Conferences of John Cassian - Part II

John Cassian (c. AD 360–435)

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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, 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, 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, who had been carried off from the assembly of anchorites and given as Bishop to the town of Panephysis, 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 Chaeremon, 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., Panephysis, 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.” 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., Chaeremon, Nesteros and Joseph, stood out as anchorites of the longest standing.

Chapter IV.

Of Abbot Chaeremon and his excuse about the teaching which we asked for. And so the blessed Archebius thought it best to take us first to Chaeremon, 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 Chaeremon's statement that faults can be overcome in three ways.

Then the blessed Chaeremon: 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. Hope also shuts out the assaults of all faults: for "all who hope in Him shall not fail. Love also fears no destruction from sins, for "love never faileth; and again: "love covers a multitude of sins. 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. 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. 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,”) 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.’” 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. 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. 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” 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. 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? 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.

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. 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. 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: 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. 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? 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. 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. 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." 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," 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." For "a righteous man pitieth the life of his beasts: but the heart of the ungodly is without pity." 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."

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.” 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.” 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.” 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.

Chaeremon: 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. While therefore in accordance with this rule holy Scripture praises those who fear God, and says ”Blessed are all they that fear the Lord,” 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. 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,” 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. And once more: ”Ye are My friends, if ye do whatever I command you. 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,” 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" 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," 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," 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. 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. 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. 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,” 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. 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; 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.

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. 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. 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: "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. 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, 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," 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 sojourneying 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. Chaeremon: 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, 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, for ”the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” 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.

12. The Second Conference of Abbot Chaeremon

On Chastity.
Not translated.

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 meter 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 Chaeremon 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.

Chaeremon: 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. 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,” 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. 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,” 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.”

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.

Chaeremon: 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 merikh/, 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 (yusiognw/mwn) looked at him, and said o!mmata paid e0rastou=, 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: pau/sasqe, e9tai=roi : ei0mi\ ga\r, e0pe/kw 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\ dwrea\n pwlou/menon qana/tw mh\ a0go/raze, i.e., you should not buy with your death what is sold for nothing.

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”), 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.”

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 recalleth,” meaning that he that is cast off should not altogether perish. 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. 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? 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. 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. 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. 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. 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 then than now. 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. 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. 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. 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,” and how it is ”not of him that willeth or runneth, but of God that hath mercy? What too is this, that God ”will render to every man according to his works; and ”it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do, of His good pleasure; and ”this is not of yourselves but it is the gift of God: not of works, that no man may boast? What is this too which is said: ”Draw near to the Lord, and He will draw near to you,” and what He says elsewhere: ”No man cometh unto Me except the Father who sent Me draw Him?

What is it that we find: ”Make straight paths for your feet and direct your ways,” 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? What is it again that we are admonished: ”Make you a new heart and a new spirit,” 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? What is it that the Lord commands, where He says: ”Wash thine heart of iniquity, O Jerusalem, that thou mayest be saved,” 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? What is it that is said to us: ”Enlighten yourselves with the light of knowledge; and this which is said of God: ”Who teacheth man knowledge; and: ”the Lord enlightens the blind,” or at any rate this, which we say in our prayers with the prophet:

”Lighten mine eyes that I sleep not in death,” 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.”

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,” but the Apostle indicates its weakness by saying ”The Lord keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. David asserts the power of free will, where he says ”I have inclined my heart to do Thy righteous acts,” 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: 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. The Psalmist denotes the power of our will, where he says: ”Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips that they speak no guile,” our prayer testifies to its weakness, when we say: ”O Lord, set a watch before my mouth, and keep the door of my lips. The importance of our will is maintained by the Lord, when we find ”Break the chains of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion: 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. 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,” but the same Lord testifies to its weakness, by saying:

”No man can come unto Me except the Father which sent Me draw him. The Apostle indicates our free will by saying: ”So run that ye may obtain: 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. We are commanded to keep our souls with all care, when the Prophet says: ”Keep your souls,” but by the same spirit another Prophet proclaims: ”Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. 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.”

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? 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. 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. 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. 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? 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,” 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. 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? 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. The Lord also says in the gospel: ”Because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not neither do they understand. 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. 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? 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 shall not build a house to My name. 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. 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, 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. 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. 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: 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. It prevents therefore the will of man, for it is said: ”My God will prevent me with His mercy; 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. For He calls and invites us, when He says: ”All the day long I stretched forth My hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people; and He is invited by us when we say to Him: ”All the day long I have stretched forth My hands unto Thee” He waits for us, when it is said by the prophet: ”Wherefore the Lord waiteth to have compassion upon us; 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. He strengthens us when He says: ”And I have chastised them, and strengthened their arms; and they have imagined evil against me; and He exhorts us to strengthen ourselves when He says: ”Strengthen ye the weak hands, and make strong the feeble knees. Jesus cries: ”If any man thirst let him come unto Me and drink; 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. The Lord seeks us, when He says: ”I sought and there was no man. I called, and there was none to answer; 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.”

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. 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," 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. 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. 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. 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 maybe 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. 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.

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. 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. 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. 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. 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 Joshuah 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. 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," 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. Zacchaeus, 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. 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," 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. 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? 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?

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. 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. 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. 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: and toanother: ”Go thy way, and as thou hast believed so be it unto thee; to another ”Be it unto thee according as thou wilt,” and again to another: ”Thy faith hath made thee whole.”

Chapter XVI.

