow the seeds of quarrels, while they themselves cannot bear to be touched by the shadow of the very slightest wrong, and while they are riding roughshod over us and flinging about wanton charges, they are not able to bear even the slightest and most trivial ones themselves. And so according to the aforesaid opinion of the Elders love cannot last firm and unbroken except among men of the same purpose and goodness. For at some time or other it is sure to be broken, however carefully it may be guarded by one of them.

Chapter XXV. A question how he can be strong who does not always support the weak.

Germanus: How then can the patience of a perfect man be worthy of praise if it cannot always bear the weak?

Chapter XXVI. The answer that the weak does not always allow himself to be borne.

Joseph: I did not say that the virtue and endurance of one who is strong and robust would be overcome, but that the miserable condition of the weak, encouraged by the tolerance of the perfect, and daily growing worse, is sure to give rise to reasons on account of which he himself ought no longer to be borne; or else with a shrewd suspicion that the patience of his neighbour shows up and sets off his own impatience at some time or other he chooses to make off rather than always to be borne by the magnanimity of the other. This then we think should be above all else observed by those who want to keep the affection of their companions unimpaired; viz., that first of all when provoked by any wrongs, a monk should keep not only his lips but even the depth of his breast unmoved: but if he finds that they are even slightly disturbed, let him keep himself in by entire silence, and diligently observe what the Psalmist speaks of: "I was troubled and spake nothing;" and: "I said I will take heed to thy ways that I offend not with my tongue. I have set a guard to my mouth, when the sinner stood against me. I was dumb and was humbled, and kept silence from good things;" [2003] and he should not pay any heed to his present state, nor give vent to what his violent rage suggests and his exasperated mind expresses at the moment, but should dwell on the grace of past love or look forward in his mind to the renewal and restoration of peace, and contemplate it even in the very hour of rage, as if it were sure presently to return. And while he is reserving himself for the delight of harmony soon to come, he will not feel the bitterness of the present quarrel and will easily make such answers that, when love is restored, he will not be able to accuse himself as guilty or be blamed by the other; and thus he will fulfil these words of the prophet: "In wrath remember mercy." [2004]

Chapter XXVII. How anger should be repressed.

We ought then to restrain every movement of anger and moderate it under the direction of discretion, that we may not by blind rage be hurried into that which is condemned by Solomon: "The wicked man expends all his anger, but the wise man dispenses it bit by bit," [2005] i.e., a fool is inflamed by the passion of his anger to avenge himself; but a wise man, by the ripeness of his counsel and moderation little by little diminishes it, and gets rid of it. Something of the same kind too is this which is said by the Apostle: "Not avenging yourselves, dearly beloved: but give place to wrath," [2006] i.e., do not under the compulsion of wrath proceed to vengeance, but give place to wrath, i.e., do not let your hearts be confined in the straits of impatience and cowardice so that, when a fierce storm of passion rises, you cannot endure it; but be ye enlarged in your hearts, receiving the adverse waves of anger in the wide gulf of that love which "suffereth all things, beareth all things;" [2007] and so your mind will be enlarged with wide long-suffering and patience, and will have within it safe recesses of counsel, in which the foul smoke of anger will be received and be diffused and forthwith vanish away; or else the passage may be taken in this way: we give place to wrath, as often as we yield with humble and tranquil mind to the passion of another, and bow to the impatience of the passionate, as if we admitted that we deserved any kind of wrong. But those who twist the meaning of the perfection of which the Apostle speaks so as to make out that those give place to anger, who go away from a man in a rage, seem to me not to cut off but rather to foment the incitement to quarrelling, for unless a neighbour's wrath is overcome at once by amends being humbly made, a man provokes rather than avoids it by his flight. And there is something like this that Solomon says: "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be wroth, for anger reposes in the bosom of fools;" and: "Be not quick to rush into a quarrel, lest thou repent thereof at the last." [2008] For he does not blame a hasty exhibition of quarrelling and anger in such a way as to praise a tardy one. In the same way too must this be taken: "A fool declares his anger in the very same hour, but a prudent man hides his shame." [2009] For he does not lay it down that a shameful outburst of anger ought to be hidden by wise men in such a way that while he blames a speedy outburst of anger he fails to forbid a tardy one, as certainly, if owing to human weakness it does burst forth, he means that it should be hidden for this reason, that while for the moment it is wisely covered up, it may be destroyed forever. For the nature of anger is such that when it is given room it languishes and perishes, but if openly exhibited, it burns more and more. The hearts then should be enlarged and opened wide, lest they be confined in the narrow straits of cowardice, and be filled with the swelling surge of wrath, and so we become unable to receive what the prophet calls the "exceeding broad" commandment of God in our narrow heart, or to say with the prophet: "I have run the way of thy commandments for thou hast enlarged my heart." [2010] For that long-suffering is wisdom we are taught by very clear passages of Scripture: for "a man who is long-suffering is great in prudence; but a coward is very foolish." [2011] And therefore Scripture says of him who to his credit asked the gift of wisdom from the Lord: "God gave Solomon wisdom and prudence exceeding much, and largeness of heart as the sand of the sea for multitude." [2012]

Chapter XXVIII. How friendships entered upon by conspiracy cannot be lasting ones.

This too has been often proved by many experiments; viz., that those who entered the bonds of friendship from a beginning of conspiracy, cannot possibly preserve their harmony unbroken; either because they tried to keep it not out of their desire for perfection nor because of the sway of Apostolic love, but out of earthly love, and because of their wants and the bonds of their agreement; or else because that most crafty foe of ours hurries them on the more speedily to break the chains of their friendship in order that he may make them breakers of their oath. This opinion then of the most prudent men is most certainly established; viz., that true harmony and undivided union can only exist among those whose life is pure, and who are men of the same goodness and purpose. Thus much the blessed Joseph discoursed in his spiritual talk on friendship, and fired us with a more ardent desire to preserve the love of our fellowship as a lasting one.

XVII. The Second Conference of Abbot Joseph.

On Making Promises.

Chapter I. Of the vigils which we endured.

When then the previous Conference was ended, and the intervening silence of night as well, as we had been conducted by the holy Abbot Joseph to a separate cell for the sake of quiet, but had passed the whole night without sleep (since owing to his words a fire was raging in our hearts), we came forth from the cell and retired about a hundred yards from it and sat down in a secluded spot. And so as an opportunity was given by the shades of night for secret and familiar converse together, as we sat there Abbot Germanus groaned heavily.

Chapter II. Of the anxiety of Abbot Germanus at the recollection of our promise.

What are we doing? said he. For we see that we are involved in a great difficulty and are in an evil plight, as reason itself and the life of the saints is effectually teaching us what is the best thing for our progress in the spiritual life, and yet our promise given to the Elders does not allow us to choose what is helpful. For we might, by the examples of such great men, be formed for a more perfect life and aim, were it not that the terms of our promise compelled us to return at once to the monastery. But if we return thither, we shall never get another chance of coming here again. But if we stay here and choose to carry out our wishes, what becomes of the faith of the oath which we are aware that we gave to our Elders promising a speedy return; that we might be allowed to make a hasty round of the monasteries and saints of this province? And when in this state of tumult we could not make up our minds what we ought to decide on the state of our salvation we simply testified by our groans the hard fate of our condition, upbraiding the audacity of our impudence, and yet hating the shame which was natural to us, weighed down by which we could not in any other way resist the prayers of those who kept us back against our profit and purpose, except by the promise of a speedy return, as we wept indeed that we laboured under the fault of that shame, of which it is said "There is a shame that bringeth sin." [2013]

Chapter III. My ideas on this subject.

Then I replied: The counsel or rather the authority of the Elder to whom we ought to refer our anxieties would make a short way out of our difficulties, and whatever is decided by his verdict, may, like a divine and heavenly reply, put an end to all our troubles. And we need not have any doubt of what is given to us by the Lord through the lips of this Elder, both for the sake of his merits and for our own faith. For by His gift believers have often obtained saving counsel from unworthy people, and unbelievers from saints, as the Lord grants this either on account of the merit of those who answer, or on account of the faith of those who ask advice. And so the holy Abbot Germanus caught eagerly at these words as if I had uttered them not of myself but at the prompting of the Lord, and when we had waited a little for the coming of the Elder and the approaching hour of the nocturnal service, after we had welcomed him with the usual greeting and finished reciting the right number of Psalms and prayers, we sat down again as usual on the same mats on which we had settled ourselves to sleep.

Chapter IV. Abbot Joseph's question and our answer on the origin of our anxiety.

Then the venerable Joseph saw that we were in rather low spirits, and, guessing that this was not the case without reason, addressed us in these words of the patriarch Joseph: "Why are your faces sad today?" [2014] to whom we answered: We are not like those bond slaves of Pharaoh who have seen a dream and there is none to interpret it, but I admit that we have passed a sleepless night and there is no one to lighten the weight of our troubles unless the Lord may remove them by your wisdom. Then he, who recalled the excellence of the patriarch both by his merits and name, said: Does not the cure of man's perplexities come from the Lord? Let them be brought forward: for the Divine Compassion is able to give a remedy for them by means of our advice according to your faith.

Chapter V. The explanation of Abbot Germanus why we wanted to stay in Egypt, and were drawn back to Syria.

To this Germanus: We used to think, said he, that we should go back to our monastery abundantly filled not only with spiritual joy but also with what is profitable by the sight of your holiness, and that after our return we should follow, though with but a feeble rivalry, what we had learnt from your teaching. For this our love for our Elders led us to promise them, while we fancied that we could in some degree follow in that monastery your sublime life and doctrine. Wherefore as we thought that by this means all joy would be bestowed upon us, so on the other hand we are overwhelmed with intolerable grief, as we find that we cannot possibly obtain in this way what we know to be good for us. On both sides then we are now hemmed in. For if we want to keep our promise which we made in the presence of all the brethren in the cave where our Lord Himself shone forth from His chamber in the Virgin's womb, [2015] and which He Himself witnessed, we shall incur the greatest loss in our spiritual life. But if we ignore our promise and stay in this district, and choose to consider that oath of ours as of less importance than our perfection, we are afraid of the awful dangers of falsehood and perjury. But not even by this plan can we lighten our burdens; viz., by fulfilling the terms of our oath by a very hasty return, and then coming back again as quickly as possible to these parts. For although even a small delay is dangerous and hurtful for those who are aiming at goodness and advance in spiritual things, yet still we would keep our faith and promise, though by an unwilling return, were it not that we felt sure that we should be so tightly bound down both by the authority and also by the love of the Elders, that we should henceforth have no opportunity at all to come back again to this place.

Chapter VI. Abbot Joseph's question whether we got more good in Egypt than in Syria.

To this the blessed Joseph, after a short silence: Are you sure, said he, that you can get more profit in spiritual matters in this country?

Chapter VII. The answer on the difference of customs in the two countries.

Germanus: Although we ought to be most grateful for the teaching of those men who taught us from our youth up to attempt great things, and, by giving us a taste of their excellence, implanted in our hearts a splendid thirst for perfection, yet if any reliance is to be placed on our judgment, we cannot draw any comparison between these customs and those which we learnt there, so as to hold our tongues about the inimitable purity of your life, which we believe is granted to you not only owing to the concentration of your mind and aim, but also owing to the aid and assistance of the place itself. Wherefore we do not doubt that for the following of your grand perfection this instruction which is given to us is not enough by itself, unless we have also the help of the life, and a long course of instruction somewhat dissolves the coldness of our heart by daily training.

Chapter VIII. How those who are perfect ought not to make any promises absolutely, and whether decisions can be reversed without sin.

Joseph: It is good indeed and right and altogether in accordance with our profession, for us effectually to perform what we decided to do in the case of any promise. Wherefore a monk ought not to make any promise hastily, lest he may be forced to do what he incautiously promised, or if he is kept back by consideration of a sounder view, appear as a breaker of his promise. But because at the present moment our purpose is to treat not so much of a state of health as of the cure of sickness we must with salutary counsel consider not what you ought to have done in the first instance, but how you can escape from the rocks of this perilous shipwreck. When then no chains impede us and no conditions restrict us, in the case of a comparison of good things, if a choice is proposed, that which is most advantageous should be preferred: but when some detriment and loss stands in the way, in a comparison of things to our hurt, that should be sought which exposes us to the smallest loss. Further, as your assertion shows, when your heedless promise has brought you to this state that in either case some serious loss and inconvenience must result to you, the will in choosing should incline to that side which involves a loss that is more tolerable, or can be more easily made up for by the remedy of making amends. If then you think that you will get more good for your spirit by staying here than what accrued to you from your life in that monastery, and that the terms of your promise cannot be fulfilled without the loss of great good, it is better for you to undergo the loss from a falsehood and an unfulfilled promise (as it is done once for all, and need not any longer be repeated or be the cause of other sins) than for you to incur that loss, through which you say that your state of life would become colder, and which would affect you with a daily and unceasing injury. For a careless promise is changed in such a way that it may be pardoned or indeed praised, if it is turned into a better path, nor need we take it as a failure in consistency, but as a correction of rashness, whenever a promise that was faulty is corrected. And all this may be proved by most certain witness from Scripture, that for many the fulfilment of their promise has led to death, and on the other hand that for many it has been good and profitable to have refused it.

Chapter IX. How it is often better to break one's engagements than to fulfil them.

And both these points are very clearly shown by the cases of S. Peter the Apostle and Herod. For the former, because he departed from his expressed determination which he had as it were confirmed with an oath saying "Thou shalt never wash my feet," [2016] gained an immortal partnership with Christ, whereas he would certainly have been cut off from the grace of this blessedness, if he had clung obstinately to his word. But the latter, by clinging to the pledge of his ill-considered oath, became the bloody murderer of the Lord's forerunner, and through the vain fear of perjury plunged himself into condemnation and the punishment of everlasting death. In everything then we must consider the end, and must according to it direct our course and aim, and if when some wiser counsel supervenes, we see it diverging to the worse part, it is better to discard the unsuitable arrangement, and to come to a better mind rather than to cling obstinately to our engagements and so become involved in worse sins.

Chapter X. Our question about our fear of the oath which we gave in the monastery in Syria.

Germanus: In so far as it concerns our desire, which we undertook to carry out for the sake of spiritual profit, we were hoping to be edified by continual intercourse with you. For if we were to return to our monastery it is certain that we should not only fail of so sublime a purpose, but that we should also suffer grievous loss from the mediocrity of the manner of life there. But that command of the gospel frightens us terribly: "Let your speech be yea, yea, nay, nay: but whatsoever is more than these, is from the evil one." [2017] For we hold that we cannot compensate for transgressing so important a command by any righteousness, nor can that finally turn out well which has once been started with a bad beginning.

Chapter XI. The answer that we must take into account the purpose of the doer rather than the execution of the business.

Joseph: In every case, as we said, we must look not at the progress of the work but at the intention of the worker, nor must we inquire to begin with what a man has done, but with what purpose, so that we may find that some have been condemned for those deeds from which good has afterwards arisen, and on the other hand that some have arrived by means of acts in themselves reprehensible at the height of righteousness. And in the case of the former the good result of their actions was of no avail to them as they took the matter in and with an evil purpose, and wanted to bring about -- not the good which actually resulted, but something of the opposite character; nor was the bad beginning injurious to the latter, as he put up with the necessity of a blameworthy start; not out of disregard for God, or with the purpose of doing wrong, but with an eye to a needful and holy end.

Chapter XII. How a fortunate issue will be of no avail to evil doers, while bad deeds will not injure good men.

And that we may make these statements clear by instances from Holy Scripture, what could be brought about that was more salutary and more to the good of the whole world, than the saving remedy of the Lord's Passion? And yet it was not only of no advantage, but was actually to the disadvantage of the traitor by whose means it is shown to have been brought about, so that it is absolutely said of him: "It were good for that man if he had never been born." [2018] For the fruits of his labour will not be repaid to him according to the actual result, but according to what he wanted to do, and believed that he would accomplish. And again, what could there be more culpable than craft and deceit shown even to a stranger, not to mention one's brother and father? And yet the patriarch Jacob not only met with no condemnation or blame for such things but was actually dowered with the everlasting heritage of the blessing. And not without reason, for the last mentioned desired the blessing destined for the first-born not out of a greedy desire for present gain but because of his faith in everlasting sanctification; while the former (Judas) delivered the Redeemer of all to death, not for the sake of man's salvation, but from the sin of covetousness. And therefore in each case the fruits of their action are reckoned according to the intention of the mind and purpose of the will, according to which the object of the one was not to work fraud, nor was that of the other to work salvation. For justly is there repayment to each man as the recompense of reward, for what he conceived in the first instance in his mind, and not for what resulted from it either well or badly, against the wish of the worker. And so the most just Judge regarded him who ventured on such a falsehood as excusable and indeed worthy of praise, because without it he could not secure the blessing of the first-born; and that should not be reckoned as a sin, which arose from desire of the blessing. Otherwise the aforesaid patriarch would have been not only unfair to his brother, but also a cheat of his father and a blasphemer, if there had been any other way by which he could secure the gift of that blessing, and he had preferred to follow this which would damage and injure his brother. You see then that with God the inquiry is not into the carrying out of the act, but into the purpose of the mind. With this preparation then for a return to the question proposed (for which all this has been premised) I want you first to tell me for what reason you bound yourselves in the fetters of that promise.

Chapter XIII. Our answer as to the reason which demanded an oath from us.

Germanus: The first reason, as we said, was that we were afraid of vexing our Elders and resisting their orders; the second was that we very foolishly believed that, if we had learnt from you anything perfect or splendid to hear or look at, when we returned to the monastery, we should be able to perform it.

Chapter XIV. The discourse of the Elder showing how the plan of action may be changed without fault provided that one keeps to the carrying out of a good intention.

Joseph: As we premised, the intent of the mind brings a man either reward or condemnation, according to this passage: "Their thoughts between themselves accusing or also defending one another, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men;" and this too: "But I am coming to gather together their works and thoughts together with all nations and tongues." [2019] Wherefore it was, as I see, from a desire for perfection that you bound yourselves with the chain of these oaths, as you then thought that by this plan it could be gained, while now that a riper judgment has supervened, you see that you cannot by this means scale its heights. And so any departure from that arrangement, which may seem to have happened, will be no hindrance, if only no change in that first purpose follows. For a change of instrument does not imply a desertion of the work, nor does the choice of a shorter and more direct road argue laziness on the path of the traveller. And so in this matter an improvement in a short-sighted arrangement is not to be reckoned a breach of a spiritual promise. For whatever is done out of the love of God and desire for goodness, which has "promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come," [2020] even though it may appear to commence with a hard and adverse beginning, is most worthy, not only of no blame, but actually of praise. And therefore the breaking of a careless promise will be no hindrance, if in every case the end, i.e., the proposed aim at goodness, be maintained. For we do all for this reason, that we may be able to show to God a clean heart, and if the attainment of this is considered to be easier in this country the alteration of the agreement extracted from you will be no hindrance to you, if only the perfection of that purity for the sake of which your promise was originally made, be the sooner secured according to the Lord's will.

Chapter XV. A question whether it can be without sin that our knowledge affords to weak brethren an opportunity for lying.

Germanus: As far as the force of the words which have been reasonably and carefully considered, is concerned, our scruple about our promise would have easily been removed from us were it not that we were terribly alarmed lest by this example an opportunity for lying might be offered to certain weaker brethren, if they knew that the faith of an agreement could be in any way lawfully broken, whereas this very thing is forbidden in such vigorous and threatening terms by the prophet when he says: "Thou shalt destroy all those who utter a lie;" and: "the mouth that speaketh a lie, shall slay the soul." [2021]

Chapter XVI. The answer that Scripture truth is not to be altered on account of an offence given to the weak.

Joseph: Occasions and opportunities for destroying themselves cannot possibly be wanting to those who are on the road to ruin, or rather who are anxious to destroy themselves; nor are those passages of Scripture to be rejected and altogether torn out of the volume, by which the perversity of heretics is encouraged, or the unbelief of the Jews increased, or the pride of heathen wisdom offended; but surely they are to be piously believed, and firmly held, and preached according to the rule of truth. And therefore we should not, because of another's unbelief, reject the oikonomias, i.e., the "economy" of the prophets and saints which Scripture relates, lest while we are thinking that we ought to condescend to their infirmities, we stain ourselves with the sin not only of lying but of sacrilege. But, as we said, we ought to admit these according to the letter, and explain how they were rightly done. But for those who are wrongly disposed, the opening for lies will not be blocked up by this means, if we are trying either altogether to deny or to explain away by allegorical interpretations the truth of those things which we are going to bring forward or have already brought forward. For how will the authority of these passages injure them if their corrupt will is alone sufficient to lead them to sin?

Chapter XVII. How the saints have profitably employed a lie like hellebore.

And so we ought to regard a lie and to employ it as if its nature were that of hellebore; which is useful if taken when some deadly disease is threatening, but if taken without being required by some great danger is the cause of immediate death. For so also we read that holy men and those most approved by God employed lying, so as not only to incur no guilt of sin from it, but even to attain the greatest goodness; and if deceit could confer glory on them, what on the other hand would the truth have brought them but condemnation? Just as Rahab, of whom Scripture gives a record not only of no good deed but actually of unchastity, yet simply for the lie, by means of which she preferred to hide the spies instead of betraying them, had it vouchsafed to her to be joined with the people of God in everlasting blessing. But if she had preferred to speak the truth and to regard the safety of the citizens, there is no doubt that she and all her house would not have escaped the coming destruction, nor would it have been vouchsafed to her to be inserted in the progenitors of our Lord's nativity, [2022] and reckoned in the list of the patriarchs, and through her descendants that followed, to become the mother of the Saviour of all. Again Dalila, who to provide for the safety of her fellow citizens betrayed the truth she had discovered, obtained in exchange eternal destruction, and has left to all men nothing but the memory of her sin. When then any grave danger hangs on confession of the truth, then we must take to lying as a refuge, yet in such a way as to be for our salvation troubled by the guilt of a humbled conscience. But where there is no call of the utmost necessity present, there a lie should be most carefully avoided as if it were something deadly: just as we said of a cup of hellebore which is indeed useful if it is only taken in the last resort when a deadly and inevitable disease is threatening, while if it is taken when the body is in a state of sound and rude health, its deadly properties at once go to find out the vital parts. And this was clearly shown of Rahab of Jericho, and the patriarch Jacob; the former of whom could only escape death by means of this remedy, while the latter could not secure the blessing of the first-born without it. For God is not only the Judge and inspector of our words and actions, but He also looks into their purpose and aim. And if He sees that anything has been done or promised by some one for the sake of eternal salvation and shows insight into Divine contemplation, even though it may appear to men to be hard and unfair, yet He looks at the inner goodness of the heart and regards the desire of the will rather than the actual words spoken, because He must take into account the aim of the work and the disposition of the doer, whereby, as was said above, one man may be justified by means of a lie, while another may be guilty of a sin of everlasting death by telling the truth. To which end the patriarch Jacob also had regard when he was not afraid to imitate the hairy appearance of his brother's body by wrapping himself up in skins, and to his credit acquiesced in his mother's instigation of a lie for this object. For he saw that in this way there would be bestowed on him greater gains of blessing and righteousness than by keeping to the path of simplicity: for he did not doubt that the stain of this lie would at once be washed away by the flood of the paternal blessing, and would speedily be dissolved like a little cloud by the breath of the Holy Spirit; and that richer rewards of merit would be bestowed on him

by means of this dissimulation which he put on than by means of the truth, which was natural to him.

Chapter XVIII. An objection that only those men employed lies with impunity, who lived under the law.

Germanus: It is no wonder that these schemes were properly employed in the Old Testament, and that some holy men laudably or at any rate venially told lies, as we see that many worse things were permitted to them owing to the rude character of the times. For why should we wonder that when the blessed David was fleeing from Saul, in answer to the inquiry of Abimelech the priest who said: "Why art thou alone, and is no man with thee?" he replied as follows: "The king hath commanded me a business, and said, Let no man know the thing for which thou art sent by me, for I have appointed my servants to such and such a place;" and again: "Hast thou here at hand a spear or a sword, for I brought not my own sword nor my own weapon with me, for the king's business required haste;" or this, when he was brought to Achish king of Gath, and feigned himself mad and frantic, "and changed his countenance before them, and slipped down between their hands; and stumbled against the doors of the gate and his spittle ran down on his beard;" [2023] when they were even allowed to enjoy crowds of wives and concubines, and no sin was on this account imputed to them, and when moreover they often shed the blood of their enemies with their own hand, and this was thought not only worthy of no blame, but actually praiseworthy? And all these things we see by the light of the gospel are utterly forbidden, so that not one of them can be done without great sin and guilt. And in the same way we hold that no lie can be employed by any one, I will not say rightly, but not even venially, however it may be covered with the colour of piety, as the Lord says: "Let your speech be yea, yea, nay, nay: but whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one;" and the Apostle also agrees with this: "And lie not one to another." [2024]

Chapter XIX. The answer, that leave to lie, which was not even granted under the old Covenant, has rightly been taken by many.

Joseph: All liberty in the matter of wives and many concubines, as the end of time is approaching and the multiplying of the human race completed, ought rightly to be cut off by evangelical perfection, as being no longer necessary. For up to the coming of Christ it was well that the blessing of the original sentence should be in full vigour, whereby it was said: "Increase and multiply, and fill the earth." [2025] And therefore it was quite right that from the root of human fecundity which happily flourished in the synagogue, in accordance with that dispensation of the times, the buds of angelical virginity should spring, and the fragrant flowers of continence be produced in the Church. But that lying was even then condemned the text of the whole Old Testament clearly shows, as it says: "Thou shalt destroy all them that speak lies;" and again: "The bread of lying is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth is filled with gravel;" and the Giver of the law himself says: "Thou shalt avoid a lie." [2026] But we said that it was then properly employed as a last resort when some need or plan of salvation was linked on to it, on account of which it ought not to be condemned. As is the case, which you mentioned, of king David when in his flight from the unjust persecution of Saul, to Abimelech the priest he used lying words, not with the object of getting any gain nor with the desire to injure anybody, but simply to save himself from that most iniquitous persecution; inasmuch as he would not stain his hands with the blood of the hostile king, so often delivered up to him by God; as he said: "The Lord be merciful to me that I may do no such thing to my master the Lord's anointed, as to lay my hand upon him, because he is the Lord's anointed." [2027] And therefore these plans which we hear that holy men under the old covenant adopted either from the will of God, or for the prefiguring of spiritual mysteries or for the salvation of some people, we too cannot refuse altogether, when necessity constrains us, as we see that even apostles did not avoid them, where the consideration of something profitable required them: which in the meanwhile we will for a time postpone, while we first discuss those instances which we propose still to bring forward from the Old Testament, and afterwards we shall more suitably introduce them so as more readily to prove that good and holy men, both in the Old and in the New Testament, were entirely at one with each other in these contrivances. For what shall we say of that pious fraud of Hushai to Absalom for the salvation of king David, which though uttered with all appearance of good-will by the deceiver and cheat, and opposed to the good of him who asked advice, is yet commended by the authority of Holy Scripture, which says: "But by the will of the Lord the profitable counsel of Ahithophel was defeated that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom?" [2028] Nor could that be blamed which was done for the right side with a right purpose and pious intent, and was planned for the salvation and victory of one whose piety was pleasing to God, by a holy dissimulation. What too shall we say of the deed of that woman, who received the men who had been sent to king David by the aforesaid Hushai, and hid them in a well, and spread a cloth over its mouth, and pretended that she was drying pearl-barley, and said "They passed on after tasting a little water"; [2029] and by this invention saved them from the hands of their pursuers? Wherefore answer me, I pray you, and say what you would have done, if any similar

situation had arisen for you, living now under the gospel; would you prefer to hide them with a similar falsehood, saying in the same way: "They passed on after tasting a little water," and thus fulfil the command: "Deliver those who are being led to death, and spare not to redeem those who are being killed;" [2030] or by speaking the truth, would you have given up those in hiding to the men who would kill them? And what then becomes of the Apostle's words: "Let no man seek his own but the things of another:" and: "Love seeketh not her own, but the things of others;" and of himself he says: "I seek not mine own good but the good of many that they may be saved?" [2031] For if we seek our own, and want obstinately to keep what is good for ourselves, we must even in urgent cases of this sort speak the truth, and so become guilty of the death of another: but if we prefer what is for another's advantage to our own good, and satisfy the demands of the Apostle, we shall certainly have to put up with the necessity of lying. And therefore we shall not be able to keep a perfect heart of love, or to seek, as Apostolic perfection requires, the things of others, unless we relax a little in those things which concern the strictness and perfection of our own lives, and choose to condescend with ready affection to what is useful to others, and so with the Apostle become weak to the weak, that we may be able to gain the weak.

Chapter XX. How even Apostles thought that a lie was often useful and the truth injurious.

Instructed by which examples, the blessed Apostle James also, and all the chief princes of the primitive Church urged the Apostle Paul in consequence of the weakness of feeble persons to condescend to a fictitious arrangement and insisted on his purifying himself according to the requirements of the law, and shaving his head and paying his vows, as they thought that the present harm which would come from this hypocrisy was of no account, but had regard rather to the gain which would result from his still continued preaching. For the gain to the Apostle Paul from his strictness would not have counterbalanced the loss to all nations from his speedy death. And this would certainly have been then incurred by the whole Church unless this good and salutary hypocrisy had preserved him for the preaching of the Gospel. For then we may rightly and pardonably acquiesce in the wrong of a lie, when, as we said, a greater harm depends on telling the truth, and when the good which results to us from speaking the truth cannot counterbalance the harm which will be caused by it. And elsewhere the blessed Apostle testifies in other words that he himself always observed this disposition; for when he says: "To the Jews I became as a Jew that I might gain the Jews; to those who were under the law as being under the law, though not myself under the law, that I might gain those who were under the law; to those who were without law, I became as without law, though I was not without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might gain those who were without law; to the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak: I became all things to all men, that I might save all;" [2032] what does he show but that according to the weakness and the capacity of those who were being instructed he always lowered himself and relaxed something of the vigour of perfection, and did not cling to what his own strict life might seem to demand, but rather preferred that which the good of the weak might require? And that we may trace these matters out more carefully and recount one by one the glories of the good deeds of the Apostles, some one may ask how the blessed Apostle can be proved to have suited himself to all men in all things. When did he to the Jews become as a Jew? Certainly in the case where, while he still kept in his inmost heart the opinion which he had maintained to the Galatians saying: "Behold, I, Paul, say unto you that if ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing," [2033] yet by circumcising Timothy he adopted a shadow as it were of Jewish superstition. And again, where did he become to those under the law, as under the law? There certainly where James and all the Elders of the Church, fearing lest he might be attacked by the multitude of Jewish believers, or rather of Judaizing Christians, who had received the faith of Christ in such a way as still to be bound by the rites of legal ceremonies, came to his rescue in his difficulty with this counsel and advice, and said: "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews, who have believed, and they are all zealots for the law. But they have heard of thee that thou teachest those Jews who are among the Gentiles to depart from Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children;" and below: "Do therefore this that we say unto thee: we have four men who have a vow on them. These take and sanctify thyself with them and bestow on them, that they may shave their heads; and all will know that the things which they have

heard of thee are false, but that thou thyself also walkest keeping the law." [2034] And so for the good of those who were under the law, he trode under foot for a while the strict view which he had expressed: "For I through the law am dead unto the law that I may live unto God;" [2035] and was driven to shave his head, and be purified according to the law and pay his vows after the Mosaic rites in the Temple. Do you ask also where for the good of those who were utterly ignorant of the law of God, he himself became as if without law? Read the introduction to his sermon at Athens where heathen wickedness was flourishing: "As I passed by," he says, "I saw your idols and an altar on which was written: To the unknown God;" and when he had thus started from their superstition, as if he himself also had been without law, under the cloke of that profane inscription he introduced the faith of Christ, saying: "What therefore ye ignorantly worship, that declare I unto you." And after a little, as if he had known nothing whatever of the Divine law, he chose to bring forward a verse of a heathen poet rather than a saying of Moses or Christ, saying: "As some also of your own poets have said: for we are also His offspring." And when he had thus approached them with their own authorities, which they could not reject, thus confirming the truth by things false, he added and said: "Since then we are the offspring of God we ought not to think that the Godhead is like to gold or silver or stone sculptured by the art and device of man." [2036] But to the weak he became weak, when, by way of permission, not of command, he allowed those who could not contain themselves to return together again, [2037] or when he fed the Corinthians with milk and not with meat, and says that he was with them in weakness and fear and much trembling. [2038] But he became all things to all men that he might save all, when he says: "He that eateth let him not despise him that eateth not, and let not him that eateth not judge him that eateth:" and: "He that giveth his virgin in marriage doeth well, and he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better;" and elsewhere: "Who," says he, "is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?" and in this way he fulfilled what he had commanded the Corinthians to do when he said: "Be ye without offence to Jews and Greeks and the Church of Christ, as I also please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit but that of the many, that they may be saved." [2039] For it had certainly been profitable not to circumcise Timothy, not to shave his head, not to undergo Jewish purification, not to practice going barefoot, [2040] not to pay legal vows; but he did all these things because he did not seek his own profit but that of the many. And although this was done with the full consideration of God, yet it was not free from dissimulation. For one who through the law of Christ was dead to the law that he might live to God, and who had made and treated that righteousness of the law in which he had lived blameless, as dung, that he might gain Christ, could not with true fervour of heart offer what belonged to the law; nor is it right to believe that he who had said: "For if I again rebuild what I have destroyed, I make myself a transgressor," [2041] would himself fall into what he had condemned. And to such an extent is account taken, not so much of the actual thing which is done as of the disposition of the doer, that on the other hand truth is sometimes found to have injured some, and a lie to have done them good. For when Saul was grumbling to his servants about David's flight, and saying: "Will the son of Jesse give you all fields and vineyards, and make you all tribunes and centurions: that all of you have conspired against me, and there is no one to inform me," did Doeg the Edomite say anything but the truth, when he told him: "I saw the son of Jesse in Nob, with Abimelech the son of Ahitub the priest, who consulted the Lord for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him also the sword of Goliath the Philistine?" [2042] For which true story he deserved to be rooted up out of the land of the living, and it is said of him by the prophet: "Wherefore God shall destroy thee forever, and pluck thee up

and tear thee out of thy tabernacle, and thy root from the land of the living:" [2043] He then for showing the truth is forever plucked and rooted up out of that land in which the harlot Rahab with her family is planted for her lie: just as also we remember that Samson most injuriously betrayed to his wicked wife the truth which he had hidden for a long time by a lie, and therefore the truth so inconsiderately disclosed was the cause of his own deception, because he had neglected to keep the command of the prophet: "Keep the doors of thy mouth from her that sleepeth in thy bosom." [2044]

Chapter XXI. Whether secret abstinence ought to be made known, without telling a lie about it, to those who ask, and whether what has once been declined may be taken in hand.

And to bring forward some instances from our unavoidable and almost daily wants which with all our care we can never so guard against as not to be driven to incur them whether with or against our will: what, I ask you, is to be done when, while we are proposing to put off our supper, a brother comes and asks us if we have had it: is our fast to be concealed, and the good act of abstinence hidden, or is it to be proclaimed by telling the truth? If we conceal it, to satisfy the Lord's command which says: "Thou shalt not appear unto men to fast but unto thy Father Who is in secret;" and again: "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth," [2045] we must at once tell a lie. If we make manifest the good act of abstinence, the word of the gospel rightly discourages us: "Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." [2046] But what if any one has refused with determination a cup offered to him by some brother, denying altogether that he will take what the other, rejoicing at his arrival, begs and intreats him to receive? Is it right that he should force himself to yield to his brother who goes on his knees and bows himself to the ground, and who thinks that he can only show his loving heart by this service, or should he obstinately cling to his own word and intention?

**Chapter XXII. An objection, that abstinence ought to be concealed,
but that things that have been declined should not be received.**

Germanus: In the former instance we think there can be no doubt that it is better for our abstinence to be hidden than for it to be displayed to the inquirers, and in cases of this sort we also admit that a lie is unavoidable. But in the second there is no need for us to tell a lie, first because we can refuse what is offered by the service of a brother in such a way as to bind ourselves in no bond of determination, and next because when we once refuse we can keep our opinion unchanged.

Chapter XXIII. The answer that obstinacy in this decision is unreasonable.

Joseph: There is no doubt that these are the decisions of those monasteries in which the infancy of your renunciation was, as you tell us, trained, as their leaders are accustomed to prefer their own will to their brother's supper, and most obstinately stick to what they have once intended. But our Elders, to whose faith the signs of Apostolical powers have borne witness, and who have treated everything with judgment and discretion of spirit rather than with stiff obstinacy of mind, have laid down that those men who give in to the infirmities of others, receive much richer fruits than those who persist in their determinations, and have declared that it is a better deed to conceal abstinence, as was said, by this needful and humble lie, rather than to display it with a proud show of truth.

Chapter XXIV. How Abbot Piamun chose to hide his abstinence.

Finally Abbot Piamun [2047] after twenty-five years did not hesitate to receive some grapes and wine offered to him by a certain brother, and at once preferred, against his rule, to taste what was brought him rather than to display his abstinence which was a secret from everybody. For if we would also bear in mind what we remember that our Elders always did, who used to conceal the marvels of their own good deeds, and their own acts, which they were obliged to bring forward in Conference for the instruction of the juniors, under cover of other persons, what else can we consider them but an open lie? And O that we too had anything worthy which we could bring forward for stirring up the faith of the juniors! Certainly we should have no scruples in following their fictions of that kind. For it is better under the colour of a figure like that to tell a lie than for the sake of maintaining that unreasonable truthfulness either hide in ill-advised silence what might be edifying to the hearers, or run into the display of an objectionable vanity by telling them truthfully in our own character. And the teacher of the Gentiles clearly teaches us the same lesson by his teaching, as he chose to bring forward the great revelations made to him, under the character of some one else, saying: "I know a man in Christ, whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell, God knoweth, caught up even unto the third heaven: and I know such a man, that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for man to utter." [2048]

Chapter XXV. The evidence of Scripture on changes of determination.

It is impossible for us briefly to run through everything. For who could count up almost all the patriarchs and numberless saints, some of whom for the preservation of life, others out of desire for a blessing, others out of pity, others to conceal some secret, others out of zeal for God, others in searching for the truth, became, so to speak, patrons of lying? And as all cannot be enumerated, so all ought not to be altogether passed over. For piety forced the blessed Joseph to raise a false charge against his brethren even with an oath by the life of the king, saying: "Ye are spies: to see the nakedness of the land are ye come;" and below: "send," says he, "one of you, and bring your brothers hither: but ye shall be kept here until your words are made manifest whether ye speak the truth or no: but if not, by the life of Pharaoh, ye are spies." [2049] For if he had not out of pity alarmed them by this lie, he would not have been able to see again his father and his brother, nor to preserve them in their great danger of starvation, nor to free the conscience of his brethren from the guilt of selling him. The act then of striking his brethren with fear by means of a lie was not so reprehensible as was it a holy and laudable act to urge his enemies and seekers to a salutary penitence by means of a feigned danger. Finally when they were weighed down by the odium of the very serious accusation, they were conscience-stricken not at the charge falsely raised against them, but at the thought of their earlier crime, and said to one another: "We suffer this rightly because we sinned against our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he asked us and we did not hearken to him: wherefore all this trouble hath come upon us." [2050] And this confession, we think, expiated by most salutary humility their terrible sin not only against their brother, against whom they had sinned with wicked cruelty, but also against God. What about Solomon, who in his first judgment manifested the gift of wisdom, which he had received of God, only by making use of falsehood? For in order to get at the truth which was hidden by the woman's lie, even he used the help of a lie most cunningly invented, saying: "Bring me a sword and divide the living child into two parts, and give the one half to the one and the other half to the other." And when this pretended cruelty stirred the heart of the true mother, but was received with approval by her who was not the true mother, then at last by this most sagacious discovery of the truth he pronounced the judgment which every one has felt to have been inspired by God, saying: "Give her the living child and slay it not: she is the mother of it." [2051] Further we are more fully taught by other passages of Scripture as well that we neither can nor should carry out everything which we determine either with peace or disturbance of mind, as we often hear that holy men and angels and even Almighty God Himself have changed what they had decided upon. For the blessed David determined and confirmed it by an oath, saying: "May God do so and add more to the foes of David if I leave of all that belong unto Nabal until the morning a single male." And presently when Abigail his wife interceded and intreated for him, he gave up his threats, lightened the sentence, and preferred to be regarded as a breaker of his word rather than to keep his pledged oath by cruelly executing it, saying: "As the Lord liveth, if thou hadst not quickly come to meet me there had not been left to Nabal by the morning light a single male." [2052] And as we

do not hold that his readiness to take a rash oath (which resulted from his anger and disturbance of mind) ought to be copied by us, so we do think that the pardon and revision of his determination is to be followed. The "chosen vessel," in writing to the Corinthians, promises unconditionally to return, saying: "But I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia: for I will pass through Macedonia. But I will stay or even pass the winter with you that you may conduct me whithersoever I shall go. For I do not want only to see you in passing: for I hope to stay with you for some time." [2053] And this fact he remembers in the Second Epistle, thus: "And in this confidence I was minded first to come unto you, that ye might receive a second favour, and by you to pass into Macedonia and again to come to you from Macedonia and by you be conducted to Judæa." But a better plan suggested itself and he plainly admits that he is not going to fulfil what he had promised. "When then," says he, "I purposed this, did I use light-mindedness? or the things that I think, do I think after the flesh, that there should be with me yea, yea, and nay, nay?" Lastly, he declares even with the affirmation of an oath, why it was that he preferred to put on one side his pledged word rather than by his presence to bring a burden and grief to his disciples: "But I call God to witness against my soul that it was to spare you that I came not as far as Corinth. For I determined this with myself that I would not come unto you in sorrow." [2054] Though when the angels had refused to enter the house of Lot at Sodom, saying to him: "We will not enter but will remain in the street," they were presently forced by his prayers to change their determination, as Scripture subjoins: "And Lot constrained them, and they turned in to him." [2055] And certainly if they knew that they would turn in to him, they refused his request with a sham excuse: but if their excuse was a real one, then they are clearly shown to have changed their mind. And certainly we hold that the Holy Spirit inserted this in the sacred volume for no other reason but to teach us by their examples that we ought not to cling obstinately to our own determinations, but to subject them to our will, and so to keep our judgment free from all the chains of law that it may be ready to follow the call of good counsel in any direction, and may not delay or refuse to pass without any delay to whatever a sound discretion may find to be the better choice. And to rise to still higher instances, when king Hezekiah was lying on his bed and afflicted with grievous sickness the prophet Isaiah addressed him in the person of God, and said: "Thus saith the Lord: set thine house in order for thou shalt die and not live. And Hezekiah," it says, "turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord and said: I beseech thee, O Lord, remember how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and how I have done what was right in Thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore." After which it was again said to him: "Go, return, and speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying: Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father: I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: and behold, I will add to thy days fifteen years: and I will deliver thee out of the hand of the king of the Assyrians, and I will defend this city for thy sake and for my servant David's sake." [2056] What can be clearer than this proof that out of consideration for mercy and goodness the Lord would rather break His word and instead of the pre-arranged limit of death extend the life of him who prayed, for fifteen years, rather than be found inexorable because of His unchangeable decree? In the same way too the Divine sentence says to the men of Nineveh: "Yet three days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown;" [2057] and presently this stern and abrupt sentence is softened by their penitence and fasting, and is turned to the side of mercy with goodness that is easy to be intreated. But if any one maintains that the Lord had threatened the destruction of their city (while He foreknew that they would be converted) for this reason, that He might incite them to a salutary penitence, it follows that those who are set over their brethren may, if need arises, without any

blame for telling lies, threaten those who need improvement with severer treatment than they are really going to inflict. But if one says that God revoked that severe sentence in consideration of their penitence, according to what he says by Ezekiel: "If I say to the wicked, Thou shalt surely die: and he becomes penitent for his sin, and doeth judgment and justice, he shall surely live, he shall not die;" [2058] we are similarly taught that we ought not obstinately to stick to our determination, but that we should with gentle pity soften down the threats which necessity called forth. And that we may not fancy that the Lord granted this specially to the Ninevites, He continually affirms by Jeremiah that He will do the same in general towards all, and promises that without delay He will change His sentence in accordance with our deserts; saying: "I will suddenly speak against a nation and against a kingdom to root out and to pull down and to destroy it. If that nation repent of the evil, which I have spoken against it, I also will repent of the evil which I thought to do to them. And I will suddenly speak of a nation and a kingdom, to build up and to plant it. If it shall do evil in My sight, that it obey not My voice: I will repent of the good that I thought to do to it." To Ezekiel also: "Leave out not a word, if so be they will hearken and be converted every one from his evil way: that I may repent Me of the evil that I thought to do to them for the wickedness of their doings." [2059] And by these passages it is declared that we ought not obstinately to stick to our decisions, but to modify them with reason and judgment, and that better courses should always be adopted and preferred, and that we should turn without any delay to that course which is considered the more profitable. For this above all that invaluable sentence teaches us, because though each man's end is known beforehand to Him before his birth, yet somehow He so orders all things by a plan and method for all, and with regard to man's disposition, that He decides on everything not by the mere exercise of His power, nor according to the ineffable knowledge which His Prescience possesses, but according to the present actions of men, and rejects or draws to Himself each one, and daily either grants or withholds His grace. And that this is so the election of Saul also shows us, of whose miserable end the foreknowledge of God certainly could not be ignorant, and yet He chose him out of so many thousands of Israel and anointed him king, rewarding the then existing merits of his life, and not considering the sin of his coming fall, so that after he became reprobate, God complains almost in human terms and, with man's feelings, as if He repented of his choice, saying: "It repenteth Me that I have appointed Saul king: for he hath forsaken Me, and hath not performed My words;" and again: "But Samuel was grieved for Saul because the Lord repented that He had made Saul king over Israel." [2060] Finally this that He afterwards executed, that the Lord also declares by the prophet Ezekiel that He will by His daily judgment do with all men, saying: "Yea, if I shall say to the righteous that he shall surely live, and he trusting in his righteousness commit iniquity: all his righteousness shall be forgotten, and in his iniquity which he hath committed, in the same he shall die. And if I shall say to the wicked: Thou shalt surely die; and if he repent of his sin and do judgment and righteousness, and if that wicked man restore the pledge and render what he hath robbed, and walk in the commandments of life, and do no righteous thing, he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins which he hath committed shall be imputed unto him." [2061] Finally, when the Lord would for their speedy fall turn away His merciful countenance from the people, whom He had chosen out of all nations, the giver of the law interposes on their behalf and cries out: "I beseech Thee, O Lord, this people have sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold; and now if Thou forgivest their sin, forgive it; but if not, blot me out of Thy book which Thou hast written. To whom the Lord answered: If any man hath sinned before Me, I will blot him out of My book." [2062] David also,

when complaining in prophetic spirit of Judas and the Lord's persecutors, says: "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living;" and because they did not deserve to come to saving penitence because of the guilt of their great sin, he subjoins: "And let them not be written among the righteous." [2063] Finally in the case of Judas himself the meaning of the prophetic curse was clearly fulfilled, for when his deadly sin was completed, he killed himself by hanging, that he might not after his name was blotted out be converted and repent and deserve to be once more written among the righteous in heaven. We must therefore not doubt that at the time when he was chosen by Christ and obtained a place in the Apostolate, the name of Judas was written in the book of the living, and that he heard as well as the rest the words: "Rejoice not because the devils are subject unto you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven." [2064] But because he was corrupted by the plague of covetousness and had his name struck out from that heavenly list, it is suitably said of him and of men like him by the prophet: "O Lord, let all those that forsake Thee be confounded. Let them that depart from Thee be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the vein of living waters." And elsewhere: "They shall not be in the counsel of My people, nor shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel." [2065]

Chapter XXVI. How saintly men cannot be hard and obstinate.

Nor must we emit the value of that command because even if we have bound ourselves by some oath under the influence of anger or some other passion, (a thing which ought never to be done by a monk) still the case for each side should be weighed by a thorough judgment of the mind, and the course on which we have determined should be compared to that which we are urged to adopt, and we should without hesitation adopt that which on the occurrence of sounder considerations is decided to be the best. For it is better to put our promise on one side than to undergo the loss of something good and more desirable. Finally we never remember that venerable and approved fathers were hard and unyielding in decisions of this sort, but as wax under the influence of heat, so they were modified by reason, and when sounder counsels prevailed, did not hesitate to give in to the better side. But those whom we have seen obstinately clinging to their determinations we have always set down as unreasonable and wanting in judgment.

Chapter XXVII. A question whether the saying: [I have sworn and am purposed] is opposed to the view given above.

Germanus: So far as this consideration is concerned which has been clearly and fully treated of, a monk ought never to determine anything for fear lest he turn out a breaker of his word or else obstinate. And what then can we make of this saying of the Psalmist: "I have sworn and am purposed to keep Thy righteous judgments?" [2066] What is "to swear and purpose" except to keep one's determinations fixedly?

Chapter XXVIII. The answer telling in what cases the determination is to be kept fixedly, and in what cases it may be broken if need be.

Joseph: We do not lay this down with regard to those fundamental commands, without which our salvation cannot in any way exist, but with regard to those which we can either relax or hold fast to without endangering our state, as for instance, an unbroken and strict fast, or total abstinence from wine or oil, or entire prohibition to leave one's cell, or incessant attention to reading and meditation, all of which can be practised at pleasure, without damage to our profession and purpose, and, if need be, can be given up without blame. But we must most resolutely make up our minds to observe those fundamental commands, and not even, if need arise, to avoid death in their cause, with regard to which we must immovably assert: "I have sworn and am purposed." And this should be done for the preservation of love, for which all things else should be disregarded lest the beauty and perfection of its calm should suffer a stain. In the same way we must swear for the purity of our chastity, and we ought to do the same for faith, and sobriety and justice, to all of which we must cling with unchangeable persistence, and to forsake which even for a little is worthy of blame. But in the case of those bodily exercises, which are said to be profitable for a little, [2067] we must, as we said, decide in such a way that, if there occurs any more decided opportunity for a good act, which would lead us to relax them, we need not be bound by any rule about them, but may give them up and freely adopt what is more useful. For in the case of those bodily exercises, if they are dropped for a time, there is no danger: but to have given up these others even for a moment is deadly.

Chapter XXIX. How we ought to do those things which are to be kept secret.

You must also provide with the same care that if by chance some word has slipped out of your mouth which you want to be a secret, no injunction to secrecy may trouble the hearer. For it will be more likely to be unheeded if it is let pass carelessly and simply, because the brother, whoever he is, will not be tormented with such a temptation to divulge it, as he will take it as something trivial dropped in casual conversation, and as what is for this very reason of less account, because it was not committed to the hearer's mind with a strict injunction to silence. For even if you bind his faith by exacting an oath from him, you need not doubt that it will very soon be divulged; for a fiercer assault of the devil's power will be made upon him, both to annoy and betray you, and to make him break his oath as quickly as possible.

Chapter XXX. That no determination should be made on those things which concern the needs of the common life.

And therefore a monk ought not hastily to make any promise on those things which merely concern bodily exercise, for fear lest he may stir up the enemy still more to attack what he is keeping as it were under the observance of the law, and so he may be more readily compelled to break it. Since every one who lives under the grace of liberty, and sets himself a law, thereby binds himself in a dangerous slavery, so that if by chance necessity constrains him to do what he might have ventured on lawfully, and indeed laudably and with thanksgiving, he is forced to act as a transgressor, and to fall into sin: "for where there is no law there is no transgression." [2068] By this instruction and the teaching of the blessed Joseph we were confirmed as by a Divine oracle and made up our minds to stop in Egypt. But though henceforward we were but a little anxious about our promise, yet when seven years were over we were very glad to fulfil it. For we hastened to our monastery, at a time when we were confident of obtaining permission to return to the desert, and first paid our respects properly to our Elders; next we revived the former love in their minds as out of the ardour of their love they had not been at all softened by our very frequent letters to satisfy them, and in the last place, we entirely removed the sting of our broken promise and returned to the recesses of the desert of Scete, as they themselves forwarded us with joy. This learning and doctrine of the illustrious fathers, our ignorance, O holy brother, has to the best of its ability made plain to you. And if perhaps our clumsy style has confused it instead of setting it in order, I trust that the blame which our clumsiness deserves will not interfere with the praise due to these grand men. Since it seemed to us a safer course in the sight of our Judge to state even in unadorned style this splendid doctrine rather than to hold our tongues about it, since if he considers the grandeur of the thoughts, the fact that the awkwardness of our style annoys him, need not be prejudicial to the profit of the reader, and for our part we are more anxious about its usefulness than its being praised. This at least I charge all those into whose hand this little book may fall; viz., that they must know that whatever in it pleases them belongs to the fathers, and whatever they dislike is all our own. [2069]

Part III.

Containing Conferences XVIII.-XXIV.

Preface.

When by the help of the grace of Christ I had published ten Conferences of the Fathers, which were composed at the urgent request of the most blessed Helladius and Leontius, I dedicated seven others to Honoratus, a Bishop blessed in name as well as merits, and also to that holy servant of Christ, Eucherius. The same number also I have thought good to dedicate now to you, O holy brothers, Jovinianus, Minervius, Leontius, and Theodore. [2070] Since the last named of you founded that holy and splendid monastic rule in the province of Gaul, with the strictness of ancient virtue, while the rest of you by your instructions have stirred up monks not only before all to seek the common life of the Coenobia, but even to thirst eagerly for the sublime life of the anchorite. For those Conferences of the best of the fathers are arranged with such care, and so carefully considered in all respects, that they are suited to both modes of life whereby you have made not only the countries of the West, but even the isles to flourish with great crowds of brethren; i.e., I mean that not only those who still remain in congregations with praiseworthy subjection to rule, but those also who retire to no great distance from your monasteries, and try to carry out the rule of anchorites, may be more fully instructed, according as the nature of the place and the character of their condition may require. And to this your previous efforts and labours have especially contributed this, that, as they are already prepared and practiced in these exercises, they can more readily receive the precepts and institutes of the Elders, and receiving into their cells the authors of the Conferences together with the actual volumes of the Conferences and talking with them after a fashion by daily questions and answers, they may not be left to their own resources to find that way which is difficult and almost unknown in this country, but full of danger even there where well-worn paths and numberless instances of those who have gone before are not wanting, but may rather learn to follow the rule of the anchorite's life taught by their examples, whom ancient tradition and industry and long experience have thoroughly instructed.

The Third Part of the Conferences

of John Cassian.

XVIII. Conference of Abbot Piamun.

On the Three Sorts of Monks.

Chapter I. How we came to Diolcos and were received by Abbot Piamun.

After visiting and conversing with those three Elders, whose Conferences we have at the instance of our brother Eucherius tried to describe, as we were still more ardently desirous to seek out the further parts of Egypt, in which a larger and more perfect company of saints dwelt, we came -- urged not so much by the necessities of our journey as by the desire of visiting the saints who were dwelling there -- to a village named Diolcos, [2072] lying on one of the seven mouths of the river Nile. For when we heard of very many and very celebrated monasteries founded by the ancient fathers, like most eager merchants, at once we undertook the journey on an uncertain quest, urged on by the hope of greater gain. And when we wandered about there for some long time and fixed our curious eyes on those mountains of virtue conspicuous for their lofty height, the gaze of those around first singled out Abbot Piamun, the senior of all the anchorites living there and their presbyter, as if he were some tall lighthouse. For he was set on the top of a high mountain like that city in the gospel, [2073] and at once shed his light on our faces, whose virtues and miracles, which were wrought by him under our very eyes, Divine Grace thus bearing witness to his excellence, if we are not to exceed the plan and limits of this volume, we feel we must pass over in silence. For we promised to commit to memory what we could recollect, not of the miracles of God, but of the institutes and pursuits of the saints, so as to supply our readers merely with necessary instruction for the perfect life, and not with matter for idle and useless admiration without any correction of their faults. And so when Abbot Piamun had received us with welcome, and had refreshed us with becoming kindness, as he understood that we were not of the same country, he first asked us anxiously whence or why we had visited Egypt, and when he discovered that we had come thither from a monastery in Syria out of desire for perfection he began as follows: --

Chapter II. The words of Abbot Piamun, how monks who were novices ought to be taught by the example of their elders.

Whatever man, my children, is desirous to attain skill in any art, unless he gives himself up with the utmost pains and carefulness to the study of that system which he is anxious to learn, and observes the rules and orders of the best masters of that work or science, is indulging in a vain hope to reach by idle wishes any similarity to those whose pains and diligence he avoids copying. For we know that some have come from your country to these parts, only to go round the monasteries for the sake of getting to know the brethren, not meaning to adopt the rules and regulations, for the sake of which they travelled hither, nor to retire to the cells and aim at carrying out in action what they had learnt by sight or by teaching. And these people retained their character and pursuits to which they had grown accustomed, and, as is thrown in their teeth by some, are held to have changed their country not for the sake of their profit, but owing to the need of escaping want. For in the obstinacy of their stubborn mind, they not only could learn nothing, but actually would not stay any longer in these parts. For if they changed neither their method of fasting, nor their scheme of Psalms, nor even the fashion of their garments, what else could we think that they were after in this country, except only the supply of their victuals.

Chapter III. How the juniors ought not to discuss the orders of the seniors.

Wherefore if, as we believe, the cause of God has drawn you to try to copy our knowledge, you must utterly ignore all the rules by which your early beginnings were trained, and must with all humility follow whatever you see our Elders do or teach. And do not be troubled or drawn away and diverted from imitating it, even if for the moment the cause or reason of any deed or action is not clear to you, because if men have good and simple ideas on all things and are anxious faithfully to copy whatever they see taught or done by their Elders, instead of discussing it, then the knowledge of all things will follow through experience of the work. But he will never enter into the reason of the truth, who begins to learn by discussion, because as the enemy sees that he trusts to his own judgment rather than to that of the fathers' he easily urges him on so far till those things which are especially useful and helpful seem to him unnecessary or injurious, and the crafty foe so plays upon his presumption, that by obstinately clinging to his own opinion he persuades himself that only that is holy, which he himself in his pig-headed error thinks to be good and right.

Chapter IV. Of the three sorts of monks which there are in Egypt.

Wherefore you should first hear how or whence the system and beginning of our order took its rise. For only then can a man at all effectually be trained in any art he may wish, and be urged on to practise it diligently, when he has learnt the glory of its authors and founders. There are three kinds of monks in Egypt, of which two are admirable, the third is a poor sort of thing and by all means to be avoided. The first is that of the Coenobites, who live together in a congregation and are governed by the direction of a single Elder: and of this kind there is the largest number of monks dwelling throughout the whole of Egypt. The second is that of the anchorites, who were first trained in the Coenobium and then being made perfect in practical life chose the recesses of the desert: and in this order we also hope to gain a place. The third is the reprehensible one of the Sarabaites. [2074] And of these we will discourse more fully one by one in order. Of these three orders then you ought, as we said, first to know about the founders. For at once from this there may arise either a hatred for the order which is to be avoided, or a longing for that which is to be followed, because each way is sure to carry the man who follows it, to that end which its author and discoverer has reached.

Chapter V. Of the founders who originated the order of Coenobites.

And so the system of Coenobites took its rise in the days of the preaching of the Apostles. For such was all that multitude of believers in Jerusalem, which is thus described in the Acts of the Apostles: "But the multitude of believers was of one heart and one soul, neither said any of them that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. They sold their possessions and property and divided them to all, as any man had need." And again: "For neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as possessed fields or houses, sold them and brought the price of the things that they sold and laid them before the feet of the Apostles: and distribution was made to every man as he had need." [2075] The whole Church, I say, was then such as now are those few who can be found with difficulty in Coenobia. But when at the death of the Apostles the multitude of believers began to wax cold, and especially that multitude which had come to the faith of Christ from diverse foreign nations, from whom the Apostles out of consideration for the infancy of their faith and their ingrained heathen habits, required nothing more than that they should "abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood," [2076] and so that liberty which was conceded to the Gentiles because of the weakness of their newly-born faith, had by degrees begun to mar the perfection of that Church which existed at Jerusalem, and the fervour of that early faith cooled down owing to the daily increasing number both of natives and foreigners, and not only those who had accepted the faith of Christ, but even those who were the leaders of the Church relaxed somewhat of that strictness. For some fancying that what they saw permitted to the Gentiles because of their weakness, was also allowable for themselves, thought that they would suffer no loss if they followed the faith and confession of Christ keeping their property and possessions. But those who still maintained the fervour of the apostles, mindful of that former perfection left their cities and intercourse with those who thought that carelessness and a laxer life was permissible to themselves and the Church of God, and began to live in rural and more sequestered spots, and there, in private and on their own account, to practise those things which they had learnt to have been ordered by the apostles throughout the whole body of the Church in general: and so that whole system of which we have spoken grew up from those disciples who had separated themselves from the evil that was spreading. And these, as by degrees time went on, were separated from the great mass of believers and because they abstained from marriage and cut themselves off from intercourse with their kinsmen and the life of this world, were termed monks or solitaries from the strictness of their lonely and solitary life. Whence it followed that from their common life they were called Coenobites and their cells and lodgings Coenobia. That then alone was the earliest kind of monks, which is first not only in time but also in grace, and which continued unbroken for a very long period up to the time of Abbot Paul and Antony; and even to this day we see its traces remaining in strict coenobia.

Chapter VI. Of the system of the Anchorites and its beginning.

Out of this number of the perfect, and, if I may use the expression, this most fruitful root of saints, were produced afterwards the flowers and fruits of the anchorites as well. And of this order we have heard that the originators were those whom we mentioned just now; viz., Saint Paul [2077] and Antony, men who frequented the recesses of the desert, not as some from faintheartedness, and the evil of impatience, but from a desire for loftier heights of perfection and divine contemplation, although the former of them is said to have found his way to the desert by reason of necessity, while during the time of persecution he was avoiding the plots of his neighbours. So then there sprang from that system of which we have spoken another sort of perfection, whose followers are rightly termed anchorites; i.e., withdrawers, because, being by no means satisfied with that victory whereby they had trodden under foot the hidden snares of the devil, while still living among men, they were eager to fight with the devils in open conflict, and a straightforward battle, and so feared not to penetrate the vast recesses of the desert, imitating, to wit, John the Baptist, who passed all his life in the desert, and Elijah and Elisha and those of whom the Apostle speaks as follows: "They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being in want, distressed, afflicted, of whom the world was not worthy, wandering in deserts, in mountains and in dens and in caves of the earth." Of whom too the Lord speaks figuratively to Job: "But who hath sent out the wild ass free, and who hath loosed his bands? To whom I have given the wilderness for an house, and a barren land for his dwelling. He scorneth the multitude of the city and heareth not the cry of the driver; he looketh round about the mountains of his pasture, and seeketh for every green thing." In the Psalms also: "Let now the redeemed of the Lord say, those whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy;" and after a little: "They wandered in a wilderness in a place without water: they found not the way of a city of habitation. They were hungry and thirsty: their soul fainted in them. And they cried unto the Lord in their trouble and He delivered them out of their distress;" whom Jeremiah too describes as follows: "Blessed is the man that hath borne the yoke from his youth. He shall sit solitary and hold his peace because he hath taken it up upon himself," and there sing in heart and deed these words of the Psalmist: "I am become like a pelican in the wilderness. I watched and am become like a sparrow alone upon the house-top." [2078]

Chapter VII. Of the origin of the Sarabaites and their mode of life.

And while the Christian religion was rejoicing in these two orders of monks though this system had begun by degrees to deteriorate, there arose afterwards that disgusting and unfaithful kind of monks; or rather, that baleful plant revived and sprang up again which when it first shot up in the persons of Ananias and Sapphira in the early Church was cut off by the severity of the Apostle Peter -- a kind which among monks has been for a long while considered detestable and execrable, and which was adopted by no one any more, so long as there remained stamped on the memory of the faithful the dread of that very severe sentence, in which the blessed Apostle not merely refused to allow the aforesaid originators of the novel crime to be cured by penitence or any amends, but actually destroyed that most dangerous germ by their speedy death. When then that precedent, which was punished with Apostolical severity in the case of Ananias and Sapphira had by degrees faded from the minds of some, owing to long carelessness and forgetfulness from lapse of time, there arose the race of Sarabaites, who owing to the fact that they have broken away from the congregations of the Coenobites and each look after their own affairs, are rightly named in the Egyptian language Sarabaites, [2079] and these spring from the number of those, whom we have mentioned, who wanted to imitate rather than truly to aim at Evangelical perfection, urged thereto by rivalry or by the praises of those who preferred the complete poverty of Christ to all manner of riches. These then while in their feeble mind they make a pretence of the greatest goodness and are forced by necessity to join this order, while they are anxious to be reckoned by the name of monks without emulating their pursuits, in no sort of way practise discipline, or are subject to the will of the Elders, or, taught by their traditions, learn to govern their own wills or take up and properly learn any rule of sound discretion; but making their renunciation only as a public profession, i.e., before the face of men, either continue in their homes devoted to the same occupations as before, though dignified by this title, or building cells for themselves and calling them monasteries remain in them perfectly free and their own masters, never submitting to the precepts of the gospel, which forbid them to be busied with any anxiety for the day's food, or troubles about domestic matters: commands which those alone fulfil with no unbelieving doubt, who have freed themselves from all the goods of this world and subjected themselves to the superiors of the Coenobia so that they cannot admit that they are at all their own masters. But those who, as we said, shirk the severity of the monastery, and live two or three together in their cells, not satisfied to be under the charge and rule of an Abbot, but arranging chiefly for this; viz., that they may get rid of the yoke of the Elders and have liberty to carry out their wishes and go and wander where they will, and do what they like, these men are more taken up both day and night in daily business than those who live in the Coenobia, but not with the same faith and purpose. For these Sarabaites do it not to submit the fruits of their labours to the will of the steward, but to procure money to lay by. And see what a difference there is between them. For the others think nothing of the morrow, and offer to God the most acceptable fruits of their toil: while these extend their faithless anxiety not only to the morrow, but even to the space of many years, and so fancy that God is either false or impotent as He either could not or would not grant them the promised supply of food and clothing. The one seek this in all their prayers; viz., that they may gain

aktemosunen, i.e., the deprivation of all things, and lasting poverty: the other that they may secure a rich quantity of all sorts of supplies. The one eagerly strive to go beyond the fixed rule of daily work that whatever is not wanted for the sacred purposes of the monastery, may be distributed at the will of the Abbot either among the prisons, or in the guest-chamber or in the infirmary or to the poor; the others that whatever the day's gorge leaves over, may be useful for extravagant wants or else laid by through the sin of covetousness. Lastly, if we grant that what has been collected by them with no good design, may be disposed of in better ways than we have mentioned, yet not even thus do they rise to the merits of goodness and perfection. For the others bring in such returns to the monastery, and daily report to them, and continue in such humility and subjection that they are deprived of their rights over what they gain by their own efforts, just as they are of their rights over themselves, as they constantly renew the fervour of their original act of renunciation, while they daily deprive themselves of the fruits of their labours: but these are puffed up by the fact that they are bestowing something on the poor, and daily fall headlong into sin. The one party are by patience and the strictness whereby they continue devoutly in the order which they have once embraced, so as never to fulfil their own will, crucified daily to this world and made living martyrs; the others are cast down into hell by the lukewarmness of their purpose. These two sorts of monks then vie with each other in almost equal numbers in this province; but in other provinces, which the need of the Catholic faith compelled me to visit, we have found that this third class of Sarabaites flourishes and is almost the only one, since in the time of Lucius who was a Bishop of Arian misbelief [2080] in the reign of Valens, while we carried alms [2081] to our brethren; viz., those from Egypt and the Thebaid, who had been consigned to the mines of Pontus and Armenia [2082] for their steadfastness in the Catholic faith, though we found the system of Coenobia in some cities few and far between, yet we never made out that even the name of anchorites was heard among them.

Chapter VIII. Of a fourth sort of monks.

There is however another and a fourth kind, which we have lately seen springing up among those who flatter themselves with the appearance and form of anchorites, and who in their early days seem in a brief fervour to seek the perfection of the Coenobium, but presently cool off, and, as they dislike to put an end to their former habits and faults, and are not satisfied to bear the yoke of humility and patience any longer, and scorn to be in subjection to the rule of the Elders, look out for separate cells and want to remain by themselves alone, that as they are provoked by nobody they may be regarded by men as patient, gentle, and humble: and, this arrangement, or rather this lukewarmness never suffers those, of whom it has once got hold, to approach to perfection. For in this way their faults are not merely not rooted up, but actually grow worse, while they are excited by no one, like some deadly and internal poison which the more it is concealed, so much the more deeply does it creep in and cause an incurable disease to the sick person. For out of respect for each man's own cell no one ventures to reprove the faults of a solitary, which he would rather have ignored than cured. Moreover virtues are created not by hiding faults but by driving them out.

Chapter IX. A question as to what is the difference between a Coenobium and a monastery.

Germanus: Is there any distinction between a Coenobium and a monastery, or is the same thing meant by either name?

Chapter X. The answer.

Piamun: Although many people indifferently speak of monasteries instead of Coenobia, yet there is this difference, that monastery is the title of the dwelling, and means nothing more than the place, i.e., the habitation of monks, while Coenobium describes the character of the life and its system: and monastery may mean the dwelling of a single monk, while a Coenobium cannot be spoken of except where dwells a united community of a large number of men living together. They are however termed monasteries in which groups of Sarabaites live.

Chapter XI. Of true humility, and how Abbot Serapion exposed the mock humility of a certain man.

Wherefore as I see that you have learnt the first principles of this life from the best sort of monks, i.e., that starting from the excellent school of the coenobium you are aiming at the lofty heights of the anchorite's rule, you should with genuine feeling of heart pursue the virtue of humility and patience, which I doubt not that you learnt there; and not feign it, as some do, by mock humility in words, or by an artificial and unnecessary readiness for some duties of the body. And this sham humility Abbot Serapion [2083] once laughed to scorn most capitally. For when one had come to him making a great display of his lowliness by his dress and words, and the old man urged him, after his custom, to "collect the prayer" [2084] he would not consent to his request, but debasing himself declared that he was involved in such crimes that he did not deserve even to breathe the air which is common to all, and refusing even the use of the mat preferred to sit down on the bare ground. But when he had shown still less inclination for the washing of the feet, then Abbot Serapion, when supper was finished, and the customary Conference gave him an opportunity, began kindly and gently to urge him not to roam with shifty lightmindedness over the whole world, idly and vaguely, especially as he was young and strong, but to keep to his cell in accordance with the rule of the Elders and to elect to be supported by his own efforts rather than by the bounty of others; which even the Apostle Paul would not allow, and though when he was labouring in the cause of the gospel this provision might lightly have been made for him, yet he preferred to work night and day, to provide daily food for himself and for those who were ministering to him and could not do the work with their own hands. Whereupon the other was filled with such vexation and disgust that he could not hide by his looks the annoyance which he felt in his heart. To whom the Elder: Thus far, my son, you have loaded yourself with the weight of all kinds of crimes, not fearing lest by the confession of such awful sins you bring a reproach upon your reputation; how is it then, I pray, that now, at our simple admonition, which involved no reproof, but simply showed a feeling for your edification and love, I see that you are moved with such disgust that you cannot hide it by your looks, or conceal it by an appearance of calmness? Perhaps while you were humiliating yourself, you were hoping to hear from our lips this saying: "The righteous man is the accuser of himself in the opening of his discourse?" [2085] Further, true humility of heart must be preserved, which comes not from an affected humbling of body and in word, but from an inward humbling of the soul: and this will only then shine forth with clear evidences of patience when a man does not boast about sins, which nobody will believe, but, when another insolently accuses him of them, thinks nothing of it, and when with gentle equanimity of spirit he puts up with wrongs offered to him.

Chapter XII. A question how true patience can be gained.

Germanus: We should like to know how that calmness can be secured and maintained, that, as when silence is enjoined on us we shut the door of our mouth, and lay an embargo on speech, so also we may be able to preserve gentleness of heart, which sometimes even when the tongue is restrained loses its state of calmness within: and for this reason we think that the blessing of gentleness can only be preserved by one in a remote cell and solitary dwelling.

Chapter XIII. The answer.

Piamun: True patience and tranquillity is neither gained nor retained without profound humility of heart: and if it has sprung from this source, there will be no need either of the good offices of the cell or of the refuge of the desert. For it will seek no external support from anything, if it has the internal support of the virtue of humility, its mother and its guardian. But if we are disturbed when attacked by anyone it is clear that the foundations of humility have not been securely laid in us, and therefore at the outbreak even of a small storm, our whole edifice is shaken and ruinously disturbed. For patience would not be worthy of praise and admiration if it only preserved its purposed tranquillity when attacked by no darts of enemies, but it is grand and glorious because when the storms of temptation beat upon it, it remains unmoved. For wherein it is believed that a man is annoyed and hurt by adversity, therein is he strengthened the more; and he is therein the more exercised, wherein he is thought to be annoyed. For everybody knows that patience gets its name from the passions and endurance, and so it is clear that no one can be called patient but one who bears without annoyance all the indignities offered to him, and so it is not without reason that he is praised by Solomon: "Better is the patient man than the strong, and he who restrains his anger than he who takes a city;" and again: "For a long-suffering man is mighty in prudence, but a faint-hearted man is very foolish." [2086] When then anyone is overcome by a wrong, and blazes up in a fire of anger, we should not hold that the bitterness of the insult offered to him is the cause of his sin, but rather the manifestation of secret weakness, in accordance with the parable of our Lord and Saviour which He spoke about the two houses, [2087] one of which was founded upon a rock, and the other upon the sand, on both of which He says that the tempest of rain and waters and storm beat equally: but that one which was founded on the solid rock felt no harm at all from the violence of the shock, while that which was built on the shifting and moving sand at once collapsed. And it certainly appears that it fell, not because it was struck by the rush of the storms and torrents, but because it was imprudently built upon the sand. For a saint does not differ from a sinner in this, that he is not himself tempted in the same way, but because he is not worsted even by a great assault, while the other is overcome even by a slight temptation. For the fortitude of any good man would not, as we said, be worthy of praise, if his victory was gained without his being tempted, as most certainly there is no room for victory where there is no struggle and conflict: for "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he has been proved he shall receive the crown of life which God hath promised to them that love Him." [2088] According to the Apostle Paul also "Strength is made perfect" not in ease and delights but "in weakness." "For behold," says He, "I have made thee this day a fortified city, and a pillar of iron, and a wall of brass, over all the land, to the kings of Judah, and to the princes thereof, and to the priests thereof, and to all the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee, and shall not prevail: for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee." [2089]

Chapter XIV. Of the example of patience given by a certain religious woman.

Of this patience then I want to give you at least two examples: one of a certain religious woman, who aimed at the virtue of patience so eagerly that she not only did not avoid the assaults of temptation, but actually made for herself occasions of trouble that she might not cease to be tried more often. For this woman as she was living at Alexandria and was born of no mean ancestors, and was serving the Lord religiously in the house which had been left to her by her parents, came to Athanasius the Bishop, of blessed memory, and entreated him to give her some other widow to support, who was being provided for at the expense of the Church. And, to give her petition in her own words: "Give me," she said, "one of the sisters to look after." When then the Bishop had commended the woman's purpose because he saw that she was very ready for a work of a mercy, he ordered a widow to be chosen out of the whole number, who was preferred to all the rest for the goodness of her character, and her grave and well-regulated life, for fear lest her wish to be liberal might be overcome by the fault of the recipient of her bounty, and she who sought gain out of the poor might be disgusted at her bad character and so suffer an injury to her faith. And when the woman was brought home, she ministered to her with all kinds of service, and found out her excellent modesty and gentleness, and saw that every minute she was honoured by thanks from her for her kind offices, and so after a few days she came back to the aforesaid Bishop, and said: I asked you to bid that a woman be given to me for me to support and to serve with obedient complaisance. And when he, not yet understanding the woman's object and desire, thought that her petition had been neglected by the deceitfulness of the superior, and inquired not without some anger in his mind, what was the reason of the delay, at once he discovered that a widow who was better than all the rest had been assigned to her, and so he secretly gave orders that the one who was the worst of all should be given to her, the one, I mean, who surpassed in anger and quarrelling and wine-bibbing and talkativeness all who were under the power of these faults. And when she was only too easily found and given to her, she began to keep her at home, and to minister to her with the same care as to the former widow, or even more attentively, and this was all the thanks which she got from her for her services; viz., to be constantly tried by unworthy wrongs and continually annoyed by her by reproaches and upbraiding, as she complained of her, and chid her with spiteful and disparaging remarks, because she had asked for her from the Bishop not for her refreshment but rather for her torment and annoyance, and had taken her away from rest to labour instead of from labour to rest. When then her continual reproaches broke out so far that the wanton woman did not restrain herself from laying hands on her, the other only redoubled her services in still humbler offices, and learnt to overcome the vixen not by resisting her, but by subjecting herself still more humbly, so that, when provoked by all kinds of indignities, she might smooth down the madness of the shrew by gentleness and kindness. And when she had been thoroughly strengthened by these exercises, and had attained the perfect virtue of the patience she had longed for, she came to the aforesaid Bishop to thank him for his decision and choice as well as for the blessing of her exercise, because he had at last as she wished provided

her with a most worthy mistress for her patience, strengthened daily by whose constant annoyance as by some oil for wrestling, she had arrived at complete patience of mind; and, at last, said she, you have given me one to support, for the former one rather honoured and refreshed me by her services. This may be sufficient to have told about the female sex, that by this tale we may not only be edified, but even confounded, as we cannot maintain our patience unless we are like wild beasts removed in caves and cells.

Chapter XV. Of the example of patience given by Abbot Paphnutius.

Now let us give the other instance of Abbot Paphnutius, who always remained so zealously in the recesses of that renowned and far-famed desert of Scete, in which he is now Presbyter, so that the rest of the anchorites gave him the name of Bubalis, [2090] because he always delighted in dwelling in the desert as if with a sort of innate liking. And so as even in boyhood he was so good and full of grace that even the renowned and great men of that time admired his gravity and steadfast constancy, and although he was younger in age, yet put him on a level with the Elders out of regard for his virtues, and thought fit to admit him to their order, the same envy, which formerly excited the minds of his brethren against the patriarch Joseph, inflamed one out of the number of his brethren with a burning and consuming jealousy. And this man wanting to mar his beauty by some blemish or spot, hit on this kind of devilry, so as to seize an opportunity when Paphnutius had left his cell to go to Church on Sunday: and secretly entering his cell he slyly hid his own book among the boughs which he used to weave of palm branches, and, secure of his well-planned trick, himself went off as if with a pure and clean conscience to Church. And when the whole service was ended as usual, in the presence of all the brethren he brought his complaint to S. Isidore [2091] who was Presbyter of this desert before this same Paphnutius, and declared that his book had been stolen from his cell. And when his complaint had so disturbed the minds of all the brethren, and more especially of the Presbyter, so that they knew not what first to suspect or think, as all were overcome with the utmost astonishment at so new and unheard of a crime, such as no one remembered ever to have been committed in that desert before that time, and which has never happened since, he who had brought forward the matter as the accuser urged that they should all be kept in Church and certain selected men be sent to search the cells of the brethren one by one. And when this had been entrusted to three of the Elders by the Presbyter, they turned over the bed-chambers of them all, and at last found the book hidden in the cell of Paphnutius among the boughs of the palms which they call seira, just as the plotter had hidden it. And when the inquisitors at once brought it back to the Church and produced it before all, Paphnutius, although he was perfectly clear in the sincerity of his conscience, yet like one who acknowledged the guilt of thieving, gave himself up entirely to make amends and humbly asked for a plan of repentance, as he was so careful of his shame and modesty (and feared) lest if he tried to remove the stain of the theft by words, he might further be branded as a liar, as no one would believe anything but what had been found out. And when he had immediately left the Church not cast down in mind but rather trusting to the judgment of God, he continually shed tears at his prayers, and fasted thrice as often as before, and prostrated himself in the sight of men with all humility of mind. But when he had thus submitted himself with all contrition of flesh and spirit for almost a fortnight, so that he came early on the morning of Saturday and Sunday not to receive the Holy Communion [2092] but to prostrate himself on the threshold of the Church and humbly ask for pardon, He, Who is the witness of all secret things and knows them, suffered him to be no longer tried by Himself or defamed by others. For what the author of the crime, the wicked thief of his own property, the cunning defamer of another's credit, had done with no man there as a witness, that He made known by means of the devil who was himself the instigator of the sin. For

possessed by a most fierce demon, he made known all the craft of his secret plot, and the same man who had conceived the accusation and the cheat betrayed it. But he was so long and grievously vexed by that unclean spirit that he could not even be restored by the prayers of the saints living there, who by means of divine gifts can command the devils, nor could the special grace of the Presbyter Isidore himself cast out from him his cruel tormentor, though by the Lord's bounty such power was given him that no one who was possessed was ever brought to his doors without being at once healed; for Christ was reserving this glory for the young Paphnutius, that the man should be cleansed only by the prayers of him against whom he had plotted, and that the jealous enemy should receive pardon for his offence and an end of his present punishment, only by proclaiming his name, from whose credit he had thought that he could detract. He then in his early youth already gave these signs of his future character, and even in his boyish years sketched the lines of that perfection which was to grow up in mature age. If then we want to attain to his height of virtue, we must lay the same foundation to begin with.

Chapter XVI. On the perfection of patience.

A twofold reason however led me to relate this fact, first that we may weigh this steadfastness and constancy of the man, and as we are attacked by less serious wiles of the enemy, may the better secure a greater feeling of calmness and patience, secondly that we may with resolute decision hold that we cannot be safe from the storms of temptation and assaults of the devil if we make all the protection for our patience and all our confidence consist not in the strength of our inner man but in the doors of our cell or the recesses of the desert, and companionship of the saints, or the safeguard of anything else outside us. For unless our mind is strengthened by the power of His protection Who says in the gospel "the kingdom of God is within you," [2093] in vain do we fancy that we can defeat the plots of our airy foe by the aid of men who are living with us, or that we can avoid them by distance of place, or exclude them by the protection of walls. For though none of these things was wanting to Saint Paphnutius yet the tempter did not fail to find a way of access against him to attack him; nor did the encircling walls, or the solitude of the desert or the merits of all those saints in the congregation repulse that most foul spirit. But because the holy servant of God had fixed the hope of his heart not on those external things but on Him Who is the judge of all secrets, he could not be moved even by the machinations of such an assault as that. On the other hand did not the man whom envy had hurried into so grievous a sin enjoy the benefit of solitude and the protection of a retired dwelling, and intercourse with the blessed Abbot and Presbyter Isidore and other saints? And yet because the storm raised by the devil found him upon the sand, it not only drove in his house but actually overturned it. We need not then seek for our peace in externals, nor fancy that another person's patience can be of any use to the faults of our impatience. For just as "the kingdom of God is within you," so "a man's foes are they of his own household." [2094] For no one is more my enemy than my own heart which is truly the one of my household closest to me. And therefore if we are careful, we cannot possibly be injured by intestine enemies. For where those of our own household are not opposed to us, there also the kingdom of God is secured in peace of heart. For if you diligently investigate the matter, I cannot be injured by any man however spiteful, if I do not fight against myself with warlike heart. But if I am injured, the fault is not owing to the other's attack, but to my own impatience. For as strong and solid food is good for a man in good health, so it is bad for a sick one. But it cannot hurt the man who takes it, unless the weakness of its recipient gives it its power to hurt. If then any similar temptation ever arises among brethren, we need never be shaken out of the even tenor of our ways and give an opening to the blasphemous snarls of men living in the world, nor wonder that some bad and detestable men have secretly found their way into the number of the saints, because so long as we are trodden down and trampled in the threshing floor of this world, the chaff which is destined for eternal fire is quite sure to be mingled with the choicest of the wheat. Finally if we bear in mind that Satan was chosen among the angels, and Judas among the apostles, and Nicholas the author of a detestable heresy among the deacons, it will be no wonder that the basest of men are found among the ranks of the saints. For although some maintain that this Nicholas was not the same man who was chosen for the work of the ministry by the Apostles, [2095] nevertheless they cannot deny that he was of the number of the disciples, all of whom were

clearly of such a character and so perfect as those few whom we can now with difficulty discover in the Coenobia. Let us then bring forward not the fall of the above-mentioned brother, who fell in the desert with so grievous a collapse, nor that horrible stain which he afterwards wiped out by the copious tears of his penitence, but the example of the blessed Paphnutius; and let us not be destroyed by the ruin of the former, whose ingrained sin of envy was increased and made worse by his affected piety, but let us imitate with all our might the humility of the latter, which in his case was no sudden production of the quiet of the desert, but had been gained among men, and was consummated and perfected by solitude. However you should know that the evil of envy is harder to be cured than other faults, for I should almost say that a man whom it has once tainted with the mischief of its poison is without a remedy. For it is the plague of which it is figuratively said by the prophet: "Behold I will send among you serpents, basilisks, against which there is no charm: and they shall bite you." [2096] Rightly then are the stings of envy compared by the prophet to the deadly poison of basilisks, as by it the first author of all poisons and their chief perished and died. For he slew himself before him of whom he was envious, and destroyed himself before that he poured forth the poison of death against man: for "by the envy of the devil death entered into the world: they therefore who are on his side follow him." [2097] For just as he who was the first to be corrupted by the plague of that evil, admitted no remedy of penitence, nor any healing plaster, so those also who have given themselves up to be smitten by the same pricks, exclude all the aid of the sacred charmer, because as they are tormented not by the faults but by the prosperity of those of whom they are jealous, they are ashamed to display the real truth and look out for some external unnecessary and trifling causes of offence: and of these, because they are altogether false, vain is the hope of cure, while the deadly poison which they will not produce is lurking in their veins. Of which the wisest of men has fitly said: "If a serpent bite without hissing, there is no supply for the charmer." [2098] For those are silent bites, to which alone the medicine of the wise is no succour. For that evil is so far incurable that it is made worse by attentions, it is increased by services, is irritated by presents, because as the same Solomon says: "envy endures nothing." [2099] For just in proportion as another has made progress in humble submission or in the virtue of patience or in the merit of munificence, so is a man excited by worse pricks of envy, because he desires nothing less than the ruin or death of the man whom he envies. Lastly no submission on the part of their harmless brother could soften the envy of the eleven patriarchs, so that Scripture relates of them: "But his brothers envied him because his father loved him, and they could not speak peaceably unto him" [2100] until their jealousy, which would not listen to any entreaties on the part of their obedient and submissive brother, desired his death, and would scarcely be satisfied with the sin of selling a brother. It is plain then that envy is worse than all faults, and harder to get rid of, as it is inflamed by those remedies by which the others are destroyed. For, for example, a man who is grieved by a loss that has been caused to him, is healed by a liberal compensation: one who is sore owing to a wrong done to him, is appeased by humble satisfaction being made. What can you do with one who is the more offended by the very fact that he sees you humbler and kinder, who is not aroused to anger by any greed which can be appeased by a bribe; or by any injurious attack or love of vengeance, which is overcome by obsequious services; but is only irritated by another's success and happiness? But who is there who in order to satisfy one who envies him, would wish to fall from his good fortune, or to lose his prosperity or to be involved in some calamity? Wherefore we must constantly implore the divine aid, to which nothing is impossible, in order that the serpent may not by a single bite of this evil destroy whatever is

flourishing in us, and animated as it were by the life and quickening power of the Holy Ghost. For the other poisons of serpents, i.e., carnal sins and faults, in which human frailty is easily entangled and from which it is as easily purified, show some traces of their wounds in the flesh, whereby although the earthly body is most dangerously inflamed, yet if any charmer well skilled in divine incantations applies a cure and antidote or the remedy of words of salvation, the poisonous evil does not reach to the everlasting death of the soul. But the poison of envy as if emitted by the basilisk, destroys the very life of religion and faith, even before the wound is perceived in the body. For he does not raise himself up against men, but, in his blasphemy, against God, who carps at nothing in his brother except his felicity, and so blames no fault of man, but simply the judgment of God. This then is that "root of bitterness springing up" [2101] which raises itself to heaven and tends to reproaching the very Author Who bestows good things on man. Nor shall anyone be disturbed because God threatens to send "serpents, basilisks," [2102] to bite those by whose crimes He is offended. For although it is certain that God cannot be the author of envy, yet it is fair and worthy of the divine judgment that, while good gifts are bestowed on the humble and refused to the proud and reprobate, those who, as the Apostle says, deserve to be given over "to a reprobate mind," [2103] should be smitten and consumed by envy sent as it were by Him, according to this passage: "They have provoked me to jealousy by them that are no gods: and I will provoke them to jealousy by them that are no nation." [2104] By this discourse the blessed Piamun excited still more keenly our desire in which we had begun to be promoted from the infant school of the Coenobium to the second standard of the anchorites' life. For it was under his instruction that we made our first start in solitary living, the knowledge of which we afterwards followed up more thoroughly in Scete.

XIX. Conference of Abbot John.

On the Aim of the Coenobite and Hermit.

Chapter I. Of the Coenobium of Abbot Paul and the patience of a certain brother.

After only a few days we made our way once more with great alacrity, drawn by the desire for further instruction, to the Coenobium of Abbot Paul, where though a greater number than two hundred of the brethren dwell there, yet, in honour of the festival which was then being held, an enormous collection of monks from other Coenobia had come there as well: for the anniversary of the death [2105] of a former Abbot who had presided over the same monastery was being solemnly kept. And we have mentioned this assembly for this reason that we may briefly treat of the patience of a certain brother, which was remarkable for immovable gentleness on his part in the presence of all this congregation. For though the object of this work has regard to another person; viz., that we may produce the utterances of Abbot John [2106] who left the desert and submitted himself to that Coenobium with the utmost goodness and humility, yet we think it not at all absurd to relate without any unnecessary verbiage, what we think is most instructive to those who are eager for goodness. And so when the whole body of the monks was seated in separate parties of twelve, in the large open court, when one of the brethren had been rather slow in fetching and bringing in a dish, the aforesaid Abbot Paul, who was busily hurrying about among the troops of brethren who were serving, saw it and struck him such a blow before them all on his open palm that the sound of the hand which was struck actually reached the ears of those whose backs were turned and who were sitting some way off. But the youth of remarkable patience received it with such calmness of mind that not only did he let no word fall from his mouth or give the slightest sign of murmuring by the silent movements of his lips, but actually did not change colour in the slightest degree or (lose) the modest and peaceful look about his mouth. And this fact struck with astonishment not merely us, who had lately come from a monastery of Syria and had not learnt the blessing of this patience by such clear examples, but all those as well who were not without experience of such earnestness, so that by it a great lesson was taught even to those who were well advanced, because even if this paternal correction had not disturbed his patience, neither did the presence of so great a number bring the slightest sign of colour to his cheeks.

Chapter II. Of Abbot John's humility and our question.

In this Coenobium then we found a very old man named John, whose words and humility we think ought certainly not to be passed over in silence as in them he excelled all the saints, as we know that he was especially vigorous in this perfection, which though it is the mother of all virtues and the surest foundation of the whole spiritual superstructure, yet is altogether a stranger to our system. Wherefore it is no wonder that we cannot attain to the height of those men, as we cannot stand the training of the Coenobium I will not say up to old age, but are scarcely content to endure the yoke of subjection for a couple of years, and at once escape to enjoy a dangerous liberty, while even for that short time we seem to be subject to the rule of the Elder not according to any strict rule, but as our free will directs. When then we had seen this old man in Abbot Paul's Coenobium, we were struck, first by his age and the grace with which the man was endowed, and with looks fixed on the ground began to entreat him to vouchsafe to explain to us why he had forsaken the freedom of the desert and that exalted profession, in which his fame and celebrity had raised him above others who had adopted the same life, and why he had chosen to enter under the yoke of the Coenobium. He said that as he was unequal to the system of the anchorites and unworthy of the heights of such perfection, he had gone back to the infant school, that he might learn to carry out the lessons taught there, according as the life demanded. And when our entreaties were not satisfied and we refused to take this humble answer, at last he began as follows.

Chapter III. Abbot John's answer why he had left the desert.

The system of the anchorites, which you are surprised at my leaving, I not only neither reject nor refuse, but rather embrace and regard with the utmost veneration: in which system, and after I had passed thirty years living in a Coenobium, I rejoice that I have also spent twenty more, so that I can never be accused of sloth among those who tried it in a half-hearted way. But because its purity, of which I had had some slight experience, was sometimes soiled by the presence of anxiety about carnal matters, it seemed better to return to the Coenobium to secure a readier attainment of an easier aim undertaken, and less danger from venturing on the higher life of the humble solitary. [2107] For it is better to seem earnest with smaller promises than careless in larger ones. And therefore if possibly I bring forward anything somewhat arrogantly and indeed somewhat too freely, I beg that you will not think it due to the sin of boasting but rather to my desire for your edification; and that, as I think that, when you ask so earnestly, nothing of the truth should be kept back from you, you will set it down to love rather than to boasting. For I think that some instruction may be given to you if I lay aside my humility, and simply lay bare the whole truth about my aim. For I trust that I shall not incur any reproach of vainglory from you because of the freedom of my words, nor any charge of falsehood from my conscience because of any suppression of the truth.

Chapter IV. Of the excellence which the aforesaid old man showed in the system of the anchorites.

If then anyone else delights in the recesses of the desert and would forget all human intercourse and say with Jeremiah: "I have not desired the day of man: Thou knowest," [2108] I confess that by the blessing of God's grace, I also secured or at any rate tried to secure this. And so by the kind gift of the Lord I remember that I was often caught up into such an ecstasy as to forget that I was clothed with the burden of a weak body, and my soul on a sudden forgot all external notions and entirely cut itself off from all material objects, so that neither my eyes nor ears performed their proper functions. And my soul was so filled with divine meditations and spiritual contemplations that often in the evening I did not know whether I had taken any food and on the next day was very doubtful whether I had broken my fast yesterday. For which reason, a supply of food for seven days, i.e., seven sets of biscuits were set apart in a sort of hand-basket, [2109] and laid by on Saturday, that there might be no doubt when supper had been omitted; and by this plan another mistake also from forgetfulness was obviated, for when the number of cakes was finished it showed that the course of the week was over, and that the services of the same day had come round, and that the festival and holy day and services of the congregation could not escape the notice of the solitary. But even if that ecstasy of mind of which we have spoken should happen to interfere with this arrangement, yet still the method of the days' work would show the number of the days and check the mistake. And to pass over in silence the other advantages of the desert (for it is not our business to treat of their number and quantity, but rather of the aim of solitude and the Coenobium) I will the rather briefly explain the reasons why I preferred to leave it, which you also wanted to know, and will in a concise discourse glance at all those fruits of solitude which I mentioned, and show to what greater advantages on the other side they ought to be held inferior.

Chapter V. Of the advantages of the desert.

So long then as owing to the fewness of those who were then living in the desert, a greater freedom was afforded to us in a wider expanse of the wilderness, so long as in the seclusion of larger retreats we were caught up to those celestial ecstasies, and were not overwhelmed by a great quantity of brethren to visit us, and thus owing to the necessity of showing hospitality overburdened in our thoughts by the distractions of great cares, I frequented with insatiable desire and all my heart the peaceful retreats of the desert and that life which can only be compared to the bliss of the angels. But when, as I said, a larger number of the brethren began to seek a dwelling in that desert, and by cramping the freedom of the vast wilderness, not only caused that fire of divine contemplation to grow cold, but also entangled the mind in many ways in the chains of carnal matters, I determined to carry out my purpose in this system rather than to grow cold in that sublime mode of life, by providing for carnal wants; so that, if that liberty and those spiritual ecstasies are denied me, yet as all care for the morrow is avoided, I may console myself by fulfilling the precept of the gospel, and what I lose in sublimity of contemplation, may be made up to me by submission and obedience. For it is a wretched thing for a man to profess to learn any art or pursuit, and never to arrive at perfection in it.

Chapter VI. Of the conveniences of the Coenobium.

Wherefore I will briefly explain what advantages I now enjoy in this manner of life. You must consider my words and judge whether those advantages of the desert outweigh these comforts, and by this you will also be able to prove whether I chose to be cramped within the narrow limits of the Coenobium from dislike or from desire of that purity of the solitary life. In this life then there is no providing for the day's work, no distractions of buying and selling, no unavoidable care for the year's food, no anxiety about bodily things, by which one has to get ready what is necessary not only for one's own wants but also for those of any number of visitors, finally no conceit from the praise of men, which is worse than all these things and sometimes in the sight of God does away with the good of even great efforts in the desert. But, to pass over those waves of spiritual pride and the deadly peril of vainglory in the life of the anchorite, let us return to this general burden which affects everybody, i.e., the ordinary anxiety in providing food, which has so far exceeded I say not the measure of that ancient strictness which altogether did without oil, but is beginning not to be content even with the relaxation of our own time according to which the requirements of all the supply of food for a year were satisfied by the preparation of a single pint of oil and a modius of lentils prepared for the use of visitors; but now the needful supply of food is scarcely met by two or three times that amount. And to such an extent has the force of this dangerous relaxation grown among some that, when they mix vinegar and sauce, they do not add that single drop of oil, which our predecessors who followed the rules of the desert with greater powers of abstinence, were accustomed to pour in simply for the sake of avoiding vainglory, [2110] but they break an Egyptian cheese for luxury and pour over it more oil than is required, and so take, under a single pleasant relish, two sorts of food which differ in their special flavour, each of which ought singly to be a pleasant refreshment at different times for a monk. To such a pitch however has this hulike ktesis, i.e., acquisition of material things grown, that actually under pretence of hospitality and welcoming guests anchorites have begun to keep a blanket in their cells -- a thing which I cannot mention without shame -- to omit those things by which the mind that is awed by and intent on spiritual meditation is more especially hampered; viz., the concourse of brethren, the duties of receiving the coming and speeding the parting guest, visits to each other and the endless worry of various confabulations and occupations, the expectation of which owing to the continuous character of these customary interruptions keeps the mind on the stretch even during the time when these bothers seem to cease. And so the result is that the freedom of the anchorite's life is so hindered by these ties that it can never rise to that ineffable keenness of heart, and thus loses the fruits of its hermit life. And if this is now denied to me while I am living in the congregation and among others, at least there is no lack of peace of mind and tranquillity of heart that is freed from all business. And unless this is ready at hand for those also who live in the desert, they will indeed have to undergo the labours of the anchorite's life, but will lose its fruits which can only be gained in peaceful stability of mind. Finally even if there is any diminution of my purity of heart while I am living in the Coenobium, I shall be satisfied by keeping in exchange that one precept of the Gospel, which certainly cannot be less esteemed than all those fruits of the desert; I mean that I should take no thought for the morrow, and submitting myself completely to the Abbot seem in

some degree to emulate Him of whom it is said: "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death; and so be able humbly to make use of His words: "For I came not to do mine own will, but the will of the Father which sent me." [2111]

Chapter VII. A question on the fruits of the Coenobium and the desert.

Germanus: Since it is evident that you have not, like so many, just touched the mere outskirts of each mode of life, but have ascended to the very heights, we should like to know what is the end of the Coenobite's life and what the end of the hermit's. For no one can doubt that no man can discourse with greater fulness or fidelity on these subjects than one who, taught by long use and experience, has followed them both, and so can by veracious teaching show us their value and aim.

Chapter VIII. The answer to the question proposed.

John: I should absolutely maintain that one and the same man could not attain perfection in both lives unless I was hindered by the example of some few. And since it is no small matter to find a man who is perfect in either of them, it is clear how much harder and I had almost said impossible it is for a man to be thoroughly efficient in both. And if this has ever happened, it cannot come under any general rule. For a general rule must be based not on exceptional instances, i.e., on the experience of a very few, but on what is within the power of the many or rather of all. But what is attained to here and there by but one or two, and is beyond the capacity of ordinary goodness, must be kept out of general rules as something permitted outside the condition and nature of human weakness, and should be brought forward as a miracle rather than as an example. Wherefore I will, as my slender ability allows, briefly intimate what you want to know. The aim indeed of the Coenobite is to mortify and crucify all his desires and, according to that salutary command of evangelic perfection, to take no thought for the morrow. And it is perfectly clear that this perfection cannot be attained by any except a Coenobite, such a man as the prophet Isaiah describes and blesses and praises as follows: "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy own will in my holy day, and glorify Him, while thou dost not thine own ways, and thine own will is not found to speak a word: then shalt thou be delighted in the Lord, and I will lift thee up above the high places of the earth, and will feed thee with the inheritance of Jacob thy father. For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." [2112] But the perfection for a hermit is to have his mind freed from all earthly things, and to unite it, as far as human frailty allows, with Christ: and such a man the prophet Jeremiah describes when he says: "Blessed is the man who hath borne the yoke from his youth. He shall sit solitary and hold his peace, because he hath taken it upon himself;" the Psalmist also: "I am become like a pelican in the desert. I watched and became as a sparrow alone upon the housetop." [2113] To this aim then, which we have described as that of either life, unless each of them attains, in vain does the one adopt the system of the Coenobium, and the other of the hermitage: for neither of them will get the good of his method of life.

Chapter IX. Of true and complete perfection.

But this is merike, i.e., no thorough and altogether complete perfection, but only a partial one. Perfection then is very rare and granted by God's gift to but a very few. For he is truly and not partially perfect who with equal imperturbability can put up with the squalor of the wilderness in the desert, as well as the infirmities of the brethren in the Coenobium. And so it is hard to find one who is perfect in both lives, because the anchorite cannot thoroughly acquire aktemosune , i.e., a disregard for and stripping oneself of material things, nor the Coenobite purity in contemplation, although we know that Abbot Moses and Paphnutius and the two Macarii [2114] were masters of both in perfection. And so they were perfect in either life, and while they withdrew further than all the dwellers in the desert and delighted themselves unceasingly in the retirement of the wilderness, and as far as in them lay never sought intercourse with other men, yet they put up with the presence and the infirmities of those who came to them so that when a large number of the brethren came to them for the sake of seeing them and profiting by it, they endured this almost continuous trouble of receiving them with imperturbable patience, and men fancied that all the days of their life they had neither learnt nor practised anything but how to show common civility to those who came, so that it was a puzzle to all to say in which life their zeal was mainly shown, i.e., whether their greatness adapted itself more remarkably to the purity of the hermitage or to the common life.

Chapter X. Of those who while still imperfect retire into the desert.

But some are sometimes so tantalized by the silence of the desert lasting all through the day that they altogether dread intercourse with men, and, when they have even for a little while broken through their habit of retirement owing to the accident of a visit from some of the brethren, boil over with marked vexation of mind, and show clear signs of annoyance. And this especially happens in the case of those who have betaken themselves to the solitary life without a well-matured purpose and without being thoroughly trained in the Coenobium, as these men are always imperfect and easily upset, and incline to one side or the other, as the gales of trouble may drive them. For as they boil over impatiently at intercourse or conversation with the brethren, so while they are living in solitude they cannot stand the vastness of that silence which they themselves have courted, inasmuch as they themselves do not even know the reason why solitude ought to be wanted and sought for, but imagine that the value and the main part of this life consist in this; viz., in avoiding intercourse with the brethren and simply shunning and loathing the sight of a man.

Chapter XI. A question how to cure those who have hastily left the congregation of the Coenobium.

Germanus: By what treatment can any help be given to us or to others who are thus weak and only up to this; who had received but little instruction in the system of the Coenobium when we began to aspire to dwell in solitude before we had got rid of our faults; or by what means shall we be able to acquire the constancy of an imperturbable mind, and immovable steadfastness of patience; we who all too soon gave up the common life in the Coenobium, and forsook the schools and training ground for these exercises, in which our principles ought first to have been thoroughly schooled and perfected? How then can we now while we are living alone gain perfection in long-suffering and patience; or how can conscience, that searcher out of inward motives, discover whether these virtues exist in us or are wanting, so that because we are severed from intercourse with men, and not irritated by any of their provocations, we may not be deceived by false notions, and fancy that we have gained that imperturbable peace of mind?

Chapter XII. The answer telling how a solitary can discover his faults.

John: To those who are really seeking relief, healing remedies from the true Physician of souls will certainly not be wanting; and to those above all will they be given who do not disregard their ill-condition (either because they despair of it, or because they do not care about it), nor hide the danger they are in from their wound, nor in their wanton heart reject the remedy of penitence, but with an humble and yet careful heart flee to the heavenly Physician for the diseases they have contracted from ignorance or error or necessity. And so we ought to know that if we retire to solitude or secret places, without our faults being first cured, their operation is but repressed, while the power of feeling them is not extinguished. For the root of all sins not having been eradicated is still lying hid in us, or rather creeping up, and that it is still alive we can tell by these signs. For instance, if, when we are living in solitude we receive the approach of some brethren, or any very slight tarrying on their part, with any anxiety or fretfulness of mind, we should recognize that an incentive to the most hasty impatience is still existing in us. But if when we are hoping for the coming of a brother, and from some cause he perhaps delays a little, our mental indignation either silently blames his slowness, and annoyance at this inconvenient waiting disturbs our mind, the examination of our conscience will show that the sin of anger and vexation is plainly still remaining in us. Again, if when a brother asks for our book to read, or for some other article to use, his request annoys us, or a refusal on our part disgusts him, there can be no doubt that we are still entangled in the meshes of avarice or covetousness. But if a sudden thought or a passage of Holy Scripture brings up the recollection of a woman and we feel that we are at all attracted towards her, we should know that the fire of fornication is not yet extinguished in us. But if on a comparison of our own strictness with the laxity of another even the slightest conceit tries our mind, it is clear that we are affected with the dreadful plague of pride. When then we detect these signs of faults in our heart, we should clearly recognize that it is only the opportunity and not the passion of sin of which we are deprived. And certainly these passions, if at any time we were to mingle in the ordinary life of men, would at once start up from their lurking places in our thoughts and prove that they did not then for the first time come into existence when they broke out, but that they were then at last made public, because they had been long lying hid. And so even a solitary can detect by sure signs that the roots of each fault are still implanted in him, if he tries not to show his purity to men, but to maintain it inviolate in His sight, from whom no secrets of the heart can be hid.

Chapter XIII. A question how a man can be cured who has entered on solitude without having his faults eradicated.

Germanus: We very clearly and plainly see the proofs by which the signs of infirmities are inferred, and the method of discerning diseases, i.e., how the faults which are concealed in us can be detected: for our every day experience and the daily motions of our thoughts show us all these as they have been stated. It remains then that as the proofs and causes of our maladies have been exposed to us in a most clear way so their remedies and cures may also be shown. For no one can doubt that one who has first discovered the grounds and beginnings of ailments, with the approving witness of the conscience of those affected, can best discourse on their remedies. And so though the teaching of your holiness has laid bare the secrets of our wounds whereby we venture to have some hope of a remedy, because so clear a diagnosis of the disease gives promise of the hope of a cure, yet because, as you say, the first elements of salvation are acquired in the Coenobium, and men cannot be in a sound condition in solitude, unless they have first been healed by the medicine of the Coenobium, we have fallen again into a dangerous state of despair lest as we left the Coenobium in an imperfect condition we may not now that we are in the desert succeed in becoming perfect.

Chapter XIV. The answer on their remedies.

John: For those who are anxious for the cure of their ailments a saving remedy is sure not to be wanting, and therefore remedies should be sought by the same means that the signs of each fault are discovered. For as we have said that the faults of men's ordinary life are not wanting to solitaries, so we do not deny that all zeal for virtue, and all the means of healing are at the disposal of all those who are cut off from men's ordinary life. When then anyone discovers by those signs which we described above, that he is attacked by outbreaks of impatience or anger, he should always practise himself in the opposite and contrary things, and by setting before himself all sorts of injuries and wrongs, as if offered to him by somebody else, accustom his mind to submit with perfect humility to everything that wickedness can bring upon him; and by often representing to himself all kinds of rough and intolerable things, continually consider with all sorrow of heart with what gentleness he ought to meet them. And, by thus looking at the sufferings of all the saints, or indeed at those of the Lord Himself, he will admit that the various reproaches as well as punishments are less than he deserves, and prepare himself to endure all kinds of griefs. And when occasionally he has been recalled by some invitation to the assembly of the brethren -- a thing which cannot but happen every now and then even to the strictest inmates of the desert, -- if he finds that his mind is silently disturbed even for trifles, he should like some stern censor of his secret emotions charge himself with all those various hard wrongs, to the perfect endurance of which he was training himself by his daily meditations, and blaming and chiding himself as follows, say My good man, are you the fellow who while training yourself in the practising ground of solitude, ventured most determinedly to think that you would get the better of all bad qualities, and who just now, when you were representing to yourself not only all sorts of bitter reproaches, but also intolerable punishments, fancied that you were pretty strong and able to stand against all storms? How is it that that unconquered patience of yours is upset by the first trial even of a light word? How is it that even a gentle breeze has shaken that house of yours which you fancied was built so strongly on the solid rock? Where is that which you announced when during a time of peace you were in your foolish confidence longing for war? "I am ready, and am not troubled;" and this which you used often to say with the prophet: "Prove me, O Lord, and try me: search out my reins and my heart;" and: "prove me, O Lord, and know my heart: question me and know my paths; and see if there be any way of wickedness in me." [2115] How has a tiny ghost of an enemy frightened your grand preparations for war? With such reproaches and remorse a man should condemn himself and not allow the sudden temptation which has upset him to go unpunished, but by chastising his flesh with a severer penalty of fasting and vigils; and, by punishing his sin of lightness of mind by continual pains of self-restraint, he should while living in solitude consume in this fire of practice what he ought to have thoroughly driven out in the life of the Coenobium. This at any rate we must firmly and resolutely hold to in order to secure a lasting and unbroken patience; viz., that for us, to whom by the Divine law not merely vengeance for, but even the recollection of injuries is forbidden, it is not permissible to be roused to anger because of some loss or annoyance. For what greater injury can happen to the soul than for it, owing to some sudden blindness from rage, to lose the brightness of the true and eternal light and to fail of the

sight of Him "Who is meek and lowly of heart?" [2116] What I ask could be more dangerous or awkward than for a man to lose his power of judging of goodness, and his standard and rule of true discernment, and for one in his sober senses to do what even a drunken man, and a fool would not be pardoned for doing? One then who carefully considers these and other injuries of the same kind, will readily endure and disregard not only all kinds of losses, but also whatever wrongs and punishments can be inflicted by the cruellest of men, as he will hold that there is nothing more damaging than anger, nor more valuable than peace of mind and unbroken purity of heart, for the sake of which we should think nothing of the advantages not merely of carnal matters but also of those things which appear to be spiritual, if they cannot be gained or done without some disturbance of this tranquillity.

Chapter XV. A question whether chastity ought to be ascertained just as the other feelings.

Germanus: As the cure for other ailments, viz., anger, vexation, and impatience, has been shown to consist in opposing to them their contraries, so also we should like to learn what sort of treatment we ought to use against the spirit of fornication: I mean, whether the fire of lust can be quenched by the representation, as in those other cases, of greater inducements and things to excite it: because not merely to increase the incentives to lust within us, but even to touch them with a passing look of the mind, we believe to be utterly fatal to chastity.

Chapter XVI. The answer giving the proofs by which it can be recognized.

John: Your shrewd question has anticipated the subject, which even if you had said nothing must have arisen from our discourse, and therefore I do not doubt that it will be effectually grasped by your minds, since indeed your sharp wits have outstripped our instruction. For the puzzle of any question is easily removed, when the inquiry anticipates the answer, and is the first to travel along the road which it is to follow. And so to the treatment of those faults of which we have spoken above, intercourse with other men is not merely no hindrance, but a considerable help, for the more often that the outbursts of their impatience are exposed, the more thorough is the sorrow and compunction which they bring on those who have failed, and the speedier is the recovery of health which they confer on those who struggle against them. Wherefore even when we are living in solitude, though the incentive to irritation and matter for it cannot arise from men, yet we ought of set purpose to meditate on incitements to it, that as we are fighting against it with a continual struggle in our thoughts a speedier cure for it may be found for us. But against the spirit of fornication the system is different, and the method an altered one. For as we must deprive the body of opportunities of lust, and contact with flesh, so we must deprive the mind of the recollection of it. For it is sufficiently dangerous for bosoms that are still weak and infirm even to tolerate the slightest recollection of this passion, in such a way that sometimes at the remembrance of holy women, or in reading a story in Holy Scripture a stimulus of dangerous excitement is aroused. For which reason our Elders used deliberately to omit passages of this kind when any of the juniors were present. However for those who are perfect and established in the feelings of chastity there can be no lack of proofs by which they may examine themselves, and establish their perfect uprightness of heart by the uncorrupted judgment of their own conscience. There will then be for the man who is thoroughly established a similar test even in regard to this passion, so that one who is sure that he has altogether exterminated the roots of this evil may for the sake of ascertaining his chastity, call up some picture as with a lascivious mind. But it is by no means proper for such a test to be attempted by those who are still weak (for to them it will be dangerous rather than useful), *ut conjunctionem femineam et palpationem quodammodo teneram atque mollissimam corde pertractent. Cum ergo perfecta quis virtute fundatus ad illecebram blandissimorum tactuum, quos cogitando confinexerit, nullum mentis assensum, nullam commotionem carnis in se deprehenderit exagitata*, he will have a very sure proof of his purity, so that training himself to this steadfast purity he will not only possess the blessing of chastity and freedom from defilement in his heart, but even if he is obliged to touch the body of a woman, he will be horrified at it. With this Abbot John brought his Conference to an end, as he saw that it was just time for the refreshment of the ninth hour.

XX. Conference of Abbot Pinufius.

On the End of Penitence and the Marks of Satisfaction.

Chapter I. Of the humility of Abbot Pinufius, and of his hiding-place.

Now that I am going to relate the precepts of that excellent and remarkable man, Abbot Pinufius, on the end of penitence, I fancy that I can dispose of a very large part of my material, if out of consideration lest I weary my reader, I here pass over in silence the praise of his humility, which I touched on in a brief discourse in the fourth book of the Institutes, [2117] which was entitled "Of the rules to be observed by renunciants," especially as many who have no knowledge of that work, may happen to read this, and then all the authority of the utterances will be weakened if there is no account of the virtues of the speaker. For this man when he was presiding as Abbot and Presbyter over a large Coenobium not far from Panephrisis, a city, as was there said, of Egypt, and when all that province had praised him to the skies for his virtues and miracles, so that he already seemed to himself to have received the reward of his labours in the remuneration of the praise of men, as he was afraid lest the emptiness of popular favour, which he especially disliked, might interfere with the fruits of an eternal reward, he secretly fled from his monastery and made his way to the furthest recesses of the monks of Tabennæ, [2118] where he chose not the solitude of the desert, not that freedom from care of which the life of one alone affords, which even those who are imperfect and who cannot endure the effort which obedience requires in the Coenobium, sometimes seek after with proud presumption, but he chose to submit himself to a most famous monastery. Where, however, that he might not be betrayed by any signs of his dress, he clothed himself in a secular garb, and lay before the doors with tears, as is the custom there, for many days, and clinging to the knees of all after being daily repulsed by those who to test his purpose said that now in extreme old age he was seeking this holy life not in sincerity, but driven by the lack of food, at last he obtained admission, and there he was told off to help a young brother who had been given the charge of a garden, and when he not only fulfilled with such marvellous and holy humility everything which his chief ordered him or which the care of the work entrusted to him demanded, but also performed in stealthy labour by night certain necessary offices which were avoided by the rest out of disgust for them, so that when morning dawned, all the congregation was delighted at such useful works but knew not their author; and when he had passed nearly three years there rejoicing in the labours, which he had desired, but to which he was so unfairly subjected, it happened that a certain brother known to him came there from the same parts of Egypt from which he himself had come. And this man for a time hesitated because the meanness of his clothes and of his office prevented him from readily recognizing him at once, but after looking very closely at him, fell at his feet, and first astonished all the brethren, and afterwards, when he betrayed his name, which the fame of his special sanctity had made known to them also, he smote them with sorrow and compunction because they had told off a man of his virtues and a priest to such mean offices. But he, shedding copious tears, and charging the accident of his betrayal to the serious envy of the devil, was brought in honourable custody by his brethren surrounding him to the monastery; and after that he had stayed there for a short time, he was once more troubled by the respect shown to his dignity and rank, and stealthily embarked on board ship and sailed to the Palestinian province of Syria, where he was received as a beginner and a novice in the house of that monastery in which we were living, and was charged by the Abbot to stop in

our cell. But not even there could his virtues and merits long remain secret. For he was discovered and betrayed in the same way, and brought back to his own monastery with the utmost honour and respect.

Chapter II. Of our coming to him.

When then after no long time a desire for holy instruction had urged us also to visit Egypt, we sought him out with the utmost eagerness and devotion and were welcomed by him with such kindness and courtesy that he actually honoured us, as former sharers of the same cell with him, with a lodging in his own cell which he had built in the furthest corner of his garden. And there when in the presence of all the brethren at service he had delivered to one of the brethren who was submitting to the rule of the monastery sufficiently difficult and elevated precepts, which as we said, I summarized as briefly as I could in the fourth book of the Institutes, the heights of a true renunciation seemed to us so unattainable and so marvellous that we did not think that such humble folks as we could ever scale them. And therefore, cast down in despair, and not concealing in our looks the inner bitterness of our thoughts, we came back to the blessed old man with a tolerably anxious heart: and when he at once asked the reason why we were so sad, Abbot Germanus groaned deeply and replied as follows.

Chapter III. A question on the end of penitence and the marks of satisfaction.

As your grand and splendid exposition of a doctrine new to us has opened out to us a more difficult road to the most glorious renunciation, and has removed the scales from our eyes, and shown to us its summit raised in the heavens, so are we proportionately cast down with a greater weight of despair. Since, when we measure its vastness against our puny strength, and compare the excessively humble character of our ignorance with the boundless height of virtue shown to us, we feel that we are so small that we not only cannot attain to it, but that we are sure to fall short in what we have. For as we are weighed down by the burden of excessive despair, we fall away somehow from the lowest depths to still lower ones. Accordingly there is one and only one support which can provide a cure for our wounds; viz., for us to learn something of the end of penitence and especially on the marks of satisfaction, that we may feel sure of the forgiveness of past sins, and so be spurred on to scale the heights of the perfection described above.

Chapter IV. The answer on the humility shown by our request.

Pinufius: I am indeed delighted at the very plentiful fruits of your humility, which indeed I saw with no indifferent concern, when I was formerly received in the habitation of that cell of yours, and I am very glad that you welcome with such respect the charge given by us, the least of all Christians, and the words that I have taken the liberty of saying so that if I am not mistaken you carry them out as soon as ever they are spoken by us; and though, as I remember, the importance of the words scarcely deserves the efforts you bestow on them, yet you so conceal the merits of your virtue, as if no breath ever reached you of those things which you are daily practising. But because this fact is worthy of the highest praise; viz., that you declare that those institutes of the saints are still unknown to you as if you were still beginners we will, as briefly as possible, summarize what you so eagerly ask of us. For we must even beyond our powers and ability, obey the commands of such old friends as you. And so on the value and appeasing power of penitence many have published a great deal, not only in words but also in writing, showing how useful it is, how strong, and full of grace, so that when God is offended by our past sins, and on the point of inflicting a most just punishment for such offences, it somehow, if it is not wrong to say so, stops Him, and, if I may so say, stays the right hand of the Avenger even against His will. But I have no doubt that all this is well known to you, either from your natural wisdom, or from your unwearied study of Holy Scripture, so that from this the first shoots, so to speak, of your conversion sprang up. Finally, you are anxious not about the character of penitence but about its end, and the marks of satisfaction, and so by a very shrewd question ask what has been left out by others.

Chapter V. Of the method of penitence and the proof of pardon.

Wherefore in order to satisfy as briefly and shortly as possible, your desire and question, the full and perfect description of penitence is, never again to yield to those sins for which we do penance, or for which our conscience is pricked. But the proof of satisfaction and pardon is for us to have expelled the love of them from our hearts. For each one may be sure that he is not yet free from his former sins as long as any image of those sins which he has committed or of others like them dances before his eyes, and I will not say a delight in -- but the recollection of -- them haunts his inmost soul while he is devoting himself to satisfaction for them and to tears. And so one who is on the watch to make satisfaction may then feel sure that he is free from his sins and that he has obtained pardon for past faults, when he never feels that his heart is stirred by the allurements and imaginations of these same sins. Wherefore the truest test of penitence and witness of pardon is found in our own conscience, which even before the day of judgment and of knowledge, while we are still in the flesh, discloses our acquittal from guilt, and reveals the end of satisfaction and the grace of forgiveness. And that what has been said may be more significantly expressed, then only should we believe that the stains of past sins are forgiven us, when the desires for present delights as well as the passions have been expelled from our heart.

Chapter VI. A question whether our sins ought to be remembered out of contrition of heart.

Germanus: And whence can there be aroused in us this holy and salutary contrition from humiliation, which is described as follows in the person of the penitent: "I have acknowledged my sin, and mine unrighteousness have I not hid. I said: I will acknowledge against myself mine unrighteousness to the Lord," so that we may be able effectually to say also what follows: "And Thou forgavest the iniquity of my heart;" [2119] or how, when we kneel in prayer shall we be able to stir ourselves up to tears of confession, by which we may be able to obtain pardon for our offences, according to these words: "Every night will I wash my bed: I will water my couch with tears;" [2120] if we expel from our hearts all recollection of our faults, though on the contrary we are bidden carefully to preserve the remembrance of them, as the Lord says: "And thine iniquities I will not remember: but do thou recollect them?" [2121] Wherefore not only when I am at work, but also when I am at prayer I try of set purpose to recall to my mind the recollection of my sins, that I may be more effectually inclined to true humility and contrition of heart, and venture to say with the prophet: "Look upon my humility and my labour: and forgive me all my sins." [2122]

Chapter VII. The answer showing how far we ought to preserve the recollection of previous actions.

Pinufius: Your question, as has been already said above, was not raised with regard to the character of penitence, but with regard to its end, and the marks of satisfaction: to which, as I think, a fair and pertinent reply has been given. But what you have said as to the remembrance of sins is sufficiently useful and needful to men who are still doing penance, that they may with constant smiting of the breast say: "For I acknowledge my wickedness: and my sin is ever before me;" and this too: "And I will think for my sin." [2123] While then we do penance, and are still grieved by the recollection of faulty actions, the shower of tears which is caused by the confession of our faults is sure to quench the fire of our conscience. But when, while a man is still in this state of humility of heart and contrition of spirit and continuing to labour and to weep, the remembrance of these things fades away, and the thorns of conscience are by God's grace extracted from his inmost heart, then it is clear that he has attained to the end of satisfaction and the reward of pardon, and that he is purged from the stain of the sins he has committed. To which state of forgetfulness we can only attain by the obliteration of our former sins and likings, and by perfect and complete purity of heart. And this most certainly will not be attained by any of those who from sloth or carelessness have failed to purge out their faults, but only by one who by constantly continuing to groan and sigh sorrowfully has removed every spot of his former stains, and by the goodness of his heart and his labour has proclaimed to the Lord: "I have acknowledged my sin, and mine unrighteousness have I not hid;" and: "My tears have been my meat day and night;" so that in the end it may be vouchsafed to him to hear these words: "Let thy voice cease from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for there is a reward for thy labour, saith the Lord;" [2124] and these words also may be uttered of him by the voice of the Lord: "I have blotted out as a cloud thine iniquities, and as a mist thy sins:" and again: "I even I am He that blotteth out thine iniquities for mine own sake, and thine offences I will no longer remember;" [2125] and so, when he is freed from the "cords of his sins," by which "everyone is bound," [2126] he will with all thanksgiving sing to the Lord: "Thou hast broken my chains: I will offer to thee the sacrifice of praise." [2127]

Chapter VIII. Of the various fruits of penitence.

For after that grace of baptism which is common to all, and that most precious gift of martyrdom which is gained by being washed in blood, there are many fruits of penitence by which we can succeed in expiating our sins. For eternal salvation is not only promised to the bare fact of penitence, of which the blessed Apostle Peter says: "Repent and be converted that your sins may be forgiven;" and John the Baptist and the Lord Himself: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand:" [2128] but also by the affection of love is the weight of our sins overwhelmed: for "charity covers a multitude of sins." [2129] In the same way also by the fruits of almsgiving a remedy is provided for our wounds, because "As water extinguishes fire, so does almsgiving extinguish sin." [2130] So also by the shedding of tears is gained the washing away of offences, for "Every night I will wash my bed: I will water my couch with tears." Finally to show that they are not shed in vain, he adds: "Depart from me all ye that work iniquity, for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping:" [2131] Moreover by means of confession of sins, their absolution is granted: for "I said: I will confess against myself my sin to the Lord: and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my heart;" and again: "Declare thine iniquities first, that thou mayest be justified." [2132] By afflicting the heart and body also is forgiveness of sins committed in like manner obtained, for he says: "Look on my humility and my labour, and forgive me all my sins;" and more especially by amendment of life: "Take away," he says, "the evil of your thoughts from mine eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed: judge the orphan, defend the widow. And come, reason with Me, saith the Lord: and though your sins were as scarlet, yet shall they be as white as snow, though they were red as crimson, they shall be as white as wool." [2133] Sometimes too the pardon of our sins is obtained by the intercession of the saints, for "if a man knows his brother to sin a sin not unto death, he asks, and He will give to him his life, for him that sinneth not unto death;" and again: "Is any sick among you? Let him send for the Elders of the Church and they shall pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him." [2134] Sometimes too by the virtue of compassion and faith the stains of sin are removed, according to this passage: "By compassion and faith sins are purged away." [2135] And often by the conversion and salvation of those who are saved by our warnings and preaching: "For he who converts a sinner from the error of his way, shall save his soul from death, and cover a multitude of sins." [2136] Moreover by pardon and forgiveness on our part we obtain pardon of our sins: "For if ye forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father will also forgive you your sins." [2137] You see then what great means of obtaining mercy the compassion of our Saviour has laid open to us, so that no one when longing for salvation need be crushed by despair, as he sees himself called to life by so many remedies. For if you plead that owing to weakness of the flesh you cannot get rid of your sins by fasting, and you cannot say: "My knees are weak from fasting, and my flesh is changed for oil; for I have eaten ashes for my bread, and mingled my drink with weeping," [2138] then atone for them by profuse almsgiving. If you have nothing that you can give to the needy (although the claims of want and poverty exclude none from this office, since the two mites of the widow are ranked higher than the splendid gifts of the rich, and the Lord promises that He will give

a reward for a cup of cold water), at least you can purge them away by amendment of life. But if you cannot secure perfection in goodness by the eradication of all your faults, you can show a pious anxiety for the good and salvation of another. But if you complain that you are not equal to this service, you can cover your sins by the affection of love. And if in this also some sluggishness of mind makes you weak, at least you should submissively with a feeling of humility entreat for remedies for your wounds by the prayers and intercession of the saints. Finally who is there who cannot humbly say: "I have acknowledged my sin: and mine unrighteousness have I not hid;" so that by this confession he may be able also to add this: "And Thou forgavest the iniquity of my heart." [2139] But if shame holds you back, and you blush to reveal them before men, you should not cease to confess them with constant supplication to Him from Whom they cannot be hid, and to say to Him: "I acknowledge mine iniquity, and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee;" [2140] as He is wont to heal them without any publication which brings shame, and to forgive sins without any reproaching. And further besides that ready and sure aid the Divine condescension has afforded us another also that is still easier, and has entrusted the possession of the remedy to our own will, so that we can infer from our own feelings the forgiveness of our offences, when we say to Him: "Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors." [2141] Whoever then desires to obtain forgiveness of his sins, should study to fit himself for it by these means. Let not the stubbornness of an obdurate heart turn away any from the saving remedy and the fount of so much goodness, because even if we have done all these things, they will not be able to expiate our offences, unless they are blotted out by the goodness and mercy of the Lord, who when He sees the service of pious efforts offered by us with a humble heart, supports our small and puny efforts with the utmost bounty, and says: "I even I am He that blotteth out thine iniquities for Mine own sake, and I will remember thy sins no more." [2142] Whoever then is aiming at this condition, which we have mentioned, will seek the grace of satisfaction by daily fasting and mortification of heart and body, for, as it is written, "Without shedding of blood there is no remission;" [2143] and this not without good reason. For "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." [2144] And therefore one who would withhold "the sword of the spirit which is the word of God" [2145] from this shedding of blood certainly comes under the lash of that curse of Jeremiah's; for "Cursed," says he "is he who withholds his sword from blood." [2146] For this is the sword which for our good sheds that bad blood whereby the material of our sins lives; and cuts off and pares away everything carnal and earthly which it finds to have grown up in the members of our soul; and makes men die to sin and live to God, and flourish with spiritual virtues. And so he will begin to weep no more at the recollection of former sins, but at the hope of what is to come, and, thinking less of past evils than of good things to come, will shed tears not from sorrow at his sins, but from delight in that eternal joy, and "forgetting those things which are behind," i.e., carnal sins, will press on "to those before," [2147] i.e., to spiritual gifts and virtues.

Chapter IX. How valuable to the perfect is the forgetfulness of sin.

But with regard to this that you said a little way back; viz., that you of set purpose go over the recollections of past sins, this ought certainly not to be done, nay, if it forcibly surprises you, it must be at once expelled. For it greatly hinders the soul from the contemplation of purity, and especially in the case of one who is living in solitude, as it entangles him in the stains of this world and swamps him in foul sins. For while you are recalling those things which you did through ignorance or wantonness in accordance with the prince of this world, though I grant you that while you are engaged in these thoughts no delight in them steals in, yet at least the mere taint of the ancient filthiness is sure to corrupt your soul with its foul stink, and to shut out the spiritual fragrance of goodness, i.e., the odour of a sweet savour. When then the recollection of past sins comes over your mind, you must recoil from it just as an honest and upright man runs away if he is sought out in public by an immodest and wanton woman either by words or by embraces. And certainly unless he at once withdraws himself from contact with her, and if he allows himself to linger the very least in impure talk, even if he refuses his consent to the shameful pleasures, yet he cannot avoid the brand of infamy and scorn in the judgment of all the passers by. So then we also, if by noxious recollections we are led to thoughts of this kind, ought at once to desist from dwelling upon them and to fulfil what we are commanded by Solomon: "But go forth," says he, "do not linger in her place, nor fix thine eye on her;" [2148] lest if the angels see us taken up with unclean and foul thoughts, they may not be able to say to us in passing by: "The blessing of the Lord be upon you." [2149] For it is impossible for the soul to continue in good thoughts, when the main part of the heart is taken up with foul and earthly considerations. For this saying of Solomon's is true: "When thine eyes look on a strange woman, then shall thy mouth speak wickedly, and thou shalt lie as it were in the midst of the sea, and as a pilot in a great storm. But thou shalt say: They have beaten me, but I felt no pain; and they mocked me, but I felt not." [2150] So then we should forsake not only all foul but even all earthly thoughts and ever raise the desires of our soul to heavenly things, in accordance with this saying of our Saviour: "For where I am," He says, "there also shall My servant be." [2151] For it often happens that when anyone out of pity is in thought going over his own falls or those of other faulty persons, he is affected by the delight and assent to this most subtle attack, and that which was undertaken and started with a show of goodness ends with a filthy and damaging termination, for "there are ways which appear to men to be right, but the ends thereof will come to the depths of hell." [2152]

Chapter X. How the recollection of our sins should be avoided.

Wherefore we must endeavour to rouse ourselves to this praiseworthy contrition, by aiming at virtue and by the desire for the kingdom of heaven rather than by dangerous recollections of sins, for a man is sure to be suffocated by the pestilential smells of the sewer as long as he chooses to stand over it or to stir its filth.

Chapter XI. Of the marks of satisfaction, and the removal of past sins.

But we know, as we have often said, that then only have we made satisfaction for past sins, when the very motions and feelings, through which we were guilty of what we have to sorrow for, have been eradicated from our hearts. But no one should fancy that he can secure this, unless he has first with all the fervour of his spirit cut off the opportunities and occasions, owing to which he fell into those sins; as for instance, if through dangerous familiarity with a woman he has fallen into fornication or adultery, he must take the utmost pains to avoid even looking on one; or if he has been overcome by too much wine and over-eating, he should chastise with the utmost severity his craving for immoderate food. And again if he has been led astray by the desire for and love of money, and has fallen into perjury or theft or murder or blasphemy, he should cut off the occasion for avarice, which has allured and deceived him. If he is driven by the passion of pride into the sin of anger, he should with all the virtue of humility, remove the incentive to arrogance. And so, in order that each single sin may be destroyed, the occasion and opportunity by which or for which it was committed should be first got rid of. For by this curative treatment we can certainly attain to forgetfulness of the sins we have committed.

Chapter XII. Wherein we must do penance for a time only; and wherein it can have no end.

But that description of the forgetfulness spoken of only has to do with capital offences, which are also condemned by the mosaic law, the inclination to which is destroyed and put an end to by a good life, and so also the penance for them has an end. But for those small offences in which, as it is written, "the righteous falls seven times and will rise again" [2153] penitence will never cease. For either through ignorance, or forgetfulness, or thought, or word, or surprise, or necessity, or weakness of the flesh, or defilement in a dream, we often fall every day either against our will or voluntarily; offences for which David also prays the Lord, and asks for purification and pardon, and says: "Who can understand sins? from my secret ones cleanse me; and from those of others spare Thy servant;" [2154] and the Apostle: "For the good which I would I do not, and the evil which I would not, that I do." For which also the same man exclaims with a sigh "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" [2155] For we slip into these so easily as it were by a law of nature, that however carefully and guardedly we are on the lookout against them, we cannot altogether avoid them. Since it was of these that one of the disciples, whom Jesus loved, declared and laid down absolutely saying: "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and His word is not in us." [2156] Further for a man who is anxious to reach the heights of perfection it will not greatly help him to have arrived at the end of penitence, i.e., to restrain himself from unlawful acts, unless he has always urged himself forward in unwearied course to those virtues whereby we come to the signs of satisfaction. For it will not be enough for a man to have kept himself clear from those foul stains of sins which the Lord hates, unless he has also secured by purity of heart and perfect Apostolical love that sweet fragrance of virtue in which the Lord delights. Thus far Abbot Pinufius discoursed on the marks of satisfaction and the end of penitence. And although he pressed us with anxious love to decide to stay in his Coenobium, yet when he could not retain us, as we were incited by the fame of the desert of Scete, he sent us on our way.

XXI. The First Conference of Abbot Theonas.

On the Relaxation During the Fifty Days. [2157]

Chapter I. How Theonas came to Abbot John.

Before we begin to set forth the words of this Conference held with that excellent man Abbot Theonas, [2158] I think it well to describe in a brief discourse the origin of his conversion because from this the reader will be able to see more clearly both the excellence and the grace of the man. He then while still very young was by the desire and command of his parents joined in the tie of marriage, for as with pious anxiety they were careful about his chastity, and were afraid of a critical fall at a dangerous age, they thought that the passions of youth might be anticipated by the remedy of a lawful marriage. When then he had lived for five years with a wife, he came to Abbot John, who was then for his marvellous sanctity chosen to preside over the administration of the alms. [2159] For it is not anyone who likes who is of his own wish or ambition promoted to this office, but only he whom the congregation of all the Elders considers from the advantage of his age and the witness of his faith and virtues to be more excellent than, and superior to, all others. To this blessed John then the aforesaid young man had come in the eagerness of his pious devotion, bringing gifts of piety among other owners who were eager to offer tithes and first-fruits of their substance to the old man I mentioned, [2160] and when the old man saw them pouring in upon him with many gifts, and was anxious to make some recompense in return for their offerings, he began, as the Apostle says, to sow spiritual things to them whose carnal gifts he was reaping. [2161] And finally thus began his word of exhortation.

Chapter II. The exhortation of Abbot John to Theonas and the others who had come together with him.

I am indeed delighted, my children, with the duteous liberality of your gifts; and your devout offering, the disposal of which is entrusted to me, I gratefully accept, because you are offering your firstfruits and tithes for the good and use of the needy, as a sacrifice to the Lord, of a sweet smelling savour, in the belief that by the offering of them, the abundance of your fruits and all your substance, from which you have taken away these for the Lord, will be richly blessed, and that you yourselves will according to the faith of His command be endowed even in this world with manifold richness in all good things: "Honour the Lord from thy righteous labours, and offer to Him of the fruits of thy righteousness; that thy garners may be full of abundance of wheat, and thy vats may overflow with wine." [2162] And as you are faithfully carrying out this service, you may know that you have fulfilled the righteousness of the old law, under which those who then lived if they transgressed it inevitably incurred guilt, while if they fulfilled it they could not attain to a pitch of perfection.

Chapter III. Of the offering of tithes and firstfruits.

For indeed by the Lord's command tithes were consecrated to the service of the Levites, but oblations and firstfruits for the priests. [2163] But this was the law of the firstfruits; viz., that the fiftieth part of fruits or animals should be given for the service of the temple and the priests: and this proportion some who were faithlessly indifferent diminished, while those who were very religious increased it, so that the one gave only the sixtieth part, and the other gave the fortieth part of their fruits. For the righteous, for whom the law is not enacted, are thus shown to be not under the law, as they try not only to fulfil but even to exceed the righteousness of the law, and their devotion is greater than the legal requirement, as it goes beyond the observance of precepts and adds to what is due of its own free will.

Chapter IV. How Abraham, David, and other saints went beyond the requirement of the law.

For so we read that Abraham went beyond the requirement of the law which was afterwards to be given, when after his victory over the four kings, he would not touch any of the spoils of Sodom, which were fairly due to him as the conqueror, and which indeed the king himself, whose spoils he had rescued, offered him; and with an oath by the Divine name he exclaimed: "I lift up my hand to the Lord Most High, who made heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread to a shoe's latchet of all that is thine." [2164] So we know that David went beyond the requirement of the law, as, though Moses commanded that vengeance should be taken on enemies, [2165] he not only did not do this, but actually embraced his persecutors with love, and piously entreated the Lord for them, and wept bitterly and avenged them when they were slain. So we are sure that Elijah and Jeremiah were not under the law, as though they might without blame have taken advantage of lawful matrimony, yet they preferred to remain virgins. So we read that Elisha and others of the same mode of life went beyond the commands of Moses, as of them the Apostle speaks as follows: "They went about in sheepskins and in goatskins, they were oppressed, afflicted, in want, of whom the world was not worthy, they wandered about in deserts and in mountains, and in caves and in dens of the earth." [2166] What shall I say of the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab, of whom we are told that, when at the Lord's bidding the prophet Jeremiah offered them wine, they replied: "We drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying: Ye shall drink no wine, ye and your sons forever: and ye shall build no house, nor sow any seed, nor plant vineyards nor possess them: but ye shall dwell in tents all your days"? Wherefore also they were permitted to hear from the same prophet these words: "Thus saith the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel: there shall not fail a man from the stock of Jonadab the son of Rechab to stand in My sight all the days;" [2167] as all of them were not satisfied with merely offering tithes of their possessions, but actually refused property, and offered the rather to God themselves and their souls, for which no redemption can be made by man, as the Lord testifies in the gospel: "For what shall a man give in exchange for his own soul?" [2168]

Chapter V. How those who live under the grace of the Gospel ought to go beyond the requirement of the law.

Wherefore we ought to know that we from whom the requirements of the law are no longer exacted, but in whose ears the word of the gospel daily sounds: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come follow Me," [2169] when we offer to God tithes of our substance, are still in a way ground down beneath the burden of the law, and not able to rise to those heights of the gospel, those who conform to which are recompensed not only by blessings in this present life, but also by future rewards. For the law promises to those who obey it no rewards of the kingdom of heaven, but only solaces in this life, saying: "The man that doeth these things shall live in them." [2170] But the Lord says to His disciples: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;" and: "Everyone that leaveth house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or field for My name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life." [2171] And this with good reason. For it is not so praiseworthy for us to abstain from forbidden as from lawful things, and not to use these last out of reverence for Him, Who has permitted us to use them because of our weakness. And so if even those who, faithfully offering tithes of their fruits, are obedient to the more ancient precepts of the Lord, cannot yet climb the heights of the gospel, you can see very clearly how far short of it those fall who do not even do this. For how can those men be partakers of the grace of the gospel who disregard the fulfilment even of the lighter commands of the law, to the easy character of which the weighty words of the giver of the law bear testimony, as a curse is actually invoked on those who do not fulfil them; for it says: "Cursed is everyone that does not continue in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." [2172] But here on account of the superiority and excellence of the commandments it is said: "He that can receive it, let him receive it." [2173] There the forcible compulsion of the lawgiver shows the easy character of the precepts; for he says: "I call heaven and earth to record against you this day, that if ye do not keep the commandments of the Lord your God ye shall perish from off the face of the earth." [2174] Here the grandeur of sublime commands is shown by the very fact that He does not order, but exhorts, saying: "if thou wilt be perfect go" and do this or that. There Moses lays a burden that cannot be refused on those who are unwilling: here Paul meets with counsels those who are willing and eager for perfection. For that was not to be enjoined as a general charge, nor to be required, if I may so say, as a regular rule from all, which could not be secured by all, owing to its wonderful and lofty nature; but by counsels all are rather stimulated to grace, that those who are great may deservedly be crowned by the perfection of their virtues, while those who are small, and not able to come up to "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," [2175] although they seem to be lost to sight and hidden as it were by the brightness of larger stars, may yet be free from the darkness of the curses which are in the law, and not adjudged to suffer present evils or visited with eternal punishment. Christ therefore does not constrain anyone, by the compulsion of a command, to those lofty heights of goodness, but stimulates them by the power of free will, and urges them on by wise counsels and the desire of perfection. For where there is a command, there

is duty, and consequently punishment. But those who keep those things to which they are driven by the severity of the law established escape the punishment with which they were threatened, instead of obtaining rewards and a recompense.

Chapter VI. How the grace of the gospel supports the weak so that they can obtain pardon, as it secures to the perfect the kingdom of God.

And as the word of the gospel raises those that are strong to sublime and lofty heights, so it suffers not the weak to be dragged down to the depths, for it secures to the perfect the fulness of blessing, and brings to those who are overcome through weakness pardon. For the law placed those who fulfilled its commands in a sort of middle state between what they deserved in either case, severing them from the condemnation due to transgressors, as it also kept them away from the glory of the perfect. But how wretched and miserable this is, you can see from comparing the state of this present life, in which it is considered a very poor thing for a man to sweat and labour only to avoid being regarded as guilty among good men, not also to be esteemed rich and honourable and renowned.

Chapter VII. How it lies in our own power to choose whether to remain under the grace of the gospel or under the terror of the law.

Wherefore it lies today in our own power whether we choose to live under the grace of the gospel or under the terrors of the law: for each man must incline to one side or the other in accordance with the character of his actions, for either the grace of Christ welcomes those who go beyond the law, or else the law keeps its hold over the weaker ones as those who are its debtors and within its clutches. For one who is guilty as regards the precepts of the law will never be able to attain to the perfection of the gospel, even though he idly boasts that he is a Christian and freed by the Lord's grace: for we must not only regard as still under the law the man who refuses to fulfil what the law enjoins, but the man as well who is satisfied with the mere observance of what the law commands, and who never brings forth fruits worthy of his vocation and the grace of Christ, where it is not said: "Thou shalt offer to the Lord thy God thy tithes and firstfruits;" but: "Go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and come follow Me;" [2176] where, owing to the grandeur of perfection, to the request of the disciple there is not granted even the very short space of an hour in which to bury his father, [2177] as the offices of human charity are outweighed by the virtue of Divine love.

Chapter VIII. How Theonas exhorted his wife that she too should make her renunciation.

And when he had heard this the blessed Theonas was fired with an uncontrollable desire for the perfection of the gospel, and, committed, as it were, the seed of the word, which he had received in a fruitful heart, to the deep and broken furrows of his bosom, as he was greatly humiliated and conscience-stricken because the old man had said not only that he had failed to attain to the perfection of the gospel, but also that he had scarcely fulfilled the commands of the law; since though he was accustomed every year to pay the tithes of his fruits as alms, yet he mourned that he had never even heard of the law of the firstfruits; and even if he had in the same way fulfilled this, he humbly confessed that still he would in the old man's view have been very far from the perfection of the gospel. And so he returned home sad and filled with that sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation, [2178] and of his own will and determination turns all his wife's care and anxiety of mind towards salvation; and began to stir her up to the same eager desire with which he himself had been inflamed, with the same sort of exhortations, and with tears day and night to urge her that together they might serve God in sanctity and chastity, telling her that their conversion to a better life ought not to be deferred because a vain hope in their youth would be no argument against the inevitableness of a sudden death, which carries off boys and youths and young persons equally with old men.

Chapter IX. How he fled to a monastery when his wife would not consent.

And when his wife was hard and would not consent to him as he constantly persisted with entreaties of this kind, but said that as she was in the flower of her age she could not altogether do without the solace of her husband, and further that supposing she was deserted by him and fell into sin, the guilt would rather be his who had broken the bonds of wedlock: to this he, when he had for a long while urged the condition of human nature (which being so weak and uncertain, it would be dangerous for it to be any longer mixed up with carnal desires and works), added the assertion that it was not right for anyone to cut himself off from that virtue to which he had learnt that he ought by all means to cleave, and that it was more dangerous to disregard goodness when discovered, than to fail to love it before it was discovered; further that he was already involved in the guilt of a fall if when he had discovered such grand and heavenly blessings he had preferred earthly and mean ones. Further that the grandeur of perfection was open to every age and either sex, and that all the members of the Church were urged to scale the heights of heavenly goodness when the Apostle said: "So run that ye may obtain;" [2179] nor should those who were ready and eager for it hang back because of the delays of the slow and dawdlers, as it is better for the sluggards to be urged on by those running before than for those who are doing their best to be hampered by the slothful. Further that he had determined and made up his mind to renounce the world and to die to the world that he might live to God, and that if he could not attain this happiness; viz., to pass with his wife into union with Christ, he would rather be saved even with the loss of one member, and enter into the kingdom of heaven as one maimed rather than be condemned with his body whole. But he also added and spoke as follows: If Moses suffered wives to be divorced for the hardness of their hearts, why should not Christ allow this for the desire of chastity, especially when the same Lord among those other affections; viz., for fathers and mothers and children (all due regard to which not only the law but He Himself also charged to be shown, yet for His name's sake and for the desire of perfection He decreed that they should not simply be disregarded but actually hated) -- to these, I say, He joined also the mention of wives, saying: "And everyone that hath left house, or brethren or sisters or father or mother or wife or children for My name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold and shall inherit eternal life." [2180] So far then is He from allowing anything to be set against that perfection which He is proclaiming, that He actually enjoins that the ties to father and mother should be broken and disregarded out of love for Him, though according to the Apostle it is the first commandment with promise; viz., "Honour thy father and thy mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee and that thy days may be long upon earth." [2181] And as the word of the gospel condemns those who break the chains of matrimony where there has been no sin of adultery, so it clearly promises a reward of an hundredfold to those who have cast off a carnal yoke out of love for Christ and the desire for chastity. Wherefore if it can be brought about that you may listen to reason and be turned together with me to this most desirable choice; viz., that we should together serve the Lord and escape the pains of hell, I will not refuse the affection of marriage, nay I will embrace it

with a still greater love. For I acknowledge and honour my helpmeet assigned to me by the word of the Lord, and I do not refuse to be joined to her in an unbroken tie of love in Christ, nor do I separate from me what the Lord joined to me by the law of the original condition, [2182] if only you yourself will be what your Maker meant you to be. But if you will not be a helpmeet, but prefer to make yourself a deceiver and an assistance not to me but to the adversary, and fancy that the sacrament of matrimony was granted to you for this reason that you may deprive yourself of this salvation which is offered to you, and also hold me back from following the Saviour as a disciple, then I will resolutely lay hold on the words which were uttered by the lips of Abbot John, or rather of Christ Himself, so that no carnal affection may be able to tear me away from spiritual blessings, for He says: "He that hateth not father and mother and children and brothers and sisters and wife and lands, yea and his own soul also, cannot be My disciple." [2183] When then by these and such like words the woman's purpose was not moved and she persisted in the same obstinate hardness, If, said the blessed Theonas, I cannot drag you away from death, neither shall you separate me from Christ: but it is safer for me to be divorced from a human person than from God. And so by the aid of God's grace he at once set about the execution of his purpose and suffered not the ardour of his desire to grow cool through any delay. For at once he stripped himself of all his worldly goods, and fled to a monastery, where in a very short time he was so famous for the splendour of his sanctity and humility that when John of blessed memory departed this life to the Lord, and the holy Elias, a man who was no less great than his predecessor, had likewise died, Theonas was chosen by the judgment of all as the third to succeed them in the administration of the almsgiving.

Chapter X. An explanation that we may not appear to recommend separation from wives.

But let no one imagine that we have invented this for the sake of encouraging divorce, as we not only in no way condemn marriage, but also, following the words of the Apostle, say: "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled," [2184] but it was in order faithfully to show the reader the origin of the conversion by which this great man was dedicated to God. And I ask the reader kindly, to allow that, whether he likes this or no, in either case I am free from blame, and to give the praise or blame for this act to its real author. But as for me, as I have not put forward an opinion of my own on this matter, but have given a simple narration of the history of the facts, it is fair that as I claim no praise from those who approve of what was done, so I should not be attacked by the hatred of those who disapprove of it. Let every man therefore, as we said, have his own opinion on the matter. But I advise him to restrain his censure in considering it, lest he come to fancy that he is more just and holy than the Divine judgment, whereby the signs even of Apostolic virtue were conferred upon him (viz., Theonas), not to mention the opinion of such great fathers by whom it is clear that his action was not only not blamed, but even so far praised that in the election to the office of almoner they preferred him to splendid and most excellent men. And I fancy that the judgment of so many spiritual men, uttered with God as its author, was not wrong, as it was, as was said above, confirmed by such wonderful signs.

Chapter XI. An inquiry why in Egypt they do not fast during all the fifty days (of Easter) nor bend their knees in prayer.

But it is now time to follow out the plan of the promised discourse. So then when Abbot Theonas had come to visit us in our cell during Eastertide [2185] after Evensong was over we sat for a little while on the ground and began diligently to consider why they were so very careful that no one should during the whole fifty days either bend his knees in prayer [2186] or venture to fast till the ninth hour, and we made our inquiry the more earnestly because we had never seen this custom so carefully observed in the monasteries of Syria.

Chapter XII. The answer on the nature of things good, bad, and indifferent.

To this Abbot Theonas thus began his reply. It is indeed right for us, even when we cannot see the reason, to yield to the authority of the fathers and to a custom of our predecessors that has been continued through so many years down to our own time, and to observe it, as handed down from antiquity, with constant care and reverence. But since you want to know the reasons and grounds for this, receive in few words what we have heard as handed down by our Elders on this subject. But before we bring forward the authority of Holy Scripture, we will, if you please, say a little about the nature and character of the fast, that afterwards the authority of Holy Scripture may support our words. The Divine Wisdom has pointed out in Ecclesiastes that for everything, i.e., for all things happy or those which are considered unfortunate and unhappy, there is a right time: saying: "For all things there is a time, and a time for everything under the heaven. A time to bring forth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pull down what is planted; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to destroy and a time to build; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to get and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to send away; a time to scatter and a time to collect; a time to be silent and a time to speak; a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace;" and below: "For there is a time," it says, "for everything and for every deed." [2187] None therefore of these things does it lay down as always good, but only when any of them are fittingly done and at the right time, so that these very things which at one time, when done at the right moment, turn out well, if they are ventured on at a wrong or unsuitable time, are found to be useless or harmful; only excepting those things which are in their own nature good or bad, and which cannot ever be made the opposite, as, e.g., justice, prudence, fortitude, temperance and the rest of the virtues, or on the other hand, those faults, the description of which cannot possibly be altered or fall under the other head. But those things which can sometimes turn out with either result, so that, in accordance with the character of those who use them, they are found to be either good or bad, these we consider to be not absolutely in their own natures useful or injurious, but only so in accordance with the mind of the doer, and the suitability of the time.

Chapter XIII. What kind of good fasting is.

Wherefore we must now inquire what we ought to hold about the state of fasting, whether we meant that it was good in the same sort of way as justice, prudence, fortitude and temperance, which cannot possibly be made anything else, or whether it is something indifferent which sometimes is useful when done, and may be sometimes omitted without condemnation; and which sometimes it is wrong to do, and sometimes laudable to omit. For if we hold fasting to be included in that list of virtues, so that abstinence from food is placed among those things which are good in themselves, then certainly the partaking of food will be bad and wrong. For whatever is the opposite of that which is in its own nature good, must certainly be held to be in its own nature bad. But this the authority of Holy Scripture does not allow to us to lay down. For if we fast with such thoughts and intentions, so as to think that we fall into sin by taking food, we shall not only gain no advantage by our abstinence but shall actually contract grievous guilt and fall into the sin of impiety, as the Apostle says: "Abstaining from meats which God has created to be received with thanksgiving by the faithful and those who know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused if it is partaken of with thanksgiving." For "if a man thinks that a thing is common, to him it is common." [2188] And therefore we never read that anyone is condemned simply for taking food, but only when something was joined with it or followed afterwards, for which he deserved condemnation.

Chapter XIV. How fasting is not good in its own nature.

And so that it is a thing indifferent is very clearly shown from this also; viz., because as it brings justification when observed, so it does not bring condemnation when it is broken in upon; unless perhaps the transgression of a command rather than the partaking of food brings punishment. But in the case of a thing that is good in its own nature, no time should be without it, in such a way as that a man may do without it, for if it ceases, the man who is careless about it is sure to fall into mischief. Nor again is any time given for what is bad in its own nature, because what is hurtful cannot help hurting, if it is indulged in, nor can it ever be made of a praiseworthy character. And further it is clear that these things, for which we see conditions and times appointed, and which sanctify, when observed without corrupting us when they are neglected, are things indifferent, as, e.g., marriage, agriculture, riches, retirement into the desert, vigils, reading and meditation on Holy Scripture and fasting itself, from which our discussion took its rise. All of which things the Divine precepts and the authority of Holy Scripture decreed should not be so incessantly aimed at, or so constantly observed, as for it to be wrong for them to be for a time intermitted. For anything that is absolutely commanded brings death if it be not fulfilled: but whatever things we are urged to rather than commanded, when done are useful, when left undone bring no punishment. And therefore in the case of all or some of these things our predecessors commanded us either to do them with consideration, or to observe them carefully with regard to the reason, place, manner, and time, because if any of them are done suitably, it is fit and convenient, but if incongruously, then it becomes foolish and hurtful. And if at the coming of a brother in whose person he ought to refresh Christ with courtesy and to embrace him with a most kindly welcome, a man should choose to observe a strict fast, would he not rather be guilty of incivility than gain the praise or reward of devoutness? or if when the failure or weakness of the flesh requires the strength to be restored by the partaking of food, a man will not consent to relax the rigour of his abstinence, is he not to be regarded as a cruel murderer of his own body rather than as one who is careful for his salvation? So too when a festival season permits a suitable indulgence in food and a necessarily liberal repast, if a man will resolutely cling to the strict observance of a fast he must be considered as not religious so much as boorish and unreasonable. But to those men also will these things be found bad, who are on the lookout for the praises of men by their fasts, and by a foolish show of paleness gain credit for sanctity, of whom the word of the Gospel tells us that they have received their reward in this life, and whose fast the Lord execrates by the prophet. In whose person he first objected to himself and said: "Wherefore have we fasted and Thou hast not regarded: wherefore have we humbled our souls, and Thou hast not known it?" and then at once he answered and explained the reasons why they did not deserve to be heard: "Behold," he says, "in the days of your fast your own will is found and you exact of all your debtors. Behold you fast for debates and strife, and strike with the fist wickedly. Do not fast as ye have done unto this day, to make your cry to be heard on high. Is this such a fast as I have chosen, for a man to afflict his soul for a day? Is it this, to wind his head about like a circle, and to spread sackcloth and ashes? Will ye call this a fast and a day acceptable to the Lord?" Then he proceeds to teach how the abstinence of one who fasts may become acceptable, and clearly lays down that fasting cannot be good of itself alone,

but only when it has the following reasons which are added: "Is not this," he says, "the fast that I have chosen? Loose the bands of wickedness, undo the bundles that oppress, let them that are broken go free, and break asunder every burden. Deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the needy and the harbourless into thine house: and when thou shalt see one naked cover him, and despise not thine own flesh. Then shalt thy light break forth as the morning and thy health shall speedily arise, and thy righteousness shall go before thy face and the glory of the Lord shall gather thee up. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall hear: thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here am I." [2189] You see then that fasting is certainly not considered by the Lord as a thing that is good in its own nature, because it becomes good and well-pleasing to God not by itself but by other works, and again from the surrounding circumstances it may be regarded as not merely vain but actually hateful, as the Lord says: "When they fast I will not hear their prayers." [2190]

Chapter XV. How a thing that is good in its own nature ought not to be done for the sake of some lesser good.

For we ought not to practise pity, patience and love, and the precepts of the virtues mentioned above, wherein there is what is good in its own nature, for the sake of fasting, but rather fasting for the sake of them. For our endeavour must be that those virtues which are really good may be gained by fasting, not that the practice of those virtues may lead to fasting as its end. For this then the affliction of the flesh is useful, for this the remedy of abstinence must be employed; viz., that by it we may succeed in attaining to love, wherein there is what is good without change, and continually with no exception of time. For medicines, and the goldsmith's art, and the systems of other arts which there are in this world are not employed for the sake of the instruments which belong to the particular work; but rather the implements are prepared for the practice of the art. And as they are useful for those who understand them, so they are useless to those who are ignorant of the system of the art in question; and as they are a great help to those who rely on their aid for doing their work, so they cannot be of the smallest use to those who do not know for what purpose they were made, and are contented simply with the possession of them; because they make all their value consist in the mere having of them, and not in the performance of work. That then is in its own nature the best thing, for the sake of which things indifferent are done, but the very chiefest good is done not for the sake of anything else but because of its own intrinsic goodness.

Chapter XVI. How what is good in its own nature can be distinguished from other things that are good.

And this may be distinguished from those other things which we have termed indifferent, in these ways: if a thing is good in itself and not by reason of something else: if it is useful for its own sake, and not for the sake of something else: if it is unchangeably and at all times good, and always keeps its character and can never become anything different: if its removal or cessation cannot fail to produce the greatest harm: if that which is its opposite is in the same way evil in its own nature, and can never be turned into anything good. And these descriptions by which the nature of things that are good in themselves can be distinguished, cannot possibly be applied to fasting, for it is not good of itself, nor useful for its own sake because it is wisely used for the acquisition of purity of heart and body, that the pricks of the flesh being dulled the soul may be pacified and reconciled to its Creator, nor is it unchangeably and at all times good, because often we are not injured by its intermission, and indeed sometimes if it is unreasonably practised it becomes injurious. Nor is that which seems its opposite evil in its own nature, i.e., the partaking of food, which is naturally agreeable, which cannot be regarded as evil, unless intemperance and luxury or some other faults are the result; "For not that which entereth into the mouth, defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth, that defileth a man." [2191] And so a man disparages what is good in its own nature, and does not treat it properly or without sin, if he does it not for its own sake but for the sake of something else, for everything else should be done for the sake of it, but it should be sought for its own sake alone.

Chapter XVII. Of the reason for fasting and its value.

So then let us constantly remember this description of the character of fasting, and always aim at it with all the powers of the soul, in such a way as to recognize that then only is it suitable for us if in it we preserve regard for time, its character and degree, and this not so as to set the end of our hope upon it, but so that by it we may succeed in attaining to purity of heart and Apostolical love. Therefore from this it is clear that fasting, for which not only are there special seasons appointed at which it should be practised or relaxed, but conditions and rules also laid down, is not good in its own nature, but something indifferent. But those things which are either enjoined as good by the authority of a precept, or are forbidden as bad, are never subject to any exceptions of time in such a way that sometimes we should do what is forbidden or omit what is commanded. For there is no limit set to justice, patience, soberness, modesty, love, nor on the other hand is a licence ever granted for injustice, impatience, wrath, immodesty, envy, and pride.

Chapter XVIII. How fasting is not always suitable.

Wherefore as we have premised this on the conditions of fasting, it seems well to subjoin the authority of Holy Scripture, by which it will be more clearly proved that fasting neither can nor should be always observed. In the Gospel when the Pharisees were fasting together with the disciples of John the Baptist, as the Apostles, as friends and companions of the heavenly Bridegroom, were not yet keeping the observance of a fast, the disciples of John (who thought that they acquired perfect righteousness by their fasts, as they were followers of that grand preacher of repentance who afforded a pattern to all the people by his own example, as he not only refused the different kinds of food which are supplied for man's use, but actually altogether did without eating the bread which is common to all) complained to the Lord and said: "Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft but thy disciples fast not?" to whom the Lord in His reply plainly showed that fasting is not suitable or necessary at all times, when any festival season or opportunity for love intervenes and permits an indulgence in food, saying: "Can the children of the bridegroom mourn while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them; and then shall they fast;" [2192] words which although they were spoken before the resurrection of His Body, yet specially point to the season of Eastertide, in which after His resurrection for forty days He ate with His disciples, and their joy in His daily Presence did not allow them to fast.

Chapter XIX. A question why we break the fast all through Eastertide.

Germanus: Why then do we relax the rigour of our abstinence in our meals all through the fifty days, whereas Christ only remained with His disciples for forty days after His resurrection?

Chapter XX. The answer.

Your pertinent question deserves to be told the perfect true reason. After the Ascension of our Saviour which took place on the fortieth day after His Resurrection, the apostles returned from the Mount of Olives, on which He had suffered them to see Him when He was returning to the Father, as the book of the Acts of the Apostles also testifies, and entered Jerusalem and are said to have waited ten days for the coming of the Holy Ghost, and when these were fulfilled on the fiftieth day they received Him with joy. And thus in this way the number of this festival was clearly made up, which as we read was figuratively foreshadowed also in the Old Testament, where when seven weeks were fulfilled the bread of the firstfruits was ordered to be offered by the priests to the Lord: [2193] and this was indeed shown to be offered to the Lord by the preaching of the Apostles which they are said on that day to have addressed to the people; the true bread of the firstfruits, which when produced from the instruction of a new doctrine, consecrated the firstfruits of the Jews as a Christian people to the Lord, five thousand men being filled with the gifts of the food. And therefore these ten days are to be kept with equal solemnity and joy as the previous forty. And the tradition about this festival, transmitted to us by Apostolic men, should be kept with the same uniformity. For therefore on those days they do not bow their knees in prayer, because the bending of the knees is a sign of penitence and mourning. Wherefore also during these days we observe in all things the same solemnities as on Sunday, on which day our predecessors taught that men ought not to fast nor to bow the knee, out of reverence for the Lord's Resurrection.

Chapter XXI. A question whether the relaxation of the fast is not prejudicial to the chastity of the body.

Germanus: Can the flesh, attracted by the unwonted luxuries of so long a festival fail to produce something thorny from the incentives to sin although they have been cut down? or can the soul weighed down by the consumption of unaccustomed feasts fail to mitigate the rigour of its rule over its servant the body, especially when in our case our mature age can excite our subject members to a speedy revolt, if we venture to take our usual food in larger quantities, or unaccustomed food more freely than usual?

Chapter XXII. The answer on the way to keep control over abstinence.

Theonas: If we weigh everything that we do, by a reasonable judgment of the mind, and on the purity of our heart always consult not the opinions of other people but our own conscience, that interval for refreshment is sure not to interfere with our proper strictness, if only, as was said, our pure mind impartially considers the right limits of indulgence and abstinence, and fairly checks excess in either, and with real discrimination discerns whether the weight of the delicacies is a burden upon our spirits, or whether too much austerity in abstaining weighs down the other side, i.e., that of the body, and either depresses or raises that side which it sees to be raised or weighed down. For our Lord would have nothing done to His honour and glory without being tempered by judgment, for "the honour of a king loveth judgment," [2194] and therefore Solomon, the wisest of men, urges us not to let our judgment incline to either side, saying: "Honour God with thy righteous labours and offer to Him of the fruits of thy righteousness." [2195] For we have residing in our conscience an uncorrupt and true judge who sometimes, when all are wrong, is the only person not deceived as to the state of our purity. And so with all care and pains we should preserve a constant purpose in our circumspect heart for fear lest if the judgment of our discretion goes wrong, we may be fired with the desire for an ill-considered abstinence, or allured by the wish for an excessive relaxation, and so weigh the substance of our strength in the tongue of an unfair balance; but we should place in one of the scales our purity of soul, and in the other our bodily strength, and weigh them both in the true judgment of conscience, so that we may not perversely incline the scale of fairness to either side, either to undue strictness or to excessive relaxation, from the preponderating desire for one or the other, and so have this said to us by reason of excessive strictness or relaxation: "If thou offerest rightly, but dost not divide rightly, hast thou not sinned?" [2196] For those offerings of fasts, which we thoughtlessly extort by violently tearing our bowels, and fancy that we rightly offer to the Lord, these He execrates who "loves mercy and judgment" saying: "I the Lord love judgment, but I hate robbery in a burnt offering." [2197] Those also who take the main part of their offerings, i.e., their offices and actions, to benefit the flesh for their own use, but leave the remains of them and a tiny portion for the Lord, these the Divine Word thus condemns as fraudulent workmen: "Cursed is he that doeth the work of the Lord fraudulently." [2198] It is not then without reason that the Lord reproves him who thus deceives himself by unfair considerations, saying: "But vain are the children of men: the children of men are liars upon the balances that they may deceive." [2199] And therefore the blessed Apostle warns us to keep hold of the reins of discretion and not to be attracted by excess and swerve to either side, saying: "Your reasonable service." [2200] And the giver of the law similarly forbids the same thing, saying: "Let the balance be just and the weights equal, the bushel just and the sextarius equal," [2201] and Solomon also gives a like opinion on this matter: "Great and small weights and double measures are both unclean before the Lord, and one who uses them shall be hindered in his contrivances." [2202] Further not only in the way in which we have said, but also in this must we strive not to have unfair weights in our hearts, nor double measures in the storehouse of our conscience, i.e., not to

overwhelm those, to whom we are to preach the word of the Lord, with precepts that are too strict and heavier than we ourselves can bear, while we take for granted that for ourselves those things which have to do with the rule of strictness are to be softened by a freer allowance of relaxation. For when we do this, what is it but to weigh and measure the goods and fruits of the Lord's commands in a double weight and measure? For if we dispense them in one way to ourselves and in another to our brethren, we are rightly blamed by the Lord because we have unfair balances and double measures, in accordance with the saying of Solomon which tells us that "A double weight is an abomination to the Lord, and a deceitful balance is not good in His sight." [2203] In this way also we plainly incur the guilt of using a deceitful weight and a double measure, if out of the desire for the praise of men, we make a show before the brethren of greater strictness than what we practice in private in our own cells, trying to appear more abstinent and holier in the sight of men than in the sight of God, an evil which we should not only avoid but actually loathe. But meanwhile as we have wandered some way from the question before us, let us return to the point from which we started.

Chapter XXIII. Of the time and measure of refreshment.

So then we should keep the observance of the days mentioned in such a way that the relaxation allowed may be useful rather than harmful to the good of body and soul, because the joy of any festival cannot blunt the pricks of the flesh, nor can that fierce enemy of ours be pacified by regard for days. In order then that the observance of the customs appointed for festival seasons may be kept and that the most salutary rule of abstinence be not at all exceeded it is enough for us to allow the permitted relaxation to go so far, as for us out of regard for the festival season to take the food, which ought to be taken at the ninth hour, a little earlier; viz., at the sixth hour, but with this condition, that the regular allowance and character of the food be not altered, for fear lest the purity of body and uprightness of soul which has been gained by the abstinence of Lent be lost by the relaxation of Eastertide, and it profit us nothing to have acquired by our fast what a careless satiety causes us presently to lose, especially as the well-known cunning of our enemy assaults the stronghold of our purity then chiefly when he sees that our guard over it is somewhat relaxed at the celebration of some festival. Wherefore we must most vigilantly look out that the vigour of our soul be never enervated by seductive flatteries, and we lose not the purity of our chastity, gained, as was said, by the continuous efforts of Lent, by the repose and carelessness of Eastertide. And therefore no addition at all should be made to the quality or the quantity of the food, but even on the highest festivals we should similarly abstain from those foods, by abstinence from which we preserve our uprightness on common days, that the joy of the festival may not excite in us a most deadly conflict of carnal desires, and so be turned to grief, and put an end to that most excellent festival of the heart, which exults in the joy of purity; and after a brief show of carnal joy we begin to mourn our lost purity of heart with a lasting sorrow of repentance. Moreover we should strive that this warning of the prophetic exhortation may not be uttered against us to no purpose: "Celebrate, O Judah, thy festivals, and pay thy vows." [2204] For if the occurrence of festival days does not interfere with the continuity of our abstinence, we shall continually enjoy spiritual festivals and so, when we cease from servile work, "there shall be month after month and Sabbath after Sabbath." [2205]

Chapter XXIV. A question on the different ways of keeping Lent.

Germanus: What is the reason why Lent is kept for six weeks, while in some countries a possibly more earnest care for religion seems to have added a seventh week as well, though neither number when you subtract Sunday and Saturday, gives the total of forty days? For only six and thirty days are included in these weeks. [2206]

Chapter XXV. The answer to the effect that the fast of Lent has reference to the tithe of the year.

Theonas: Although the pious simplicity of some folks would put aside a question on this subject, yet because you are more scrupulous in your examination of those things which another would consider unworthy to be asked about, and want to know the whole truth of this observance of ours and the secret of it, you shall have a very clear reason for this also, that you may still more plainly be convinced that our predecessors taught nothing unreasonable. By the law of Moses the command propounded to all the people generally was this: "Thou shalt offer to the Lord thy God thy tithes and firstfruits." [2207] And so, while we are commanded to offer tithes of our substance and all our fruits, it is much more needful for us to offer tithes of our life and ordinary employments and actions, which certainly is clearly arranged for in the calculation of Lent. For the tithe of the number of all the days included in the revolving circle of the year is thirty-six days and a half. But in seven weeks, if Sundays and Saturdays are subtracted, there remain thirty-five days assigned for fasting. But by the addition of Easter Eve when the Saturday's fast is prolonged to the cock-crowing at the dawn of Easter Day, not only is the number of thirty-six days made up, but in regard to the tithe of the five days which seemed to be over, if the bit of the night which was added be taken into account nothing will be wanting to the whole sum.

Chapter XXVI. How we ought also to offer our firstfruits to the Lord.

But what shall I say of the firstfruits which surely are given daily by all who serve Christ faithfully? For when men waking from sleep and arising with renewed activity after their rest, before they take in any impulse or thought in their heart, or admit any recollection or consideration of business consecrate their first and earliest thoughts as divine offerings, what are they doing indeed but rendering the firstfruits of their produce through the High Priest Jesus Christ for the enjoyment of this life and a figure of the daily resurrection? And also when roused from sleep in the same way they offer to God a sacrifice of joy and invoke Him with the first motion of their tongue and celebrate His name and praise, and throwing open, the first thing, the door of their lips to sing hymns to Him they offer to God the offices of their mouth; and to Him also in the same way their bring the earliest offerings of their hands and steps, when they rise from bed and stand in prayer and before they use the services of their limbs for their own purposes, take to themselves nothing of their services, but for His glory advance their steps, and set them in His praise and so render the first fruits of all their movements by stretching forth the hands, bending the knees, and prostrating the whole body. For in no other way can we fulfil that of which we sing in the Psalm: "I prevented the dawning of the day and cried;" and: "Mine eyes to Thee have prevented the morning that I might meditate on Thy words;" and: "In the morning shall my prayer prevent Thee;" [2208] unless after our rest in sleep when, as we said above, we are restored as from darkness and death to this light, we have the courage not to begin by taking any of all the services both of mind and body for our own uses. For there is no other morning which the prophet "prevented," or which in the same way we ought to prevent, except either ourselves, i.e., our occupations and feelings and earthly cares, without which we cannot exist -- or the most subtle suggestions of the adversary, which he tries to suggest to us, while still resting and overcome with sleep, by the phantoms of vain dreams, with which, when we presently awake, he will fill our minds and occupy us, that he may be the first to seize and carry off the spoils of our firstfruits. Wherefore we must take the utmost care (if we want to fulfil in act the meaning of the above quoted verse) that an anxious watchfulness takes regard of our first and earliest morning thoughts, that they may not be defiled beforehand being hastily taken possession of by our jealous adversary, and thus he may make our firstfruits to be rejected by the Lord as worthless and common. And if he is not prevented by us with watchful circumspection of mind, he will not lay aside his habit of miserably anticipating us nor cease day after day to prevent us by his wiles. And therefore if we want to offer firstfruits that are acceptable and well pleasing to God of the fruits of our mind, we ought to spend no ordinary care to keep all the senses of our body, especially during the hours of the morning, as a sacred holocaust to the Lord pure and undefiled in all things. And this kind of devotion many even of those who live in the world observe with the utmost care, as they rise before it is light or very early, and do not at all mix in the ordinary and necessary business of this world before hastening to church and striving to consecrate in the sight of God the firstfruits of all their actions and doings.

Chapter XXVII. Why Lent is kept by very many with a different number of days.

Further, as for what you say; viz., that in some countries Lent is kept in different ways, i.e., for six or seven weeks, it is but one system and the same manner of the fast that is preserved by the different observance of the weeks. For those who think one ought to fast also on the Saturday, have determined on the observance of six weeks. They therefore fast for six days out of the seven, and this being six times repeated makes up the six and thirty days. It is therefore, as we said, but one system and the same manner of the fast, although there seems to be a difference in the number of the weeks.

Chapter XXVIII. Why it is called Quadragesima, when the fast is only kept for thirty-six days.

But further, as man's carelessness dropped out of sight the reason of this, this season when, as was said, the tithes of the year are offered by fasts for thirty-six days and a half, was called Quadragesima, [2209] a name which perhaps they thought ought to be given to it for this reason; viz., that it is said that Moses and Elijah and our Lord Jesus Christ Himself fasted for forty days. To the mystery of which number are not unsuitably applied those forty years in which Israel dwelt in the wilderness, and in like manner the forty stations which they are said to have passed through with a mystic meaning. Or perhaps the tithes were properly given the name of Quadragesima from the use of the custom-house. For so that state tax is commonly called, from which the same proportion of the increment is assigned for the king's use, as the legal tribute of Quadragesima, which is required of us by the King of all the ages for the use of our life. At any rate, although this has nothing to do with the question raised, yet I think that I ought not to omit the fact that very often our elders used to testify that especially on these days the whole body of monks was attacked according to the ancient custom of the people opposed to them, and was more vehemently urged to forsake their homes, for this reason, because in accordance with this figure, whereby the Egyptians formerly oppressed the children of Israel with grievous afflictions, so now also the spiritual Egyptians try to bow down the true Israel, i.e., the monastic folk, with hard and vile tasks, lest by means of that peace which is dear to God, we should forsake the land of Egypt, and for our good cross to the desert of virtues, so that Pharaoh rages against us and says: "They are idle and therefore they cry saying: Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord our God. Let them be oppressed with labours, and be harassed in their works, and they shall not be harassed by vain words." [2210] For certainly their folly imagines that the holy sacrifice of the Lord, which is only offered in the desert of a pure heart, is the height of folly, for "religion is an abomination to a sinner." [2211]

Chapter XXIX. How those who are perfect go beyond the fixed rule of Lent.

By this law of Lent then the man who is upright and perfect is not restrained nor is he content with merely submitting to that paltry rule which the heads of the church have established for those who all the year round are involved in pleasure or business, that they may be bound by this legal requirement and forced at any rate during these days to find time for the Lord, and dedicate to Him the tithes of the days of their life, all of which they would have consumed as their profits. But the righteous, for whom the law is not appointed, and who devote to spiritual duties not a small part; viz., the tenth, but the whole time of their life, because they are free from the burden of tithes according to law, for this reason, if any worthy and pious occasion happening to them constrains them, are ready to relax their station fast [2212] without any hesitation. For in their case it is no paltry tithes that is diminished, as they offer all that they have to the Lord equally with themselves. And this certainly a man could not do without being guilty of a grievous wrong, who, offering nothing of his own free will to God, is forced to pay his tithes by the stern compulsion of the law which takes no excuse. Wherefore it is clearly established that the servant of the law cannot be perfect, who only shuns those things which are forbidden and does those things which are commanded, but that those are really perfect who do not take advantage even of those things which the law allows. And in this way, though it is said of the Mosaic law that "the law brought nothing to perfection," [2213] we read that some of the saints in the Old Testament were perfect because they went beyond the commands of the law and lived under the perfection of the Gospel: "Knowing that the law is not appointed for the righteous but for the unrighteous and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the wicked and defiled, etc." [2214]

Chapter XXX. Of the origin and beginning of Lent.

Howbeit you should know that as long as the primitive church retained its perfection unbroken, this observance of Lent did not exist. For they were not bound by the requirements of this order, or by any legal enactments, nor confined in the very narrow limits of the fast, as the fast embraced equally the whole year round. But when the multitude of believers began day by day to decline from that apostolic fervour, and to look after their own wealth, and not to portion it out for the good of all the faithful in accordance with the arrangement of the apostles, but having an eye to their own private expenses, tried not only to keep it but actually to increase it, not content with following the example of Ananias and Sapphira, then it seemed good to all the priests that men who were hampered by worldly cares, and almost ignorant, if I may say so, of abstinence and contrition, should be recalled to the pious duty by a fast canonically enjoined, and be constrained by the necessity of paying the legal tithes, as this certainly would be good for the weak brethren and could not do any harm to the perfect who were living under the grace of the gospel and by their voluntary devotion going beyond the law, so as to succeed in attaining to the blessedness which the Apostle speaks of: "For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law but under grace." [2215] For of a truth sin cannot exercise dominion over one who lives faithfully under the liberty of grace.

Chapter XXXI. A question, how we ought to understand the Apostle's words: |Sin shall not have dominion over you.|

Germanus: Because this saying of the Apostle, which promises freedom from care not only to monks but to all Christians in general, cannot lead us wrong, it seems to us somewhat obscure. For whereas he maintains that all those who believe the gospel are at liberty and free from the yoke and dominion of sin, how is it that the dominion of sin holds vigorous sway over almost all the baptized, in accordance with the Lord's words, where He says: "Every one that doeth sin is the servant of sin"? [2216]

Chapter XXXII. The answer on the difference between grace and the commands of the law.

Theonas: Your inquiry once more raises before us a question of no small extent. The explanation of which though I know that it cannot be taught to or understood by the inexperienced, yet as far as I can, I will try to set forth in words and briefly to explain, if only your minds will follow up and act upon what we say. For whatever is known not by teaching but by experience, just as it cannot be taught by one without experience, so neither can it be grasped or taken in by the mind of one who has not laid the foundation by a similar study and training. And therefore I think it necessary for us first to inquire somewhat carefully what is the purpose or meaning of the law, and what is the system and perfection of grace, that from this we may succeed in understanding the dominion of sin and how to drive it out. And so the law chiefly commands men to seek the bonds of wedlock, saying: "Blessed is he that hath seed in Sion and an household in Jerusalem;" [2217] and: "Cursed is the barren that hath not borne." [2218] On the other hand grace invites us to the purity of perpetual chastity, and the undefiled state of blessed virginity, saying: "Blessed are the barren, and the breasts which have not given suck;" and: "he that hateth not father and mother and wife cannot be my disciple;" and this of the Apostle: "It remaineth that they that have wives be as though they had them not." [2219] The law says: "Thou shalt not delay to offer thy tithes and firstfruits;" grace says: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor:" [2220] The law forbids not retaliation for wrongs and vengeance for injuries, saying "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Grace would have our patience proved by the injuries and blows offered to us being redoubled, and bids us be ready to endure twice as much damage; saying: "If a man strike thee on one cheek, offer him the other also; and to him who will contend with thee at the law and take away thy coat, give him thy cloak also." [2221] The one decrees that we should hate our enemies, the other that we should love them so that it holds that even for them we ought always to pray to God.

Chapter XXXIII. Of the fact that the precepts of the gospel are milder than those of the law.

Whoever therefore climbs this height of evangelical perfection, is at once raised by the merits of such virtue above every law, and disregarding as trivial all that is commanded by Moses, recognizes that he is only subject to the grace of the Saviour, by whose aid he knows that he attained to that most exalted condition. Therefore sin has no dominion over him, "because the love of God, which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us," [2222] shuts out all care for everything else, and can neither desire what is forbidden, or disregard what is commanded, as its whole aim and all its desire is ever fixed on divine love, and to such an extent is it not caught by the delights of worthless things, that it actually does not take advantage of those things which are permitted. But under the law, where lawful marriages are observed, although the roving of wantonness are restrained, and bound down to one woman alone, yet the pricks of carnal lust cannot help being vigorous; and it is hard for the fire, for which fuel is expressly supplied, to be thus shut in within prearranged limits, so as not to spread further and burn up anything it touches. As even if this objection occurs to it that it is not allowed to be kindled beyond these limits, yet even while it is kept in check, it is on fire because the will itself is in fault, and its habit of carnal intercourse hurries it into too speedy excesses of adultery. But those whom the grace of the Saviour has fired with the holy love of chastity, so consume all the thorns of carnal desires in the fire of the Lord's love, that no dying embers of sin interfere with the coldness of their purity. The servants of the law then from the use of lawful things fall away to unlawful; the partakers of grace while they disregard lawful things know nothing of unlawful ones. But as sin is alive in one who loves marriage, so is it also in one who is satisfied with merely paying his tithes and firstfruits. For, while he is dawdling or careless, he is sure to sin in regard to either their quality or quantity, or the daily distribution of them. For as he is commanded unweariedly to minister to those in want of what is his, although he may dispense it with the fullest faith and devotion, yet it is hard for him not to fall often into the snares of sin. But over those who have not set at naught the counsel of the Lord, but who, disposing of all their property to the poor, take up their cross and follow the bestower of grace, sin can have no dominion. For no faithless anxiety for getting food will annoy him who piously distributes and disperses his wealth already consecrated to Christ and no longer regarded as his own; nor will any grudging hesitation take away from the cheerfulness of his almsgiving, because without any thought of his own needs or fear of his own food running short he is distributing what has once for all been completely offered to God, and is no longer regarded as his own, as he is sure that when he has succeeded in stripping himself as he desires, he will be fed by God much more than the birds of the air. On the other hand he who retains his goods of this world, or, bound by the rules of the old law, distributes the tithe of his produce, and his firstfruits, or a portion of his income, although he may to a considerable degree quench the fire of his sins by this dew of almsgiving, yet, however generously he gives away his wealth, it is impossible for him altogether to rid himself of the dominion of sin, unless perhaps by the grace of the Saviour, together with his substance he gets rid of all love of possessing. In the same way he cannot fail to

be subject to the bloody sway of sin, whoever chooses to pull out, as the law commands, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or to hate his enemy, for while he desires by retaliation in exchange to avenge an injury done to himself, and while he cherishes bitter hatred against an enemy, he is sure always to be inflamed with the passion of anger and rage. But whoever lives under the light of the grace of the gospel, and overcomes evil by not resisting it, but by bearing it, and does not hesitate of his own free will to give to one who smites his right cheek, the other also, and to one who wants to raise a lawsuit against him for his coat, gives his cloak also, and who loves his enemies, and prays for those who slander him, this man has broken the yoke of sin and burst its chains. For he is not living under the law, which does not destroy the seeds of sin (whence not without reason the Apostle says of it: "There is a setting aside of the former commandment because of the weakness and unprofitableness thereof: for the law brought nothing to perfection;" and the Lord says by the prophet: "And I gave them commands that were not good, and ordinances, whereby they could not live" [2223] , but under grace which does not merely lop off the boughs of wickedness, but actually tears up the very roots of an evil will.

Chapter XXXIV. How a man can be shown to be under grace.

Whoever then strives to reach the perfection of evangelical teaching, this man living under grace is not oppressed by the dominion of sin, for to be under grace is to do those things which grace commands. But whoever will not submit himself to the complete requirements of evangelical perfection, must not remain ignorant that, although he seems to be baptized and to be a monk, yet he is not under grace, but is still shackled by the chains of the law, and weighed down by the burden of sin. For it is the aim of Him, who by the grace of adoption accepts all those by whom He has been received, not to destroy but to build upon, not to abolish but to fulfil the Mosaic requirements. But some knowing nothing about this, and disregarding the splendid counsels and exhortations of Christ, are so emancipated by the carelessness of a freedom too hastily assumed, that they not only fail to carry out the commands of Christ as if they were too hard, but actually scorn as antiquated, the commands given to them as beginners and children by the law of Moses, saying in this dangerous freedom of theirs that which the Apostle execrates: "We have sinned, because we are not under the law but under grace." [2224] He then who is neither under grace, because he has never climbed the heights of the Lord's teaching, nor under the law, because he has not accepted even those small commands of the law, this man, ground down beneath a twofold rule of sin, fancies that he has received the grace of Christ, simply and solely for this, that by this dangerous liberty of his he may make himself none of His, and falls into that state, which the Apostle Peter warns us to avoid, saying: "Act as free, and not having your liberty as a cloak of wickedness." The blessed Apostle Paul also says: "For ye, brethren, were called to liberty," i.e., that ye might be free from the dominion of sin, "only use not your liberty for an occasion of the flesh," [2225] i.e., believe that the doing away with the commands of the law is a licence to sin. But this liberty, the Apostle Paul teaches us is nowhere but where the Lord is dwelling, for he says: "The Lord is the Spirit, but where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty." [2226] Wherefore I know not whether I could express and explain the meaning of the blessed Apostle, as those know how, who have experience; one thing I do know, that it is very clearly revealed even without anyone's explanation to all those who have perfectly acquired praktike, i.e., practical training. For they will need no effort to understand in discussion what they have already learnt by practice.

Chapter XXXV. A question, why sometimes when we are fasting more strictly than usual, we are troubled by carnal desires more keenly than usual.

Germanus: You have very clearly explained a most difficult question, and one which, as we think, is unknown to many. Wherefore we pray you to add this also for our good, and carefully to expound why sometimes when we are fasting more strictly than usual, and are exhausted and worn out, severer bodily struggles are excited. For often on waking from sleep, when we have discovered that we have been defiled [2227] we are so dejected in heart that we do not even venture faithfully to rise even for prayer.

Chapter XXXVI. The answer, telling that this question should be reserved for a future Conference.

Theonas: Your zeal indeed, whereby you desire to reach the way of perfection, not for a moment only but fully and perfectly, urges us to continue this discussion unweariedly. For you are anxiously inquiring not about external chastity or outward circumcision, but about that which is secret, as you know that complete perfection does not consist in this visible continence of the flesh which can be attained either by constraint, or by hypocrisy even by unbelievers, but in that voluntary and invisible purity of heart, which the blessed Apostle describes as follows: "For he is not a Jew which is so outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh, but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and the circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God," [2228] who alone searches the secrets of the heart. But because it is not possible for your wish to be fully satisfied (as the short space of the night that is left is not enough for the investigation of this most difficult question,) I think it well to postpone it for a while. For these matters, as they should be propounded by us quietly and with an heart entirely free from all bustling thoughts, so should they be received into your minds; for just as the inquiry ought to be undertaken for the sake of our common purity, so they cannot be learnt or acquired by one who is without the gift of uprightness. For we do not ask what arguments of empty words, but what the inward faith of the conscience and the greater force of truth can persuade. And therefore with regard to the knowledge and teaching of this purification nothing can be brought forward except by one who has had experience of it, nor can anything be committed except to one who is a most eager and very earnest lover of the truth itself, who does not hope to attain it by asking questions with mere vain words, but by striving with all his might and main, with no wish for useless chattering but with the desire to purify himself internally.

XXII. The Second Conference of Abbot Theonas.

On Nocturnal Illusions. This Conference is omitted.

XXIII. The Third Conference of Abbot Theonas.

On Sinlessness.

Chapter I. Discourse of Abbot Theonas on the Apostle's words: [For I do not the good which I would.]

At the return of light therefore, as the old man was forced by our intense urgency to investigate the depths of the Apostle's subject, he spoke as follows: As for the passages by which you try to prove that the Apostle Paul spoke not in his own person but in that of sinners: "For I do not the good that I would, but the evil which I hate, that I do;" or this: "But if I do that which I would not, it is no longer I that do it but sin that dwelleth in me;" or what follows: "For I delight in the law of God after the inner man, but I see another law in my members opposing the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members;" [2229] these passages on the contrary plainly show that they cannot possibly fit the person of sinners, but that what is said can only apply to those that are perfect, and that it only suits the chastity of those who follow the good example of the Apostles. Else how could these words apply to the person of sinners: "For I do not the good which I would, but the evil which I hate that I do"? or even this: "But if I do what I would not it is no longer I that do it but sin that dwelleth in me"? For what sinner defiles himself unwillingly by adulteries and fornication? Who against his will prepares plots against his neighbour? Who is driven by unavoidable necessity to oppress a man by false witness or cheat him by theft, or covet the goods of another or shed his blood? Nay rather, as Scripture says, "Mankind is diligently inclined to wickedness from his youth." [2230] For to such an extent are all inflamed by the love of sin and desire to carry out what they like, that they actually look out with watchful care for an opportunity of committing wickedness and are afraid of being too slow to enjoy their lusts, and glory in their shame and the mass of their crimes, as the Apostle says in censure, [2231] and seek credit for themselves out of their own confusion, of whom also the prophet Jeremiah maintains that they commit their flagitious crimes not only not unwillingly nor with ease of heart and body, but with laborious efforts to such an extent that they come to toil to carry them out, so that they are prevented even by the hindrance of arduous difficulty from their deadly quest of sin; as he says: "They have laboured to do wickedly." [2232] Who also will say that this applies to sinners: "And so with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin," as it is plain that they serve God neither with the mind nor the flesh? Or how can those who sin with the body serve God with the mind, when the flesh receives the incitement to sin from the heart, and the Creator of either nature Himself declares that the fount and spring of sin flows from the latter, saying: "From the heart proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, etc." [2233] Wherefore it is clearly shown that this cannot in any way be taken of the person of sinners, who not only do not hate, but actually love what is evil and are so far from serving God with either the mind or the flesh that they sin with the mind before they do with the flesh, and before they carry out the pleasures of the body are overcome by sin in their mind and thoughts.

Chapter II. How the Apostle completed many good actions.

It remains therefore for us to measure its meaning and drift from the inmost feelings of the speaker, and to discuss what the blessed Apostle called good, and what he pronounced by comparison evil, not by the bare meaning of the words, but with the same insight which he showed, and to investigate his meaning with due regard to the worth and goodness of the speaker. For then we shall be able to understand the words, which were uttered by God's inspiration, in accordance with his purpose and wish, when we weigh the position and character of those by whom they were spoken, and are ourselves clothed with the same feelings (not in words but by experience), in accordance with the character of which most certainly all the thoughts are conceived and opinions uttered. Wherefore let us carefully consider what was in the main that good which the Apostle could not do when he would. For we know that there are many good things which we cannot deny that the blessed Apostle and all men as good as he either have by nature, or acquire by grace. For chastity is good, continence is praiseworthy, prudence is to be admired, kindness is liberal, sobriety is careful, temperance is modest, pity is kind, justice is holy: all of which we cannot doubt existed fully and in perfection in the Apostle Paul and his companions, so that they taught religion by the lesson of their virtues rather than their words. What if they were always consumed with the constant care of all the churches and watchful anxiety? How great a good is this pity, what perfection it is to burn for them that are offended, to be weak with the weak! [2234] If then the Apostle abounded with such good things, we cannot recognize what that good was, in the perfection of which the Apostle was lacking, unless we have advanced to that state of mind in which he was speaking. And so all those virtues which we say that he possessed, though they are like most splendid and precious gems, yet when they are compared with that most beautiful and unique pearl which the merchant in the gospel sought and wanted to acquire by selling all that he possessed, so does their value seem poor and trifling, so that if they are without hesitation got rid of, the possession of one good thing alone will enrich the man who sells countless good things.

Chapter III. What is really the good which the Apostle testifies that he could not perform.

What then is that one thing which is so incomparably above those great and innumerable good things, that, while they are all scorned and rejected, it alone should be acquired? Doubtless it is that truly good part, the grand and lasting character of which is thus described by the Lord, when Mary disregarded the duties of hospitality and courtesy and chose it: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but there is but need of but few things or even of one only. Mary hath chosen the good part which shall not be taken away from her." [2235] Contemplation then, i.e., meditation on God, is the one thing, the value of which all the merits of our righteous acts, all our aims at virtue, come short of. And all those things which we said existed in the Apostle Paul, were not only good and useful, but even great and splendid. But as, for example, the metal of alloy which is considered of some use and worth, becomes worthless when silver is taken into account, and again the value of silver disappears in comparison with gold, and gold itself is disregarded when compared with precious stones, and yet a quantity of precious stones however splendid are outdone by the brightness of a single pearl, so all those merits of holiness, although they are not merely good and useful for the present life, but also secure the gift of eternity, yet if they are compared with the merit of Divine contemplation, will be considered trifling and so to speak, fit to be sold. And to support this illustration by the authority of Scripture, does not Scripture declare of all things in general which were created by God, and say: "And behold everything that God had made was very good;" and again: "And things that God hath made are all good in their season"? [2236] These things then which in the present time are termed not simply and solely good, but emphatically "very good" (for they are really convenient for us while living in this world, either for purposes of life, or for remedies for the body, or by reason of some unknown usefulness, or else they are indeed "very good," because they enable us "to see the invisible things of God from the creatures of the world, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead," [2237] from this great and orderly arrangement of the fabric of the world; and to contemplate them from the existence of everything in it), yet none of these things will keep the name of good if they are regarded in the light of that world to come, where no variation of good things, and no loss of true blessedness need be feared. The bliss of which world is thus described: "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold as the light of seven days." [2238] These things then which are great and wondrous to be gazed on, and marvellous, will at once appear as vanity if they are compared with the future promises from faith; as David says: "They all shall wax old as a garment, and as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail." [2239] Because then there is nothing of itself enduring, nothing unchangeable, nothing good but Deity alone, while every creature, to obtain the blessing of eternity and immutability, aims at this not by its own nature but by participation of its Creator, and His grace, they cannot maintain their character for goodness when compared with their Creator.

Chapter IV. How man's goodness and righteousness are not good if compared with the goodness and righteousness of God.

But if we want also to establish the force of this opinion by still clearer proofs, is it not the case that while we read of many things as called good in the gospel, as a good tree, and good treasure, and a good man, and a good servant, for He says: "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit;" and: "a good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things;" and: "Well done, good and faithful servant;" [2240] and certainly there can be no doubt that none of these are good in themselves, yet if we take into consideration the goodness of God, none of them will be called good, as the Lord says: "None is good save God alone"? [2241] In whose sight even the apostles themselves, who in the excellence of their calling in many ways went beyond the goodness of mankind, are said to be evil, as the Lord thus speaks to them: "If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him." [2242] Finally as our goodness turns to badness in the eyes of the Highest so also our righteousness when set against the Divine righteousness is considered like a menstruous cloth, as Isaiah the prophet says: "All your righteousness is like a menstruous cloth." [2243] And to produce something still plainer, even the vital precepts of the law itself, which are said to have been "given by angels by the hand of a mediator," and of which the same Apostle says: "So the law indeed is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good," [2244] when they are compared with the perfection of the gospel are pronounced anything but good by the Divine oracle: for He says: "And I gave them precepts that were not good, and ordinances whereby they should not live in them." [2245] The Apostle also affirms that the glory of the law is so dimmed by the light of the New Testament that he declares that in comparison with the splendour of the gospel it is not to be considered glorious, saying: "For even that which was glorious was not glorified by reason of the glory that excelleth." [2246] And Scripture keeps up this comparison on the other side also, i.e., in weighing the merits of sinners, so that in comparison with the wicked it justifies those who have sinned less, saying: "Sodom is justified above thee;" and again: "For what hath thy sister Sodom sinned?" and: "The rebellious Israel hath justified her soul in comparison of the treacherous Judah." [2247] So then the merits of all the virtues, which I enumerated above, though in themselves they are good and precious, yet become dim in comparison of the brightness of contemplation. For they greatly hinder and retard the saints who are taken up with earthly aims even at good works, from the contemplation of that sublime good.

Chapter V. How no one can be continually intent upon that highest good.

For who, when "delivering the poor from the hand of them that are too strong for him, and the needy and the poor from them that strip him," who when "breaking the jaws of the wicked and snatching their prey from between their teeth," [2248] can with a calm mind regard the glory of the Divine Majesty during the actual work of intervention? Who when ministering support to the poor, or when receiving with benevolent kindness the crowds that come to him, can at the very moment when he is with anxious mind perplexed for the wants of his brethren, contemplate the vastness of the bliss on high, and while he is shaken by the troubles and cares of the present life look forward to the state of the world to come with an heart raised above the stains of earth? Whence the blessed David when laying down that this alone is good for man, longs to cling constantly to God, and says: "It is good for me to cling to God, and to put my hope in the Lord." [2249] And Ecclesiastes also declares that this cannot be done without fault by any of the saints, and says: "For there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not." [2250] For who, even if he be the chief of all righteous and holy men, can we ever think could, while bound in the chains of this life, so acquire this chief good, as never to cease from divine contemplation, or be thought to be drawn away by earthly thoughts even for a short time from Him Who alone is good? Who ever takes no care for food, none for clothing or other carnal things, or when anxious about receiving the brethren, or change of place, or building his cell, has never desired the aid of man's assistance, nor when harassed by scarcity and want has incurred this sentence of reproof from the Lord: "Be not anxious for your life what ye shall eat, nor for your body what ye shall put on"? [2251] Further we confidently assert that even the Apostle Paul himself who surpassed in the number of his sufferings the toils of all the saints, could not possibly fulfil this, as he himself testifies to the disciples in the Acts of the Apostles: "Ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my needs, and to the needs of those who were with me," or when in writing in the Thessalonians he testifies that he "worked in labour and weariness night and day." [2252] And although for this there were great rewards for his merits prepared, yet his mind, however holy and sublime it might be, could not help being sometimes drawn away from that heavenly contemplation by its attention to earthly labours. Further, when he saw himself enriched with such practical fruits, and on the other hand considered in his heart the good of meditation, and weighed as it were in one scale the profit of all these labours and in the other the delights of divine contemplation, when for a long time he had corrected the balance in his breast, while the vast rewards for his labours delighted him on one side, and on the other the desire for unity with and the inseparable companionship of Christ inclined him to depart this life, at last in his perplexity he cries out and says: "What I shall choose I know not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, for it were much better: but to abide in the flesh is more necessary for your sakes." [2253] Though then in many ways he preferred this excellent good to all the fruits of his preaching, yet he submits himself in consideration of love, without which none can gain the Lord; and for their sakes, whom hitherto he had soothed with milk as nourishment from the breasts of the gospel, does not refuse

to be parted from Christ, which is bad for himself though useful for others. For he is driven to choose this the rather by that excessive goodness of his whereby for the salvation of his brethren he is ready, were it possible, to incur even the last evil of an Anathema. "For I could wish," he says, "that I myself were Anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, who are my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites," [2254] i.e., I could wish to be subject not only to temporal, but even to perpetual punishment, if only all men, were it possible, might enjoy the fellowship of Christ: for I am sure that the salvation of all would be better for Christ and for me than my own. That then the Apostle might perfectly gain this chief good, i.e., to enjoy the vision of God and to be joined continually to Christ, he was ready to be parted from this body, which as it is feeble and hindered by the many requirements of its frailties cannot help separating from union with Christ: for it is impossible for the mind, that is harassed by such frequent cares, and hampered by such various and tiresome troubles, always to enjoy the Divine vision. For what aim of the saints can be so persistent, what purpose can be so high that that crafty plotter does not sometimes destroy it? Who has frequented the recesses of the desert and shunned intercourse with all men in such a way that he never trips by unnecessary thoughts, and by looking on things or being occupied in earthly actions falls away from that contemplation of God, which truly alone is good? Who ever could preserve such fervour of spirit as not sometimes to pass by roving thoughts from his attention to prayer, and fall away suddenly from heavenly to earthly things? Which of us (to pass over other times of wandering) even at the very moment when he raises his soul in prayer to God on high, does not fall into a sort of stupor, and even against his will offend by that very thing from which he hoped for pardon of his sins? Who, I ask, is so alert and vigilant as never, while he is singing a Psalm to God, to allow his mind to wander from the meaning of Scripture? Who is so intimate with and closely joined to God, as to congratulate himself on having carried out for a single day that rule of the Apostle's, whereby he bids us pray without ceasing? [2255] And though all these things may seem to some, who are involved in grosser sins, to be trivial and altogether foreign to sin, yet to those who know the value of perfection a quantity even of very small matters becomes most serious.

Chapter VI. How those who think that they are without sin are like purblind people.

As if we were to suppose that two men, one of whom was clear sighted with perfect vision, and the other, one whose eyesight was obscured by dimness of vision, had together entered some great house that was filled with a quantity of bundles, instruments, and vessels, would not he, whose dullness of vision prevented his seeing everything, assert that there was nothing there but chests, beds, benches, tables, and whatever met the fingers of one who felt them rather than the eyes of one who saw them, while on the other hand would not the other, who searched out what was hidden with clear and bright eyes, declare that there were there many most minute articles, and what could scarcely be counted; which if they were ever gathered up into a single pile, would by their number equal or perhaps exceed the size of those few things which the other had felt. So then even saints, and, if we may so say, men who see, whose aim is the utmost perfection, cleverly detect in themselves even those things which the gaze of our mind being as it were darkened cannot see, and condemn them very severely, to such an extent that those who have not, as it seems to our carelessness, dimmed the whiteness of their body, which is as it were like snow, with even the slightest spot of sin, seem to themselves to be covered with many stains, if, I will not say any evil or vain thoughts creep into the doors of their mind, but even the recollection of a Psalm which has to be said takes off the attention of the kneeler at the time for prayer. For if, say they, when we ask some great man, I will not say for our life and salvation, but for some advantage and profit, we fasten all our attention of mind and body upon him, and hang with trembling expectation on his nod, with no slight dread lest haply some foolish or unsuitable word may turn aside the pity of our hearer, and then too, when we are standing in the forum or in the courts of earthly judges, with our opponent standing over against us, if in the midst of the prosecution and trial any coughing, or spitting, or laughing, or yawning, or sleep overtakes us, with what malice will our ever watchful opponent stir up the severity of the judge to our damage: how much more, when we entreat Him who knows all secrets, should we, by reason of our imminent danger of everlasting death, plead with earnest and anxious prayer for the kindness of the judge, especially as on the other side there stands one who is both our crafty seducer and our accuser! And not without reason will he be bound by no light sin, but by a grievous fault of wickedness, who, when he pours forth his prayer to God, departs at once from His sight as if from the eyes of one who neither sees nor hears, and follows the vanity of wicked thoughts. But they who cover the eyes of their heart with a thick veil of their sins, and as the Saviour says, "Seeing see not and hearing hear not nor understand," [2256] hardly regard in the inmost recesses of their breast even those faults which are great and deadly, and cannot with clear eyes look at any deceitful thoughts, nor even those vague and secret desires which strike the mind with slight and subtle suggestions, nor the captivities of their soul, but always wandering among impure thoughts they know not how to be sorry when they are distracted from that meditation which is so special, nor can they grieve that they have lost anything as while they lay open their mind to the entrance of any thought as they please, they have nothing set before them to hold to as the main thing or to desire in every way.

Chapter VII. How those who maintain that a man can be without sin are charged with a twofold error.

The reason however which drives us into this error is that, as we are utterly ignorant of the virtue of being without sin, [2257] we fancy that we cannot contract any guilt from those idle and random vagaries of our thoughts, but being rendered stupid by dullness and as it were smitten with blindness we can see nothing in ourselves but capital offences, and think that we have only to keep clear of those things which are condemned also by the severity of secular laws, and if we find that even for a short time we are free from these we at once imagine that there is no sin at all in us. Accordingly we are distinguished from the number of those who see, because we do not see the many small stains, which are crowded together in us, and are not smitten with saving contrition, if the malady of vexation overtakes our thoughts, nor are we sorry that we are struck by the suggestions of vainglory, nor do we weep over our prayers offered up so tardily and coldly, nor consider it a fault if while we are singing or praying, something else besides the actual prayer or Psalm fills our thoughts, nor are we horrified because we do not blush to conceive many things which we are ashamed to speak or do before men, in our heart, which, as we know, lies open to the Divine gaze; nor do we purge away the pollution of filthy dreams with copious ablutions of our tears, nor grieve that in the pious act of almsgiving when we are assisting the needs of the brethren, or ministering support to the poor, the brightness of our cheerfulness is clouded over by a stingy delay, nor do we think that we are affected by any loss when we forget God and think about things that are temporal and corrupt, so that these words of Solomon fairly apply to us: "They smite me but I have not grieved, and they have mocked me, but I knew it not." [2258]

Chapter VIII. How it is given to but few to understand what sin is.

Those on the other hand who make the sum of all their joy and delight and bliss consist in the contemplation of divine and spiritual things alone, if they are unwillingly withdrawn from them even for a short time by thoughts that force themselves upon them, punish this as if it were a kind of sacrilege in them, and avenge it by immediate chastisement, and in their grief that they have preferred some worthless creature (to which their mental gaze was turned aside) to their Creator, charge themselves with the guilt (I had almost said) of impiety, and although they turn the eyes of their heart with the utmost speed to behold the brightness of the Divine Glory, yet they cannot tolerate even for a very short time the darkness of carnal thoughts, and execrate whatever keeps back their soul's gaze from the true light. Finally when the blessed Apostle John would instill this feeling into everybody he says: "Little children, love not the world, neither the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of God is not in him: for everything that is in the world is the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, which is not of the Father but of the world. And the world perisheth and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." [2259] The saints therefore scorn all those things on which the world exists, but it is impossible for them never to be carried away to them by a brief aberration of thoughts, and even now no man, except our Lord and Saviour, can keep his naturally wandering mind always fixed on the contemplation of God so as never to be carried away from it through the love of something in this world; as Scripture says: "Even the stars are not clean in His sight," and again: "If He puts no trust in His saints, and findeth iniquity in His angels," or as the more correct translation has it: "Behold among His saints none is unchangeable, and the heavens are not pure in His sight." [2260]

Chapter IX. Of the care with which a monk should preserve the recollection of God.

I should say then that the saints who keep a firm hold of the recollection of God and are borne along, as it were, with their steps suspended on a line stretched out on high, may be rightly compared to rope dancers, commonly called funambuli, who risk all their safety and life on the path of that very narrow rope, with no doubt that they will immediately meet with a most dreadful death if their foot swerves or trips in the very slightest degree, or goes over the line of the course in which alone is safety. And while with marvellous skill they ply their airy steps through space, if they keep not their steps to that all too narrow path with careful and anxious regulation, the earth which is the natural base and the most solid and safest foundation for all, becomes to them an immediate and clear danger, not because its nature is changed, but because they fall headlong upon it by the weight of their bodies. So also that unwearied goodness of God and His unchanging nature [2261] hurts no one indeed, but we ourselves by falling from on high and tending to the depths are the authors of our own death, or rather the very fall becomes death to the faller. For it says: "Woe to them for they have departed from Me: they shall be wasted because they have transgressed against Me;" and again: "Woe to them when I shall depart from them." For "thine own wickedness shall reprove thee, and thy apostasy shall rebuke thee. Know thou and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God;" for "every man is bound by the cords of his sins." [2262] To whom this rebuke is aptly directed by the Lord: "Behold," He says, "all you that kindle a fire, encompassed with flames, walk ye in the light of your fire and in the flames which you have kindled;" and again: "He that kindleth iniquity, shall perish by it." [2263]

Chapter X. How those who are on the way to perfection are truly humble, and feel that they always stand in need of God's grace.

When then holy men feel that they are oppressed by the weight of earthly thoughts and fall away from their loftiness of mind, and that they are led away against their will or rather without knowing it, into the law of sin and death, and (to pass over other matters) are kept back by those actions which I described above, which are good and right though earthly, from the vision of God; they have something to groan over constantly to the Lord; they have something for which indeed to humble themselves, and in their contrition to profess themselves not in words only but in heart, sinners; and for this, while they continually ask of the Lord's grace pardon for everything that day by day they commit when overcome by the weakness of the flesh, they should shed without ceasing true tears of penitence; as they see that being involved even to the very end of their life in the very same troubles, with continual sorrow for which they are tried, they cannot even offer their prayers without harassing thoughts. So then as they know by experience that through the hindrance of the burden of the flesh they cannot by human strength reach the desired end, nor be united according to their heart's desire with that chief and highest good, but that they are led away from the vision of it captive to worldly things, they betake themselves to the grace of God, "Who justifieth the ungodly," [2264] and cry out with the Apostle: O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ." [2265] For they feel that they cannot perform the good that they would, but are ever falling into the evil which they would not, and which they hate, i.e., wandering thoughts and care for carnal things.

Chapter XI. Explanation of the phrase: |For I delight in the law of God after the inner man,| etc.

And they "delight" indeed "in the law of God after the inner man," which soars above all visible things and ever strives to be united to God alone, but they "see another law in their members," i.e., implanted in their natural human condition, which "resisting the law of their mind," [2266] brings their thoughts into captivity to the forcible law of sin, compelling them to forsake that chief good and submit to earthly notions, which though they may appear necessary and useful when they are taken up in the interests of some religious want, yet when they are set against that good which fascinates the gaze of all the saints, are seen by them to be bad and such as should be avoided, because by them in some way or other and for a short time they are drawn away from the joy of that perfect bliss. For the law of sin is really what the fall of its first father brought on mankind by that fault of his, against which there was uttered this sentence by the most just Judge: "Cursed is the ground in thy works; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread." [2267] This, I say, is the law, implanted in the members of all mortals, which resists the law of our mind and keeps it back from the vision of God, and which, as the earth is cursed in our works after the knowledge of good and evil, begins to produce the thorns and thistles of thoughts, by the sharp pricks of which the natural seeds of virtues are choked, so that without the sweat of our brow we cannot eat our bread which "cometh down from heaven," and which "strengtheneth man's heart." [2268] The whole human race in general therefore is without exception subject to this law. For there is no one, however saintly, who does not take the bread mentioned above with the sweat of his brow and anxious efforts of his heart. But many rich men, as we see, are fed on that common bread without any sweat of their brow.

Chapter XII. Of this also: |But we know that the law is spiritual,| etc.

And this law the Apostle also calls spiritual saying: "But we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin." [2269] For this law is spiritual which bids us eat in the sweat of our brow that "true bread which cometh down from heaven" [2270] but that sale under sin makes us carnal. What, I ask, or whose is that sin? Doubtless Adam's, by whose fall and, if I may so say, ruinous transaction and fraudulent bargain we were sold. For when he was led astray by the persuasion of the serpent he brought all his descendants under the yoke of perpetual bondage, as they were alienated by taking the forbidden food. For this custom is generally observed between the buyer and seller, that one who wants to make himself over to the power of another, receives from his buyer a price for the loss of his liberty, and his consignment to perpetual slavery. And we can very plainly see that this took place between Adam and the serpent. For by eating of the forbidden tree he received from the serpent the price of his liberty, and gave up his natural freedom and chose to give himself up to perpetual slavery to him from whom he had obtained the deadly price of the forbidden fruit; and thenceforth he was bound by this condition and not without reason subjected all the offspring of his posterity to perpetual service to him whose slave he had become. For what can any marriage in slavery produce but slaves? What then? Did that cunning and crafty buyer take away the rights of ownership from the true and lawful lord? Not so. For neither did he overcome all God's property by the craft of a single act of deception so that the true lord lost his rights of ownership, who though the buyer himself was a rebel and a renegade, yet oppressed him with the yoke of slavery; but because the Creator had endowed all reasonable creatures with free will, he would not restore to their natural liberty against their will those who contrary to right had sold themselves by the sin of greedy lust. Since anything that is contrary to goodness and fairness is abhorrent to Him who is the Author of justice and piety. For it would have been wrong for Him to have recalled the blessing of freedom granted, unfair for Him to have by His power oppressed man who was free, and by taking him captive, not to have allowed him to exercise the prerogative of the freedom he had received, as He was reserving his salvation for future ages, that in due season the fulness of the appointed time might be fulfilled. For it was right that his offspring should remain under the ancient conditions for so long a time, until by the price of His own blood the grace of the Lord redeemed them from their original chains and set them free in the primeval state of liberty, though He was able even then to save them, but would not, because equity forbade Him to break the terms of His own decree. Would you know the reason for your being sold? Hear thy Redeemer Himself proclaiming openly by Isaiah the prophet: "What is this bill of the divorce of your mother with which I have put her away? Or who is My creditor to whom I sold you? Behold you are sold for your iniquities and for your wicked deeds have I put your mother away." Would you also plainly see why when you were consigned to the yoke of slavery He would not redeem you by the might of His own power? Hear what He added to the former passage, and how He charges the same servants of sin with the reason for their voluntary sale. "Is My hand shortened and become little that I cannot redeem, or is there no strength in Me to deliver?" [2271] But what it is which is always standing in the way of His most powerful pity the same prophet shows when he says: "Behold the hand of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is His ear heavy that it cannot hear:

But your iniquities have divided between you and your God and your sins have hid His face from you that He should not hear." [2272]

Chapter XIII. Of this also: |But I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.|

Because then the original curse of God has made us carnal and condemned us to thorns and thistles, and our father has sold us by that unhappy bargain so that we cannot do the good that we would, while we are torn away from the recollection of God Most High and forced to think on what belongs to human weakness, while burning with the love of purity, we are often even against our will troubled by natural desires, which we would rather know nothing about; we know that in our flesh there dwelleth no good thing [2273] viz., the perpetual and lasting peace of this meditation of which we have spoken; but there is brought about in our case that miserable and wretched divorce, that when with the mind we want to serve the law of God, since we never want to remove our gaze from the Divine brightness, yet surrounded as we are by carnal darkness we are forced by a kind of law of sin to tear ourselves away from the good which we know, as we fall away from that lofty height of mind to earthly cares and thoughts, to which the law of sin, i.e., the sentence of God, which the first delinquent received, has not without reason condemned us. And hence it is that the blessed Apostle, though he openly admits that he and all saints are bound by the constraint of this sin, yet boldly asserts that none of them will be condemned for this, saying: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus: for the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath set me free from the law of sin and death," [2274] i.e., the grace of Christ day by day frees all his saints from this law of sin and death, under which they are constantly reluctantly obliged to come, whenever they pray to the Lord for the forgiveness of their trespasses. You see then that it was in the person not of sinners but of those who are really saints and perfect, that the blessed Apostle gave utterance to this saying: "For I do not the good that I would, but the evil which I hate, that I do;" and: "I see another law in my members resisting the law of my mind and bringing me captive to the law of sin which is in my members." [2275]

Chapter XIV. An objection, that the saying: [For I do not the good that I would,] etc., applies to the persons neither of unbelievers nor of saints.

Germanus: We say that this does not apply to the persons either of those who are involved in capital offences, or of an Apostle and those who have advanced to his measure, but we think that it ought properly to be taken of those who after receiving the grace of God and the knowledge of the truth, are anxious to keep themselves from carnal sins but, as ancient custom like a natural law rules most forcibly in their members, they are carried away to the ingrained lust of their passions. For the custom and frequency of sinning becomes like a natural law, which, implanted in the man's weak members, leads the feelings of the soul that is not yet instructed in all the pursuits of virtue, but is still, if I may say so, of an uninstructed and tender chastity, captive to sin and subjecting them by an ancient law to death, brings them under the yoke of sin that rules over them, not suffering them to obtain the good of purity which they love, but rather forcing them to do the evil which they hate.

Chapter XV. The answer to the objection raised.

Theonas: Your notion does not come to much; as you yourselves have actually now begun to maintain that this cannot possibly stand in the person of those who are out and out sinners, but that it properly applies to those who are trying to keep themselves clear from carnal sins. And since you have already separated these from the number of sinners, it follows that you must shortly admit them into the ranks of the faithful and holy. For what kinds of sin do you say that those can commit, from which, if they are involved in them after the grace of baptism, they can be freed by the daily grace of Christ? or of what body of death are we to think that the Apostle said: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord"? [2276] Is it not clear, as truth compels you yourselves also to admit, that it is spoken not of those members of capital crimes, by which the wages of eternal death are gained; viz., murder, fornication, adultery, drunkenness, thefts and robberies, but of that body before mentioned, which the daily grace of Christ assists? For whoever after baptism and the knowledge of God falls into that death, must know that he will either have to be cleansed, not by the daily grace of Christ, i.e., an easy forgiveness, which our Lord when at any moment He is prayed to, is wont to grant to our errors, but by a lifelong affliction of penitence and penal sorrow, or else will be hereafter consigned to the punishment of eternal fire for them, as the same Apostle thus declares: "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor defilers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous persons, nor drunkards, nor railers, nor extortioners shall possess the kingdom of God." [2277] Or what is that law warring in our members which resists the law of our mind, and when it has led us resisting but captives to the law of sin and death, and has made us serve it with the flesh, nevertheless suffers us to serve the law of God with the mind? For I do not suppose that this law of sin denotes crimes or can be taken of the offences mentioned above, of which if a man is guilty he does not serve the law of God with the mind, from which law he must first have departed in heart before he is guilty of any of them with the flesh. For what is it to serve the law of sin, but to do what is commanded by sin? What sort of sin then is it to which so great holiness and perfection feels that it is captive, and yet doubts not that it will be freed from it by the grace of Christ, saying: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord"? What law, I ask, will you maintain to be implanted in our members, which, withdrawing us from the law of God and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin, could make us wretched rather than guilty so that we should not be consigned to eternal punishment, but still as it were sigh for the unbroken joys of bliss, and, seeking for a helper who shall restore us to it, exclaim with the Apostle: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" For what is it to be led captive to the law of sin but to continue to perform and commit sin? Or what other chief good can be given which the saints cannot fulfil, except that in comparison with which, as we said above, everything else is not good? Indeed we know that many things in this world are good, and chiefly, modesty, continence, sobriety, humility, justice, mercy, temperance, piety: but all of these things fail to come up to that chief good, and can be done I say not by apostles, but even by ordinary folk; and, those by whom they are not done, are either chastised with eternal punishment, or are set free by great exertions,

as was said above, of penitence, and not by the daily grace of Christ. It remains then for us to admit that this saying of the Apostle is rightly applied only to the persons of saints, who day after day falling under this law, which we described, of sin not of crimes, are secure of their salvation and not precipitated into wicked deeds, but, as has often been said, are drawn away from the contemplation of God to the misery of bodily thoughts, and are often deprived of the blessing of that true bliss. For if they felt that by this law of their members they were bound daily to crimes, they would complain of the loss not of happiness but of innocence, and the Apostle Paul would not say: "O wretched man that I am," but "Impure," or "Wicked man that I am," and he would wish to be rid not of the body of this death, i.e., this mortal state, but of the crimes and misdeeds of this flesh. But because by reason of his state of human frailty he felt that he was captive, i.e., led away to carnal cares and anxieties which the law of sin and death causes, he groans over this law of sin under which against his will he had fallen, and at once has recourse to Christ and is saved by the present redemption of His grace. Whatever of anxiety therefore that law of sin, which naturally produces the thorns and thistles of mortal thoughts and cares, has caused to spring up in the ground of the Apostle's breast, that the law of grace at once plucks up. "For the law," says he, "of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath set me free from the law of sin and death." [2278]

Chapter XVI. What is the body of sin.

This then is that body of death from which we cannot escape, pent in which those who are perfect, who have tasted "how gracious the Lord is," [2279] daily feel with the prophet "how bad for himself and bitter it is for a man to depart from the Lord his God." [2280] This is the body of death which restrains us from the heavenly vision and drags us back to earthly things, which causes men while singing Psalms and kneeling in prayer to have their thoughts filled with human figures, or conversations, or business, or unnecessary actions. This is the body of death, owing to which those, who would emulate the sanctity of angels, and who long to cling continually to God, yet are unable to arrive at the perfection of this good, because the body of death stands in their way, but they do the evil that they would not, i.e., they are dragged down in their minds even to the things which have nothing to do with their advance and perfection in virtue. Finally that the blessed Apostle might clearly denote that he said this of saintly and perfect men, and those like himself, he in a way points with his finger to himself and at once proceeds: "And so I myself," i.e., I who say this, lay bare the secrets of my own not another's conscience. This mode of speech at any rate the Apostle is familiarly accustomed to use, whenever he wants to point specially to himself, as here: "I, Paul, myself beseech you by the mildness and modesty of Christ;" and again: "except that I myself was not burdensome to you;" and once more: "But be it so: I myself did not burden you;" and elsewhere: "I, Paul, myself say unto you: if ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing;" and to the Romans: "For I could wish that I myself were Anathema from Christ for my brethren." [2281] But it cannot unreasonably be taken in this way, that "And so I myself" is expressly said with emphasis, i.e., I whom you know to be an Apostle of Christ, whom you venerate with the utmost respect, whom you believe to be of the highest character and perfect, and one in whom Christ speaks, though with the mind I serve the law of God, yet with the flesh I confess that I serve the law of sin, i.e., by the occupations of my human condition am sometimes dragged down from heavenly to earthly things and the height of my mind is brought down to the level of care for humble matters. And by this law of sin I find that at every moment I am so taken captive that although I persist in my immovable longing around the law of God, yet in no way can I escape the power of this captivity, unless I always fly to the grace of the Saviour.

Chapter XVII. How all the saints have confessed with truth that they were unclean and sinful.

And therefore with daily sighs all the saints grieve over this weakness of their nature and while they search into their shifting thoughts and the secrets and inmost recesses of their conscience, cry out in entreaty: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified;" and this: "Who will boast that he hath a chaste heart? or who will have confidence that he is pure from sin?" and again: "There is not a righteous man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not;" and this also: "Who knoweth his faults?" [2282] And so they have recognized that man's righteousness is weak and imperfect and always needs God's mercy, so that one of those whose iniquities and sins God purged away with the live coal of His word sent from the altar, after that marvellous vision of God, after his view of the Seraphim on high and the revelation of heavenly mysteries, said: "Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." [2283] And I fancy that perhaps even then he would not have felt the uncleanness of his lips, unless it had been given him to recognize the true and complete purity of perfection by the vision of God, at the sight of Whom he suddenly became aware of his own uncleanness, of which he had previously been ignorant. For when he says: "Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips," he shows that his confession that follows refers to his own lips, and not to the uncleanness of the people: "and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." But even when in his prayer he confesses the uncleanness of all sinners, he embraces in his general supplication not only the mass of the wicked but also of the good, saying: "Behold Thou art angry, and we have sinned: in them we have been always, and we shall be saved. We are all become as one unclean, and all our righteousnesses as filthy rags." [2284] What, I ask, could be clearer than this saying, in which the prophet includes not one only but all our righteousnesses and, looking round on all things that are considered unclean and disgusting, because he could find nothing in the life of men fouler or more unclean, chose to compare them to filthy rags. In vain then is the sharpness of a nagging objection raised against this perfectly clear truth, as a little while back you said: "If no one is without sin, then no one is holy; and if no one is holy, then no one will be saved." [2285] For the puzzle of this question can be solved by the prophet's testimony. "Behold," he says, "Thou art angry and we have sinned," i.e., when Thou didst reject our pride of heart or our carelessness, and deprive us of Thine aid, at once the abyss of our sins swallowed us up, as if one should say to the bright substance of the sun: Behold thou hast set, and at once murky darkness covered us. And yet though he here says that the saints have sinned, and have not only sinned but also have always remained in their sins, he does not altogether despair of salvation but adds: "In them we have been always, and we shall be saved." This saying: "Behold Thou art angry and we have sinned," I will compare to that one of the Apostle's: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Again this that the prophet subjoins: "In them we have been always, and we shall be saved," corresponds to the following words of the Apostle: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." In the same way also this passage of the same prophet: "Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips,"

seems to agree with the words quoted above: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And what follows in the prophet. "And behold there flew to me one of the Seraphim, having in his hand a coal (or stone) which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: Lo, with this I have touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin is purged," [2286] is just what seems to have fallen from the mouth of Paul, who says: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." You see then how all the saints with truth confess not so much in the person of the people as in their own that they are sinners, and yet by no means despair of their salvation, but look for full justification (which they do not hope that they cannot obtain by virtue of the state of human frailty) from the grace and mercy of the Lord.

Chapter XVIII. That even good and holy men are not without sin.

But that no one however holy is in this life free from trespasses and sin, we are told also by the teaching of the Saviour, who gave His disciples the form of the perfect prayer and among those other sublime and sacred commands, which as they were only given to the saints and perfect cannot apply to the wicked and unbelievers, He bade this to be inserted: "And forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors." [2287] If then this is offered as a true prayer and by saints, as we ought without the shadow of a doubt to believe, who can be found so obstinate and impudent, so puffed up with the pride of the devil's own rage, as to maintain that he is without sin, and not only to think himself greater than apostles, but also to charge the Saviour Himself with ignorance or folly, as if He either did not know that some men could be free from debts, or was idly teaching those whom He knew to stand in no need of the remedy of that prayer? But since all the saints who altogether keep the commands of their King, say every day "Forgive us our debts," if they speak the truth there is indeed no one free from sin, but if they speak falsely, it is equally true that they are not free from the sin of falsehood. Wherefore also that most wise Ecclesiastes reviewing in his mind all the actions and purposes of men declares without any exception: "that there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not," [2288] i.e., no one ever could or ever will be found on this earth so holy, so diligent, so earnest as to be able continually to cling to that true and unique good, and not day after day to feel that he is drawn aside from it and fails. But still though he maintains that he cannot be free from wrong doing, yet none the less we must not deny that he is righteous.

Chapter XIX. How even in the hour of prayer it is almost impossible to avoid sin.

Whoever then ascribes sinlessness to human nature must fight against no idle words but the witness and proof of his conscience which is on our side, and then only should maintain that he is without sin, when he finds that he is not torn away from this highest good: nay rather, whoever considering his own conscience, to say no more, finds that he has celebrated even one single service without the distraction of a single word or deed or thought, may say that he is without sin. Further because we admit that the discursive lightness of the human mind cannot get rid of these idle and empty things, we thus consequently confess with truth that we are not without sin. For with whatever care a man tries to keep his heart, he can never, owing to the resistance of the nature of the flesh, keep it according to the desire of his spirit. For however far the human mind may have advanced and progressed towards a finer purity of contemplation, so much the more will it see itself to be unclean, as it were in the mirror of its purity, because while the soul raises itself for a loftier vision and as it looks forth yearns for greater things than it performs, it is sure always to despise as inferior and worthless the things in which it is mixed up. Since a keener sight notices more; and a blameless life produces greater sorrow when found fault with; and amendment of life, and earnest striving after goodness multiplies groans and sighs. For no one can rest content with that stage to which he has advanced, and however much a man may be purified in mind, so much the more does he see himself to be foul, and find grounds for humiliation rather than for pride, and, however swiftly he may climb to greater heights, so much more does he see above him whither he is tending. Finally that chosen Apostle "whom Jesus loved," [2289] who lay on His bosom, uttered this saying as if from the heart of the Lord: "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." [2290] And so if when we say that we have no sin, we have not the truth, that is Christ, in us, what good do we do except to prove ourselves by this very profession, criminals and wicked among sinners?

Chapter XX. From whom we can learn the destruction of sin and perfection of goodness.

Lastly if you would like to investigate more thoroughly whether it is possible for human nature to attain sinlessness, from whom can we more clearly learn this than from those who "have crucified the flesh with its faults and lusts," and to whom "the world is really crucified"? [2291] Who though they have not only utterly eradicated all faults from their hearts, but also are trying to shut out even the thought and recollection of sin, yet still day after day faithfully maintain that they cannot even for a single hour be free from spot of sin.

Chapter XXI. That although we acknowledge that we cannot be without sin, yet still we ought not to suspend ourselves from the Lord's Communion.

Yet we ought not to suspend ourselves from the Lord's Communion because we confess ourselves sinners, but should more and more eagerly hasten to it for the healing of our soul, and purifying of our spirit, and seek the rather a remedy for our wounds with humility of mind and faith, as considering ourselves unworthy to receive so great grace. Otherwise we cannot worthily receive the Communion even once a year, as some do, who live in monasteries and so regard the dignity and holiness and value of the heavenly sacraments, as to think that none but saints and spotless persons should venture to receive them, and not rather that they would make us saints and pure by taking them. And these thereby fall into greater presumption and arrogance than what they seem to themselves to avoid, because at the time when they do receive them, they consider that they are worthy to receive them. But it is much better to receive them every Sunday for the healing of our infirmities, with that humility of heart, whereby we believe and confess that we can never touch those holy mysteries worthily, than to be puffed up by a foolish persuasion of heart, and believe that at the year's end we are worthy to receive them. Wherefore that we may be able to grasp this and hold it fruitfully, let us the more earnestly implore the Lord's mercy to help us to perform this, which is learnt not like other human arts, by some previous verbal explanation, but rather by experience and action leading the way; and which also unless it is often considered and hammered out in the Conferences of spiritual persons, and anxiously sifted by daily experience and trial of it, will either become obsolete through carelessness or perish by idle forgetfulness.

XXIV. Conference of Abbot Abraham.

On Mortification.

Chapter I. How we laid bare the secrets of our thoughts to Abbot Abraham.

This twenty-fourth Conference of Abbot Abraham [2292] is by the favour of Christ produced, which concludes the traditions and decisions of all the Elders; and when by the aid of your prayers it has been finished, as the number mystically corresponds to that of the four and twenty Elders who are said in the holy Apocalypse [2293] to offer their crowns to the Lamb, we think that we shall have paid the debt of all our promises. And henceforth if these four and twenty Elders of ours have been crowned with any glory for the sake of their teaching, they shall with bowed heads offer it to the Lamb who was slain for the salvation of the world: for He it was Who vouchsafed for the honour of His name to grant to them such exalted feelings and to us whatever words were needful to set forth such profound thoughts. And the merits of His gift must be referred to the Author of all good, to whom the more is owed, as the more is paid. Therefore with anxious confession we laid before this Abraham the impulse of our thoughts, whereby we were urged by daily perplexities of our mind to return to our country and revisit our kinsfolk. For from this the greatest reason for our desire sprang, because we remembered that our kinsfolk were endowed with such piety and goodness that we felt sure that they would never interfere with our purpose, and we constantly reflected, that we should gain more good out of their earnestness, and should be hampered by no cares about bodily matters, and no trouble in providing food, as they would gladly minister abundantly to the supply of all our wants, and besides this we were feeding our souls on the hope of empty joys, as we thought that we should gain the greatest good from the conversion [2294] of many, who were to be turned to the way of salvation by our example and instructions. Then besides this the very spot, where was the ancestral possession of our forefathers, and the delightful pleasantness of the neighbourhood was painted before our eyes, how pleasantly and suitably it stretched away to the desert, so that the recesses of the woods would not only delight the heart of a monk, but would also furnish him with a plentiful supply of food. [2295] And when we explained all this to the aforesaid old man, in a straightforward way, according to the faith of our conscience, and showed by our copious tears that we could no longer resist the violence of the impulse, unless the grace of God came to our rescue by the healing which he could give, he waited for a long time in silence and at last sighed deeply and said:

Chapter II. How the old man exposed our errors.

The feebleness of your ideas shows that you have not yet renounced worldly desires nor mortified your former lusts. For as the wandering character of your desires testifies to the sloth of your heart, this pilgrimage and absence from your kinsfolk, which you ought rather to endure with your heart, you do endure only with the flesh. For all these things would have been buried and altogether driven out of your hearts, if you had got hold of the right method of renunciation, and the main reason for the solitude in which we dwell. And so I see that you are labouring under that infirmity of sluggishness, which is thus described in Proverbs: "Every sluggard is always desiring something;" and again: "Desires kill the slothful." [2296] For in our case too these supplies of worldly conveniences, which you have described, would not be wanting, if we believed that they were appropriate to our calling, or thought that we could get out of those delights and pleasures as much profit as that which is gained from this squalor of the country and bodily affliction. Nor are we so deprived of the solace of our kinsfolk, that those who delight to support us with their substance should fail us, were it not that this saying of the Saviour meets us and excludes everything that contributes to the support of this flesh, as He says: "He who doth not leave (or hate) father and mother and children and brethren cannot be My disciple." [2297] But if we were altogether deprived of the protection of our parents, the services of the princes of this world would not be wanting, as they would most thankfully rejoice to minister to our necessities with prompt liberality. And supported by their bounty, we should be free from the care of preparing food, were it not that this curse of the prophet terribly frightened us. For "Cursed," he says, "is the man that putteth his hope in man;" and: "Put not your trust in princes." [2298] We should also at any rate place our cells on the banks of the river Nile and have water at our very doors, so as not to be obliged to carry it on our necks for four miles, were it not that the blessed Apostle rendered us indefatigable in enduring this labour, and cheered us by his words, saying: "Every one shall receive his own reward according to his labour." [2299] Nor are we ignorant that there are even in our country some pleasant recesses, where plenty of fruits, and pleasant gardens, and fertile ground would furnish the food we need with the slightest bodily efforts on our part, were it not that we were afraid lest that reproach might apply to us, which is directed against the rich man in the gospel: "Because thou hast received thy consolation in this life." [2300] But as we despise all these things and scorn them together with all the pleasures of this world, we delight only in this squalor, and prefer to all luxuries this dreadful and vast desert, and cannot compare any riches of a fertile soil to these barren sands, as we pursue no temporal gains of this body, but the eternal rewards of the spirit. For it is but little for a monk to have once made his renunciation, i.e., in the early days of his conversion to have disregarded the present world, unless he continues to renounce it daily. For to the very end of this life we must with the prophet say this: "And I have not desired the day of man, Thou knowest." [2301] Wherefore also the Lord says in the gospel: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me." [2302]

Chapter III. Of the character of the districts which anchorites ought to seek.

And therefore by him who is exercising anxious care over the purity of his inner man, those districts should be sought, which do not by their fruitfulness and fertility invite his mind to the trouble of cultivating them, nor drive him forth from his fixed and immovable position in his cell, and force him to go forth to some work in the open air, and so, his thoughts being as it were poured forth openly, scatter to the winds all his concentration of mind and all the keenness of his vision of his aim. And this cannot be guarded against or seen by anyone at all however careful and watchful, except one who continually keeps his body and soul shut up and enclosed in walls, that, like a splendid fisherman, looking out for food for himself by the apostolic art, he may eagerly and without moving catch the swarms of thoughts swimming in the calm depths of his heart, and surveying with curious eye the depths as from a high rock, may sagaciously and cunningly decide what he ought to lure to himself by his saving hook, and what he can neglect and reject as bad and nasty fishes.

Chapter IV. What sorts of work should be chosen by solitaires.

Everyone therefore who constantly perseveres in this watchfulness will effectually fulfil what is very plainly expressed by the prophet Habakkuk: "I will stand upon my watch, and ascend upon the rock, and will look out to see what He shall say to me, and what I may answer to Him that reproveth me." [2303] And how difficult and tiresome this is, is very clearly shown by the experience of those who live in the desert of Calamus or Porphyryon. [2304] For though they are separated from all the cities and dwellings of men by a longer stretch of desert than the wilderness of Scete (since by penetrating seven or eight days' journey into the recesses of the vast wilderness, they scarcely arrive at their hiding places and cells) yet because there they are devoted to agriculture and not in the least confined to the cloister, whenever they come to these squalid districts in which we are living, or to Scete, they are annoyed by such harassing thoughts and such anxiety of mind that, as if they were beginners and men who had never given the slightest attention to the exercises of solitude, they cannot endure the life of the cells and the peace and quietness of them, and are at once driven forth and obliged to leave them, as if they were inexperienced and novices. For they have not learnt to still the motions of the inner man, and to quell the tempests of their thoughts by anxious care and persevering efforts, as, toiling day after day in work in the open air, they are moving about all day long in empty space, not only in the flesh but also in heart; and pour forth their thoughts openly as the body moves hither and thither. And therefore they do not notice the folly of their mind in longing for many things, nor can they put a check upon its vague discursiveness; and as they cannot bear sorrow of spirit they think that the fact of a continuance of silence is unendurable, and those who are never tired by hard work in the country, are beaten by silence and worn out by the length of their rest.

Chapter V. That anxiety of heart is made worse rather than better by restlessness of body.

Nor is it wonderful if one who lives in a cell, having his thoughts collected together as it were in a narrow cloister, is oppressed by a multitude of anxieties, which break out with the man himself from the confinement of the dwelling, and at once dash here and there like wild horses. But while they are now roaming at large from their stalls, for the moment some short and sad solace is enjoyed: but when, after the body has returned to its own cell, the whole troop of thoughts retires again to its proper home, the habit of chronic licence gives rise to worse pangs. Those then who are unable and ignorant how to struggle against the promptings of their own fancies, when they are harassed in their cell, by accidie attacking their bosom more violently than usual, if they relax their strict rule and allow themselves the liberty of going out oftener, will arouse a worse plague against themselves by means of this which they fancy is a remedy: just as men fancy that they can check the violence of an inward fever by a draught of the coldest water, though it is a fact that by it its fire is inflamed rather than quenched, as a far worse attack follows after the momentary alleviation.

Chapter VI. A comparison showing how a monk ought to keep guard over his thoughts.

Wherefore a monk's whole attention should thus be fixed on one point, and the rise and circle of all his thoughts be vigorously restricted to it; viz., to the recollection of God, as when a man, who is anxious to raise on high a vault of a round arch, must constantly draw a line round from its exact centre, and in accordance with the sure standard it gives discover by the laws of building all the evenness and roundness required. But if anyone tries to finish it without ascertaining its centre -- though with the utmost confidence in his art and ability, it is impossible for him to keep the circumference even, without any error, or to find out simply by looking at it how much he has taken off by his mistake from the beauty of real roundness, unless he always has recourse to that test of truth and by its decision corrects the inner and outer edge of his work, and so finishes the large and lofty pile to the exact point. [2305] So also our mind, unless by working round the love of the Lord alone as an immovably fixed centre, through all the circumstances of our works and contrivances, it either fits or rejects the character of all our thoughts by the excellent compasses, if I may so say, of love, will never by excellent skill build up the structure of that spiritual edifice of which Paul is the architect, nor possess that beautiful house, which the blessed David desired in his heart to show to the Lord and said: "I have loved the beauty of Thine house and the place of the dwelling of Thy glory;" [2306] but will without foresight raise in his heart a house that is not beautiful, and that is unworthy of the Holy Ghost, one that will presently fall, and so will receive no glory from the reception of the blessed Inhabitant, but will be miserably destroyed by the fall of his building.

Chapter VII. A question why the neighbourhood of our kinsfolk is considered to interfere with us, whereas it does not interfere in the case of those living in Egypt.

Germanus: It is a very useful and needful rule that is given for the kind of works that can be done within the cells. For we have often proved the value of this not only by the example of your holiness, based on the imitation of the virtues of the apostles, but also by our own experience. But it is not sufficiently clear why we ought so thoroughly to avoid the neighbourhood of our kinsfolk, which you did not reject altogether. For if we see you, blamelessly walking in all the way of perfection, and not only dwelling in your own country but some of you having not even retired far from their own village, why should that which does not hurt you be considered bad for us?

Chapter VIII. The answer that all things are not suitable for all men.

Abraham: Sometimes we see bad precedents taken from good things. For if a man ventures to do the same thing as another, but not with the same mind and purpose, or not with equal goodness, he will immediately fall into the snares of deception and death through the very things from which others gain the fruit of eternal life: As that strong armed lad matched with the warlike giant in the combat would certainly have found, if he had been clad in the heavy armour of Saul fit only for men; and that by which one of stronger age would have laid low countless hosts of foes, would only have brought certain danger to the stripling, had he not with prudent discretion chosen the sort of weapons suitable to his youth, and armed himself against his foul foe not with breastplate and shield, with which he saw that others were equipped, but with those weapons with which he was able to fight. Wherefore it is right for each one of us first to consider carefully the measure of his powers and in accordance with its limits, to choose what system he pleases, because though all are good, yet all things cannot be fit for all men. For we do not assert that because the anchorite's life is good, it is therefore suited for everybody: for by many it is felt to be not only useless, but even injurious. Nor because we are right in taking up the system of the Coenobium and the pious and praiseworthy care of the brethren, do we therefore consider that it ought to be followed by everybody. So also the fruits of the care of strangers are very plentiful, but this cannot be taken up by everybody without loss of patience. Further, the systems of your country and of this must first be weighed against each other; and then the powers of men gathered from the constant occurrence of their virtues or vices must be severally weighed in the opposite scales. For it may happen that what is difficult or impossible for a man of one nation in the case of others is somehow turned by ingrained habit into nature: just as some nations, separated by a wide difference of region, can bear tremendous force of cold or heat of the sun without any covering of the body, which certainly others who have no experience of that inclement sky, could not possibly endure, however strong they may be. So also do you who with the utmost efforts of mind and body are trying in this district to get the better of the nature of your country in many respects, diligently consider whether in those regions which, as report says, are frozen, and bound by the cold of excessive unbelief, you could endure this nakedness, if I may so term it. For to us the fact that our holy life is of long standing has almost naturally imparted this fortitude in our purpose, and if we see that you are our equals in virtue and constancy, you in like manner need not shun the neighbourhood of your kinsfolk and brethren.

Chapter IX. That those need not fear the neighbourhood of their kinsfolk, who can emulate the mortification of Abbot Apollos.

But that you may be able fairly to measure the amount of your strength by a certain test of strictness I will point out to you what was done by a certain old man; viz., Abbot Apollos [2307] that if your secret scrutiny of your heart decides that you are not behind this man in purpose and goodness, you may venture on remaining in your country and living near your kinsfolk without detriment to your purpose or injury to your mode of life, and be sure that neither the feeling of nearness nor your love for the district can interfere with the strictness of this humble lot, [2308] which not only your own will but the needs also of your pilgrimage enforce upon you in this country. When then his own brother had come to this old man, whom we have mentioned, in the dead of night, begging him to come out for a little while from his monastery, to help him to rescue an ox, which as he sadly complained had stuck in the mire of a swamp a little way off, because he could not possibly rescue it alone, Abbot Apollos stolidly replied to his entreaties: "Why did you not ask our younger brother who was nearer to you as you passed by than I?" and when the other, thinking that he had forgotten the death of his brother who had been long ago buried, and that he was almost weak in his mind from excessive abstinence and continual solitude, replied: "How could I summon one who died fifteen years ago?" Abbot Apollos said: "Don't you know that I too have been dead to this world for twenty years, and that I can't from my tomb in this cell give you any assistance in what belongs to the affairs of this present life? And Christ is so far from allowing me ever so little to relax my purpose of mortification on which I have entered, for extricating your ox, that He did not even permit the very shortest intermission of it for my father's funeral, which would have been undertaken much more readily properly and piously." And so do ye now search out the secrets of your breast and carefully consider whether you also can continually preserve such strictness of mind with regard to your kinsfolk, and when you find that you are like him in this mortification of soul, then at last you may know that in the same way the neighbourhood of your kinsfolk and brothers will not hurt you, when, I mean, you hold that though they are very close to you, you are dead to them, in such a way that you suffer neither them to be benefited by your assistance, nor yourselves to be relaxed by duties towards them.

Chapter X. A question whether it is bad for a monk to have his wants supplied by his kinsfolk.

Germanus: On this subject you have certainly left no room for any further uncertainty. For we are sure that we cannot possibly keep up our present wretched garb, or our daily going barefoot in their neighbourhood, and that there we should not even procure with the same labour what is necessary for our sustenance, as here we are actually obliged to fetch our water on our necks for three miles. For shame on our part as well as on theirs would not in the least allow us to do this before them. However how will it hurt our plan of life if we are altogether set free from anxiety on the score of preparing our food, by being supplied by them with all things, and so give ourselves up simply to reading and prayer, that by the removal of that labour with which we are now distracted we may devote ourselves more earnestly to spiritual interests alone?

Chapter XI. The answer stating what Saint Antony laid down on this matter.

Abraham: I will not give you my own opinion against this, but that of the blessed Antony, whereby he confounded the laziness of a certain brother (overcome by this luke-warmness which you describe) in such a way as also to cut the knot of your subject. For when one came as I said to the aforesaid old man, and said that the Anchorite system was not at all to be admired, declaring that it required greater virtue for a man to practise what belongs to perfection living among men rather than in the desert, the blessed Antony asked where he lived himself, and when he said that he lived close to his relations, and boasted that by their provision he was set free from all care and anxiety of daily work, and gave himself up ceaselessly and solely to reading and prayer without any distraction of spirit, once more the blessed Antony said: "Tell me, my good friend, whether you grieve with their griefs and misfortunes, and in the same way rejoice in their good fortune?" He confessed that he shared in them both. To whom the old man: "You should know," said he, "that in the world to come also you will be judged in the lot of those with whom in this life you have been affected by sharing in their gain or loss, or joy or sorrow." And not satisfied with this statement the blessed Antony entered on a still wider field of discussion, saying: "This mode of life and this most lukewarm condition not only strike you with that damage of which I spoke (though you do not feel it now, when somehow you say in accordance with that saying in Proverbs: They strike me but I am not grieved: and they mocked me but I knew it not;' or this that is said in the Prophet: And strangers have devoured his strength, but he himself knew it not' [2309]), because day after day they ceaselessly drag down your mind to earthly things, and change it in accordance with the variations of chance; but also because they defraud you of the fruits of your hands and the due reward of your own exertions, as they do not suffer you to be supported by what these supply, or to procure your daily food for yourself with your own hands, according to the rule of the blessed Apostle, as he when giving his last charge to the heads of the Church of Ephesus, asserts that though he was occupied with the sacred duties of preaching the gospel yet he provided not only for himself, but also for those who were prevented by necessary duties with regard to his ministry, saying: Ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities and to the necessities of those who were with me.' But to show that he did this as a pattern to be useful to us he says elsewhere: We were not idle among you; neither did we eat any man's bread for nothing, but in labour and in toil we worked night and day lest we should be chargeable to any of you. Not as if we had not power; but that we might give ourselves a pattern unto you, to imitate us." [2310]

Chapter XII. Of the value of work and the harm of idleness.

And so though we also might have the protection of our kinsfolk, yet we have preferred his abstinence to all riches, and have chosen to procure our daily bodily sustenance by our own exertions rather than rely on the sure provision made by our relations, having less inclination for idle meditation on holy Scripture of which you have spoken, and that fruitless attendance to reading than to this laborious poverty. And certainly we should most gladly pursue the former, if the authority of the apostles had taught us by their examples that it was better for us, or the rules of the Elders had laid it down for our good. But you must know that you are affected by this no less than by that harm of which I spoke above, because though your body may be sound and lusty, yet you are supported by another's contributions, a thing which properly belongs only to the feeble. For certainly the whole human race, except only that class of monks, who live in accordance with the Apostle's command by the daily labours of their own hands, looks for the charity of another's compassion. Wherefore it is clear that not only those who boast that they themselves are supported either by the wealth of their relations or the labours of their servants or the produce of their farms, but also the kings of this world are supported by charity. This at any rate is embraced in the definition of our predecessors, who have laid down that anything that is taken for the requirements of daily food which has not been procured and prepared by the labour of our own hands, ought to be referred to charity, as the Apostle teaches, who altogether forbids the help of another's bounty to the idle and says: "If a man does not work, neither let him eat." [2311] These words the blessed Antony used against some one, and instructed us also by the example of his teaching, to shun the pernicious allurements of our relations and of all who provide the needful charity for our food as well as the delights of a pleasant home, and to prefer to all the wealth of this world sandy wastes horrid with the barrenness of nature, and districts overwhelmed by living incrustations, and for that reason subject to no control or dominion of man, so that we should not only avoid the society of men for the sake of a pathless waste, but also that the character of a fruitful soil may never entice us to the distractions of cultivating it, whereby the mind would be recalled from the chief service of the heart, and rendered useless for spiritual aims.

Chapter XIII. A story of a barber's payments, introduced for the sake of recognizing the devil's illusions.

For as you hope that you can save others also, and are eager to return to your country with the hope of greater gain, hear also on this subject a story of Abbot Macarius, very neatly and prettily invented, which he also gave to a man in a tumult of similar desires, to cure him by a most appropriate story. "There was," said he, "in a certain city a very clever barber, who used to shave everybody for three pence and by getting this poor and wretched sum for his work, out of this same amount used to procure what was required for his daily food, and after having taken all care of his body, used every day to put a hundred pence into his pocket. But while he was diligently amassing this gain, he heard that in a city a long way off each man paid the barber a shilling as his pay. And when he found this out, how long,' said he, shall I be satisfied with this beggary, so as to get with my labour a pay of three pence, when by going thither I might amass riches by a large gain of shillings?' And so at once taking with him the implements of his art, and using up in the expense all that he had got together and saved during a long time, he made his way with great difficulty to that most lucrative city. And there on the day of his arrival, he received from everyone the pay for his labour in accordance with what he had heard, and at eventide seeing that he had gained a large number of shillings he went in delight to the butcher's to buy the food he wanted for his supper. And when he began to purchase it for a large sum of shillings he spent on a tiny bit of meat all the shillings that he had gained, and did not take home a surplus of even a single penny. And when he saw that his gains were thus used up every day so that he not only failed to put by anything but could scarcely get what he required for his daily food, he thought over the matter with himself and said: I will go back to my city, and once more, seek those very moderate profits, from which, when all my bodily wants were satisfied, a daily surplus gave a growing sum to support my old age; which, though it seemed small and trifling, yet by being constantly increased was amounting to no slight sum. In fact that gain of coppers was more profitable to me than is this nominal one of shillings from which not only is there nothing over to be laid by, but the necessities of my daily food are scarcely met.'" And therefore it is better for us with unbroken continuance to aim at this very slender profit in the desert, from which no secular cares, no worldly distractions, no pride of vainglory and vanity can detract, and which the pressure of no daily wants can lessen (for "a small thing that the righteous hath is better than great riches of the ungodly" [2312]) rather than to pursue those larger profits which even if they are procured by the most valuable conversion of many, are yet absorbed by the claims of secular life and the daily leakage of distractions. For, as Solomon says, "Better is a single handful with rest than both hands full with labour and vexation of mind." [2313] And in these allusions and inconveniences all that are at all weak are sure to be entangled, as while they are even doubtful of their own salvation, and themselves stand in need of the teaching and instruction of others, they are incited by the devil's tricks to convert and guide others, and as, even if they succeed in gaining any advantage from the conversion of some, they waste by their impatience and rude manners whatever they have gained. For that will happen to them which is described by the prophet Haggai: "And he that gathereth riches, putteth them into a

bag with holes." [2314] For indeed a man puts his gains into a bag with holes, if he loses by want of self control and daily distractions of mind whatever he appears to gain by the conversion of others. And so it results that while they fancy that they can make larger profits by the instruction of others, they are actually deprived of their own improvement. For "There are who make themselves out rich though possessing nothing, and there are who humble themselves amid great riches;" and: "Better is a man who serves himself in a humble station than one who gains honour for himself and wanteth bread." [2315]

Chapter XIV. A question how such wrong notions can creep into us.

Germanus: Very aptly has your discussion shown the error of these illusions by this illustration: but we should like in the same way to be taught its origin and how to cure it, and we are equally anxious to learn how this deception has taken hold of us. For everybody must see that no one at all can apply remedies to ill health except one who has already diagnosed the actual origin of the disease.

Chapter XV. The answer on the threefold movement of the soul.

Abraham: Of all faults there is one source and origin, but different names are assigned to the passions and corruptions in accordance with the character of that part, or member, if I may so call it, which has been injuriously affected in the soul: As is sometimes also shown by the case of bodily diseases, in which though the cause is one and the same, yet there is a division into different kinds of maladies in accordance with the nature of the member affected. For when the violence of a noxious moisture has seized on the body's citadel, i.e., the head, it brings about a feeling of headache, but when it affects the ears or eyes, it passes into the malady of earache or ophthalmia: when it spreads to the joints and the extremities of the hands it is called the gout in the joints or hands; but when it descends to the extremities of the feet, its name is changed and it is termed podagra: and the noxious moisture which is originally one and the same is described by as many names as there are separate members which it affects. In the same way to pass from visible to invisible things, we should hold that the tendency to each fault exists in the parts and, if I may use the expression, members of our soul. And, as some very wise men have laid down that its powers are threefold, either what is *logikon*, i.e., reasonable, or *thumikon*, i.e., irascible, or *epithumetikon*, i.e., subject to desire, is sure to be troubled by some assault. When then the force of noxious passion takes possession of anyone by reason of these feelings, the name of the fault is given to it in accordance with the part affected. For if the plague of sin has infested its rational parts, it will produce the sins of vainglory, conceit, envy, pride, presumption, strife, heresy. If it has wounded the irascible feelings, it will give birth to rage, impatience, sulkiness, accidie, pusillanimity and cruelty. If it has affected that part which is subject to desire, it will be the parent of gluttony, fornication, covetousness, avarice, and noxious and earthly desires.

Chapter XVI. That the rational part of our soul is corrupt.

And therefore if you want to discover the source and origin of this fault, you must recognize that the rational part of your mind and soul is corrupt, that part namely from which the faults of presumption and vainglory for the most part spring. Further this first member, so to speak, of your soul must be healed by the judgment of a right discretion and the virtue of humility, as when it is injured, while you fancy that you can not only still scale the heights of perfection but actually teach others, and hold that you are capable and sufficient to instruct others, through the pride of vainglory you are carried away by these vain roving, which your confession discloses. And these you will then be able to get rid of without difficulty, if you are established as I said in the humility of true discretion and learn with sorrow of heart how hard and difficult a thing it is for each of us to save his soul, and admit with the inmost feelings of your heart that you are not only far removed from that pride of teaching, but that you are actually still in need of the help of a teacher.

Chapter XVII. How the weaker part of the soul is the first to yield to the devil's temptations.

You should then apply to this member or part of the soul which we have described as particularly wounded, the remedy of true humility: for as, so far as appears, it is weaker than the other powers of the soul in you, it is sure to be the first to yield to the assaults of the devil. As when some injuries come upon us, which are caused either by toil laid upon us or by a bad atmosphere, it is generally the case in the bodies of men that those which are the weaker are the first to give in and yield to those chances, and when the disease has more particularly laid hold of them, it affects the sound parts of the body also with the same mischief, so also, when the pestilent blast of sin breathes over us the soul of each one of us is sure to be tempted above all by that passion, in the case of which its feebler and weaker portion does not make so stubborn a resistance to the powerful attacks of the foe, and to run the risk of being taken captive by those, in the case of which a careless watch opens an easier way to betrayal. For so Balsam [2316] gathered that God's people could be by a sure method deceived, when he advised, that in that quarter, wherein he knew that the children of Israel were weak, the dangerous snares should be set for them, as he had no doubt that when a supply of women was offered to them, they would at once fall and be destroyed by fornication, because he was aware that the parts of their souls which were subject to desire were corrupted. So then the spiritual wickednesses tempt with crafty malice each one of us, by particularly laying insidious snares for those affections of the soul, in which they have seen that it is weak, as for instance, if they see that the reasonable parts of our soul are affected, they try to deceive us in the same way that the Scripture tells us that king Ahab was deceived by those Syrians, who said: "We know that the kings of Israel are merciful: And so let us put sackcloth upon our loins, and ropes round our heads, and go out to the king of Israel, and say to him: Thy servant Benhadad saith: I pray thee, let my soul live." And thereby he was affected by no true goodness, but by the empty praise of his clemency, and said: "If he still liveth, he is my brother;" and after this fashion they can deceive us also by the error of that reasonable part, and make us incur the displeasure of God owing to that from which we were hoping that we might gain a reward and receive the recompense of goodness, and to us too the same rebuke may be addressed: "Because thou hast let go from thy hand a man who was worthy of death, thy life shall be for his life, and thy people for his people" [2317] Or when the unclean spirit says: "I will go forth, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets," [2318] he certainly spread the nets of deception by means of the reasonable feeling which he knew to be exposed to his deadly wiles. And this also the same spirit expected in the case of our Lord, when he tempted Him in these three affections of the soul, wherein he knew that all mankind had been taken captive, but gained nothing by his crafty wiles. For he approached that portion of his mind which was subject to desire, when he said: "Command that these stones be made bread;" the part subject to wrath, when he tried to incite Him to seek the power of the present life and the kingdoms of this world; the reasonable part when he said: "If Thou art the Son of God cast Thyself down from hence." [2319] And in these his deception availed nothing for this reason because he found that there was nothing damaged in

Him, in accordance with the supposition which he had formed from a false idea. Wherefore no part of His soul yielded when tempted by the wiles of the foe, "For lo," He saith, "the prince of this world cometh and shall find nothing in Me." [2320]

Chapter XVIII. A question whether we should be drawn back to our country by a proper desire for greater silence.

Germanus: Among other kinds of illusions and mistakes on our part, which by the vain promise of spiritual advantages have fired us with a longing for our country (as your holiness has discovered by the keen insight of your mind), this stands out as the principal reason, that sometimes we are beset by our brethren and cannot possibly continue in unbroken solitude and continual silence, as we should like. And by this the course and measure of our daily abstinence, which we always want to maintain undisturbed for the chastening of our body, is sure to be interfered with on the arrival of some of the brethren. And this we certainly feel would never happen in our own country, where it is impossible to find anyone, or scarcely anyone who adopts this manner of life.

Chapter XIX. The answer on the devil's illusion, because he promises us the peace of a vaster solitude.

Abraham: Never to be resorted to by men at all is a sign of an unreasonable and ill-considered strictness, or rather of the greatest coldness. For if a man walks in this way, on which he has entered, with too slow steps, and lives according to the former man, it is right that none -- I say not of the saints -- but of any men should visit him. But you, if you are inflamed with true and perfect love of our Lord, and follow God, who indeed is love, with entire fervour of spirit, are sure to be resorted to by men, to whatever inaccessible spot you may flee, and, in proportion as the ardour of divine love brings you nearer to God, so will a larger concourse of saintly brethren flock to you. For, as the Lord says, "A city set on an hill cannot be hid," [2321] because "them that love Me," saith the Lord, "will I honour, and they that despise Me shall be contemned." [2322] But you ought to know that this is the subtlest device of the devil, this is his best concealed pitfall, into which he precipitates some wretched and heedless persons, so that, while he is promising them greater things, he takes away the requisite advantages of their daily profit, by persuading them that more remote and rarer deserts should be sought, and by portraying them in their heart as if they were sown with marvellous delights. And further some unknown and non-existent spots, he feigns to be well-known and suitable and already given over to our power and able to be secured without any difficulty. The men also of that country he feigns to be docile and followers of the way of salvation, that, while he is promising richer fruits for the soul there, he may craftily destroy our present profits. For when owing to this vain hope each one separates himself from living together with the Elders and has been deprived of all those things that he idly imagined in his heart, he rises as it were from a most profound slumber, and when awake will find nothing of those things of which he had dreamed. And so as he is hampered by larger requirements for this life and inextricable snares, the devil will not even allow him to aspire to those things which he had once promised himself, and as he is liable no longer to those rare and spiritual visits of the brethren which he had formerly avoided, but to daily interruptions from worldly folk, he will never suffer him to return even to the moderate quiet and system of the anchorite's life.

Chapter XX. How useful is relaxation on the arrival of brethren.

That most refreshing interlude also of relaxation and courtesy, which sometimes is wont to intervene because of the arrival of brethren, although it may seem to us tiresome and what we ought to avoid, yet how useful it is and good for our bodies as well as our souls you must patiently hear in few words. It often happens I say not to novices and weak persons but even to those of the greatest experience and perfection, that unless the strain and tension of their mind is lessened by the relaxation of some changes, they fall either into coldness of spirit; or at any rate into a most dangerous state of bodily health. And therefore when there occur even frequent visits from the brethren they should not only be patiently put up with, but even gratefully welcomed by those who are wise and perfect; first because they stimulate us always to desire with greater eagerness the retirement of the desert (for somehow while they are thought to impede our progress, they really maintain it unwearied and unbroken, and if it was never hindered by any obstacles, it would not endure to the end with unswerving perseverance), next because they give us the opportunity of refreshing the body, together with the advantages of kindness, and at the same time with a most delightful relaxation of the body confer on us greater advantage than those which we should have gained by the weariness which results from abstinence. On which matter I will briefly give a most apt illustration handed down in an old story.

Chapter XXI. How the Evangelist John is said to have shown the value of relaxation.

It is said that the blessed John, while he was gently stroking a partridge with his hands suddenly saw a philosopher approaching him in the garb of a hunter, who was astonished that a man of so great fame and reputation should demean himself to such paltry and trivial amusements, and said: "Can you be that John, whose great and famous reputation attracted me also with the greatest desire for your acquaintance? Why then do you occupy yourself with such poor amusements?" To whom the blessed John: "What is it," said he, "that you are carrying in your hand?" The other replied: "a bow." "And why," said he, "do you not always carry it everywhere bent?" To whom the other replied: "It would not do, for the force of its stiffness would be relaxed by its being continually bent, and it would be lessened and destroyed, and when the time came for it to send stouter arrows after some beast, its stiffness would be lost by the excessive and continuous strain. and it would be impossible for the more powerful bolts to be shot." "And, my lad," said the blessed John, "do not let this slight and short relaxation of my mind disturb you, as unless it sometimes relieved and relaxed the rigour of its purpose by some recreation, the spirit would lose its spring owing to the unbroken strain, and would be unable when need required, implicitly to follow what was right." [2323]

Chapter XXII. A question how we ought to understand what the gospel says |My yoke is easy and My burden is light. |

Germanus: As you have given us a remedy for all delusions, and by God's grace all the wiles of the devil by which we were harassed, have been exposed by your teaching, we beg that you will also explain to us this that is said in the gospel: "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." [2324] For it seems tolerably opposed to that saying of the prophet where it is said: "For the sake of the words of Thy lips I kept hard ways;" while even the Apostle says: "All who will live godly in Christ suffer persecutions." [2325] But whatever is hard and fraught with persecutions cannot be easy and light.

Chapter XXIII. The answer with the explanation of the saying.

Abraham: We can prove by the easy teaching of our own experience that our Lord and Saviour's saying is perfectly true, if we approach the way of perfection properly and in accordance with Christ's will, and mortifying all our desires, and cutting off injurious likings, not only allow nothing to remain with us of this world's goods (whereby our adversary would find at his pleasure opportunities of destroying and damaging us) but actually recognize that we are not our own masters, and truly make our own the Apostle's words: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." [2326] For what can be burdensome, or hard to one who has embraced with his whole heart the yoke of Christ, who is established in true humility and ever fixes his eye on the Lord's sufferings and rejoices in all the wrongs that are offered to him, saying: "For which cause I please myself in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ: for when I am weak, then am I strong"? [2327] By what loss of any common thing, I ask, will he be injured, who boasts of perfect renunciation, and voluntarily rejects for Christ's sake all the pomp of this world, and considers all and every of its desires as dung, so that he may gain Christ, and by continual meditation on this command of the gospel, scorns and gets rid of agitation at every loss: "For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, but lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" [2328] For the loss of what will he be vexed, who recognizes that everything that can be taken away from others is not their own, and proclaims with unconquered valour: "We brought nothing into this world: it is certain that we cannot carry anything out"? [2329] By the needs of what want will his courage be overcome, who knows how to do without "scrip for the way, money for the purse," [2330] and, like the Apostle, glories "in many fasts, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness"? [2331] What effort, or what hard command of an Elder can disturb the peace of his bosom, who has no will of his own, and not only patiently but even gratefully accepts what is commanded him, and after the example of our Saviour, seeks to do not his own will, but the Father's, as He says Himself to His Father: "Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt"? [2332] By what wrongs also, by what persecution will he be frightened, nay, what punishment can fail to be delightful to him, who always rejoices together with apostles in stripes, and longs to be counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ?

Chapter XXIV. Why the Lord's yoke is felt grievous and His burden heavy.

But the fact that to us on the contrary the yoke of Christ seems neither light nor easy, must be rightly ascribed to our perverseness, as we are cast down by unbelief and want of faith, and fight with foolish obstinacy against His command, or rather advice, who says: "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell (or get rid of) all that thou hast, and come follow Me," [2333] for we keep the substance of our worldly goods. And as the devil holds our soul fast in the toils of these, what remains but that, when he wants to sever us from spiritual delights, he should vex us by diminishing these and depriving us of them, contriving by his crafty wiles that when the sweetness of His yoke and lightness of His burden have become grievous to us through the evil of a corrupt desire, and when we are caught in the chains of that very property and substance, which we kept for our comfort and solace, he may always torment us with the scourges of worldly cares, extorting from us ourselves that wherewith we are tortured? For "Each one is bound by the cords of his own sins," and hears from the prophet: "Behold all you that kindle a fire, encompassed with flames, walk in the light of your fire, and in the flames which you have kindled." Since, as Solomon is witness, "Each man shall thereby be punished, whereby he has sinned." [2334] For the very pleasures which we enjoy become a torment to us, and the delights and enjoyments of this flesh, turn like executioners upon their originator, because one who is supported by his former wealth and property is sure not to admit perfect humility of heart, not entire mortification of dangerous pleasures. But where all these implements of goodness give their aid, there all the trials of this present life, and whatever losses the enemy can contrive, are endured not only with the utmost patience, but with real pleasure, and again when they are wanting so dangerous a pride springs up that we are actually wounded by the deadly strokes of impatience at the slightest reproach, and it may be said to us by the prophet Jeremiah: "And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the troubled water? And what hast thou to do with the way of the Assyrians, to drink the water of the river? Thy own wickedness shall reprove thee, and thy apostasy shall rebuke thee. Know thou and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God, and that My fear is not with thee, saith the Lord." [2335] How then is it that the wondrous sweetness of the Lord's yoke is felt to be bitter, but because the bitterness of our dislike injures it? How is it that the exceeding lightness of the Divine burden becomes heavy, but because in our obstinate presumption we despise Him by whom it was borne, especially as Scripture itself plainly testifies to this very thing saying: "For if they would walk in right paths, they would certainly have found the paths of righteousness smooth"? [2336] It is plain, I say, that it is we, who make rough with the nasty and hard stones of our desires the right and smooth paths of the Lord; who most foolishly forsake the royal road made stony with the flints of apostles and prophets, and trodden down by the footsteps of all the saints and of the Lord Himself, and seek trackless and thorny places, and, blinded by the allurements of present delights, tear our way with torn legs and our wedding garment rent, through dark paths, overrun with the briars of sins, so as not only to be pierced by the sharp thorns of the brambles but actually laid low by the bites of deadly serpents and

scorpions lurking there. For "there are thorns and thistles in wrong ways, but he that feareth the Lord shall keep himself from them." [2337] Of such also the Lord says elsewhere by the prophet: "My people have forgotten, sacrificing in vain, and stumbling in their ways, in ancient paths, to walk in them in a way not trodden." [2338] For according to Solomon's saying: "The ways of those who do not work are strewn with thorns, but the ways of the lusty are trodden down." [2339] And thus wandering from the king's highway, they can never arrive at that metropolis, whither our course should ever be directed without swerving. And this also Ecclesiastes has pretty significantly expressed saying: "The labour of fools wearies those who know not how to go to the city;" viz., that "heavenly Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all." [2340] But whoever truly gives up this world and takes upon him Christ's yoke and learns of Him, and is trained in the daily practice of suffering wrong, for He is "meek and lowly of heart," [2341] will ever remain undisturbed by all temptations, and "all things will work together for good to him." [2342] For as the prophet Obadiah says the words of God are "good to him that walketh uprightly;" and again: "For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them; but the transgressors shall fall in them." [2343]

Chapter XXV. Of the good which an attack of temptation brings about.

And so by the struggle with temptation the kindly grace of the Saviour bestows on us larger rewards of praise than if it had taken away from us all need of conflict. For it is a mark of a loftier and grander virtue to remain ever unmoved when hemmed in by persecutions and trials, and to stand faithfully and courageously at the ramparts of God, and in the attacks of men, girt as it were with the arms of unconquered virtue, to triumph gloriously over impatience and somehow to gain strength out of weakness, for "strength is made perfect in weakness." "For behold I have made thee." saith the Lord, "a pillar of iron and a wall of brass, over all the land, to the kings of Judah, and the princes and the priests thereof, and all the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee and shall not prevail: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord." [2344] Therefore according to the plain teaching of the Lord the king's highway is easy and smooth, though it may be felt as hard and rough: for those who piously and faithfully serve Him, when they have taken upon them the yoke of the Lord, and have learnt of Him, that He is meek and lowly of heart, at once somehow or other lay aside the burden of earthly passions, and find no labour but rest for their souls, by the gift of the Lord, as He Himself testifies by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: "Stand ye on the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, which is the good way, and walk ye in it: and you shall find refreshment for your souls." For to them at once "the crooked shall become straight and the rough ways plain;" and they shall "taste and see that the Lord is gracious," [2345] and when they hear Christ proclaiming in the gospel: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you," they will lay aside the burden of their sins, and realize what follows: "For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." [2346] The way of the Lord then has refreshment if it is kept to according to His law. But it is we who by troublesome distractions bring sorrows and troubles upon ourselves, while we try even with the utmost exertion and difficulty to follow the crooked and perverse ways of this world. But when in this way we have made the Lord's yoke heavy and hard to us, we at once complain in a blasphemous spirit of the hardness and roughness of the yoke itself or of Christ who lays it upon us, in accordance with this passage: "The folly of man corrupteth his ways, but he blames God in his heart;" [2347] and as Haggai the prophet says, when we say that "the way of the Lord is not right" the reply is aptly made to us by the Lord: "Is not My way right? Are not your ways rather crooked?" [2348] And indeed if you will compare the sweet scented flower of virginity, and tender purity of chastity to the foul and fetid sloughs of lust, the calm and security of monks to the dangers and losses in which the men of this world are involved, the peace of our poverty to the gnawing vexations and anxious cares of riches, in which they are night and day consumed not without the utmost peril to life, then you will prove that the yoke of Christ is most easy and His burden most light.

Chapter XXVI. How the promise of an hundredfold in this life is made to those whose renunciation is perfect.

Further also that recompense of reward, wherein the Lord promises an hundredfold in this life to those whose renunciation is perfect, and says: "And everyone that hath left house or brethren or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for My name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold in the present time and shall inherit eternal life," [2349] is rightly and truly taken in the same sense without any disturbance of faith. For many taking occasion by this saying, insist with crass intelligence that these things will be given carnally in the millennium, though they must certainly admit that age, which they say will be after the resurrection cannot possibly be understood as present. It is then more credible and much clearer that one, who at the persuasion of Christ has made light of any worldly affections or goods, receives from the brethren and partners of his life, who are joined to him by a spiritual tie, even in this life a love which is an hundred times better: since it is certain that among parents and children and brothers, wives and relations, where either the tie is merely formed by intercourse, or the bond of union by the claims of relationship, the love is tolerably short lived and easily broken. Finally even good and duteous children when they have grown up, are sometimes shut out by their parents from their homes and property, and sometimes for a really good reason the tie of matrimony is severed, and a quarrelsome division destroys the property of brothers. Monks alone maintain a lasting union in intimacy, and possess all things in common, as they hold that everything that belongs to their brethren is their own, and that everything which is their own is their brethren's. If then the grace of our love is compared to those affections where the bond of union is a carnal love, certainly it is an hundred times sweeter and finer. There will indeed also be gained from conjugal continence a pleasure that is an hundred times greater than that which arises from the union of the sexes. And instead of that joy, which a man experiences from the possession of a single field of house, he will enjoy a delight in riches a hundred times greater, if he passes over to the adoption of sons of God, and possesses as his own all things which belong to the eternal Father, and asserts in heart and soul after the fashion of that true Son: "All things that the Father hath are mine;" [2350] and if no longer tried by that criminal anxiety in distractions and cares, but free from care and glad at heart he succeeds everywhere to his own, hearing daily the announcement made to him by the Apostle: "For all things are yours, whether the world, or things present, or things to come;" and by Solomon: "The faithful man has a whole world of riches." [2351] You have then that recompense of an hundredfold brought out by the greatness of the value, and the difference of the character that cannot be estimated. For if for a fixed weight of brass or iron or some still commoner metal, one had given in exchange the same weight only in gold, he would appear to have given much more than an hundredfold. And so when for the scorn of delights and earthly affections there is made a recompense of spiritual joy and the gladness of a most precious love, even if the actual amount be the same, yet it is an hundred times better and grander. And to make this plainer by frequent repetition: I used formerly to have a wife in the lustful passion of desire: I now have one in honourable sanctification and the true love of Christ. The woman is but one, but the value of the

love has increased an hundredfold. But if instead of distrusting anger and wrath you have regard to constant gentleness and patience, instead of the stress of anxiety and trouble, peace and freedom from care, instead of the fruitless and criminal vexation of this world the salutary fruits of sorrow, instead of the vanity of temporal joy the richness of spiritual delights, you will see in the change of these feelings a recompense of an hundredfold. And if we compare with the short-lived and fleeting pleasure of each sin the benefits of the opposite virtues the increased delights will prove that these are an hundred times better. For in counting on your fingers you transfer the number of an hundred from the left hand to the right and though you seem to keep the same arrangement of the fingers yet there is a great increase in the amount of the quantity. [2352] For the result will be that we who seemed to bear the form of the goats on the left hand, will be removed and gain the reward of the sheep on the right hand. Now let us pass on to consider the nature of those things which Christ gives back to us in this world for our scorn of worldly advantages, more particularly according to the Gospel of Mark who says: "There is no man who hath left house or brethren or sisters or mother or children or lands for My sake and the gospel's sake, who shall not receive an hundred times as much now in this time: houses and brethren and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the world to come life eternal." [2353] For he who for the sake of Christ's name disregards the love of a single father or mother or child, and gives himself over to the purest love of all who serve Christ, will receive an hundred times the amount of brethren and kinsfolk; since instead of but one he will begin to have so many fathers and brethren bound to him by a still more fervent and admirable affection. He also will be enriched with an increased possession of lands, who has given up a single house for the love of Christ, and possesses countless homes in monasteries as his own, to whatever part of the world he may retire, as to his own house. For how can he fail to receive an hundredfold, and, if it is not wrong to add somewhat to our Lord's words, more than an hundredfold, who gives up the faithless and compulsory service of ten or twenty slaves and relies on the spontaneous attendance of so many noble and free born men? And that this is so you could prove by your own experience, as since you have each left but one father and mother and home, you have gained without any effort or care, in any part of the world to which you have come, countless fathers and mothers and brethren, as well as houses and lands and most faithful servants, who receive you as their masters, and welcome, and respect, and take care of you with the utmost attention. But, I say that deservedly and confidently will the saints enjoy this service, if they have first submitted themselves and everything they have by a voluntary offering for the service of the brethren. For, as the Lord says, they will freely receive back that which they themselves have bestowed on others. But if a man has not first offered this with true humility to his companions, how can he calmly endure to have it offered to him by others, when he knows that he is burdened rather than helped by their services, because he prefers to receive attention from the brethren rather than to give it to them? But all these things he will receive not with careless slackness and a lazy delight, but, in accordance with the Lord's word, "with persecutions," i.e., with the pressure of this world, and terrible distress from his passions, because, as the wise man testifies: "He who is easy going and without trouble shall come to want." [2354] For not the slothful, or the careless, or the delicate, or the tender take the kingdom of heaven by force, but the violent. Who then are the violent? Surely they are those who show a splendid violence not to others, but to their own soul, who by a laudable force deprive it of all delights in things present, and are declared by the Lord's mouth to be splendid plunderers, and by rapine of this kind, violently seize upon the kingdom of heaven.

For, as the Lord says, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force." [2355] Those are certainly worthy of praise as violent, who do violence to their own destruction, for, "A man," as it is written, "that is in sorrow laboureth for himself and does violence to his own destruction." [2356] For our destruction is delight in this present life, and to speak more definitely, the performance of our own likes and desires, as, if a man withdraws these from his soul and mortifies them, he straightway does glorious and valuable violence to his own destruction, provided that he refuses to it the pleasantest of its wishes which the Divine word often rebukes by the prophet, saying: "For in the days of your fast your own will is found;" and again: "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, to do thy will on My holy day, and glorify him, while thou dost not thy own ways, and thy own will is not found, to speak a word." And the great blessedness that is promised to him is at once added by the prophet. "Then," he says, "shalt thou be delighted in the Lord, and I will lift thee up above the high places of the earth, and will feed thee with the inheritance of Jacob thy father. For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." [2357] And therefore our Lord and Saviour, to give us an example of giving up our own wills, says: "I came not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me;" and again: "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." [2358] And this good quality those men in particular show who live in the Coenobia and are governed by the rule of the Elders, who do nothing of their own choice, but their will depends upon the will of the Abbot. Finally to bring this discussion to a close, I ask you, do not those who faithfully serve Christ, most clearly receive grace an hundredfold in this, while for His name's sake they are honoured by the greatest princes, and though they do not look for the praise of men, yet become venerated in the trials of persecution whose humble condition would perhaps have been looked down upon even by common folk, either because of their obscure birth, or because of their condition as slaves, if they had continued in their life in the world? But because of the service of Christ no one will venture to raise a calumny against their state of nobility, or to fling in their teeth the obscurity of their origin. Nay rather, through the very opprobrium of a humble condition by which others are shamed and confounded, the servants of Christ are more splendidly ennobled, as we can clearly show by the case of Abbot John who lives in the desert which borders on the town of Lycus. For he sprang from obscure parents, but owing to the name of Christ has become so well known to almost all mankind that the very lords of creation, who hold the reins of this world and of empire, and are a terror to all powers and kings, venerate him as their lord, and from distant countries seek his advice, and entrust to his prayers and merits the crown of their empire, and the state of safety, and the fortunes of war. [2359] In such terms the blessed Abraham discoursed on the origin of and remedy for our illusion, and exposed to our eyes the crafty thoughts which the devil had originated and suggested, and kindled in us the desire of true mortification, wherewith we hope that many also may be inflamed, even though all these things have been written in a somewhat simple style. For though the dying embers of our words cover up the glowing thoughts of the greatest fathers, yet we hope that in the case of very many who try to remove the embers of our words and to fan into a flame the hidden thoughts, their coldness will be turned into heat. But, O holy brethren, I have not indeed been so puffed up by the spirit of presumption as to give forth to you this fire (which the Lord came to send upon the earth, and which He eagerly longs to kindle [2360]) in order that by the application of this warmth I might set on fire your purpose which is already at a white heat, but in order that your authority with your children might be greater, if in addition the precepts of the greatest and most ancient fathers support what you are teaching not by the dead sound of words but by your living example. It only remains that I who have been till now tossed

about by a most dangerous tempest, should be wafted to the safe harbour of silence by the spiritual gales of your prayers.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
 - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net