Of the Face of God; to the effect that it transcends thenarrow 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. 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 sating:

"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. 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: "wiliest 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.

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.”

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? 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.”

Chapter XVIII.

The decision of the fathers that free will is not equal to savea 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. 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. 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") 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 Chaeremon prevented us from feeling the toil of so difficult a journey.

Chapter I.

The words of Abbot Nesteros on the knowledge of thereligious. The order of our promise and course demands that there should follow the instruction of Abbot Nesteros, 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 art 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, praktikh/, i.e., practical, which is brought about by an improvement of morals and purification from faults: secondly, qewrhtikh/, 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."

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. 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 differentprofessions 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, 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, 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.” 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.

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 shouldnot 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,becauseat 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. But of spiritual knowledge there are three kinds, tropological, allegorical, anagogical, 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. 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. 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. 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?

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. 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. 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. 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; and: "God sent His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law; or this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord the God is one Lord."

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,” 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. 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.

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," 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; 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. 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 inthe gospel to the disciples: "What they sayunto you, that observe and do, but not aftertheir words: for they say and do not.

But they bind heavy burdens and grievous to beborne, and lay them on men's shoulders; butthey themselves will not move them with oneof their fingers. For if he who shall "breakone of these commands, and shall teach menso, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven," 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, which has within it two tables of stone, i.e., the constant assurance of the two testaments; 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,” 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. 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. This is rightly observed according to the simple meaning of the letter, by a man who is still in bondage tofoul passions. But by one who has alreadyforsaken 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," 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," 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. 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. 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. 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.

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. 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 ofthis 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 ourmemory.

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. 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. 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. 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.' And so it will come to pass that not only every purpose and thought of your heart, but also all the wanderings and rovings 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 spiritualknowledge. 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,” nor will it keep undefiled that spiritual knowledge and the words of Scripture which are ”sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.” ”For what share hath righteousness with iniquity? or what agreement hath light with darkness? or what concord has Christ with Belial?”

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 rounded 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 trueknowledge.

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 bast no heart: ye who having eyessee not, and having ears, hear not. And again: ”Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I also will reject thee from acting as My priest. For as it is said that in Christ ”all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid,” 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. 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. 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. 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 yeudw/numon , 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; which is in the Greek ta/j a0ntiqe/seij yeudwnu/mou gnw/sewj. 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. 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; as to him it is said by the prophet: "Wherefore dost thou declare My righteous acts, and takest My covenant in thy lips? 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," 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. 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 perceivedthat they were ignorant and unlearned men, they were astonished. 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. 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.

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 sufering, 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.”

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. And ”give not that which is holy to dogs, neither east ye your pearls before swine, lest haply they trample them under foot and turn again and rend you. 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. 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,” 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,” 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. 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. 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. 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,” 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."

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 cart of this people is blinded, and theirears 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.”

Chapter XIX.

How often even those who are not worthy can receive thegrace 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," 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.

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 Eider, 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. The second when for the edification of the church or on account of the faith of those who bring their sick, or of those whoare 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.

And on the other hand, if the faith of those who bring them or of the sick is wanting, it prevents those onwhom 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. 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. 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. 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.”

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.:" when he was going to speak about love notice how in a few words he put it before all gifts: "Andyet," he says, "I show unto you a still more excellent way." 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. 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. 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," 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 breastsof a woman. Why also need I mention the acts of Abbot Abraham, who was surnamed [a9plou/j], 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 was pestered withtears 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 oncemost 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 hismiracles. 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 hon- our 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.” 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,” 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.” 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.”

Chapter VII.

How the excellence of gifts consists not in miracles but inhumility.

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. 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 goodfor 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. He says not: ”if ye do signs and miracles in the same way,” but ”if ye have to one another; and thisit is certain that none but the meek andhumble can keep. Wherefore our predecessors never reckoned those as good monks orfree from the fault of vainglory, who professed themselves exorcists among men, andproclaimed with boastful ostentation amongadmiring crowds the grace which they hadeither obtained or which they claimed. Butin vain, for ”he who trusteth in lies feedeththe winds: and the same runneth after birdsthat fly away. For without doubt that willhappen to them which we find in Proverbs:”As the winds and clouds and rain are veryclear so are these who boast of a fictitiousgift.

And so if any one does any of thesethings in our presence, he ought to meet withcommendation from us not from admirationof his miracles, but from the beauty of his life,nor should we ask whether the devils are subject to him, but whether he possesses thosefeatures of love which the Apostle describes.

Chapter VIII.

How it is more wonderful to have east out one's faults fromone's self than devils from another. Asp 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 theworking of miracles. Ann of those cures it was said to the blessed Apostles: ”Rejoice not that the devils are subject to you” 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 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 lentiles which they call Athera, and his hand, as it happened, wasburnt 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 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 Nesteros, finishing the account of the true working of the gifts of grace accompanied us to the cell of the Eider Joseph which was nearly six miles distant from his, as we were eager for instruction in his doctrine.

Chapter I.

What Abbot Joseph asked us in the first instance. The blessed Joseph, whose instructions and precepts are now to be set forth, and who was one of the three whom we mentioned in the first Conference, belonged to a most illustrious family, and was the chief man of his city in Egypt, which was named Thmuis, 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 offriendship.

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. 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. 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 amongthose 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 neigh-bout. The third is for him to recognize that everything, even what he deems useful ant 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 motionsof 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. 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 of man which He had taken, said: ”I am not come to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me?

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. 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; 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 broker 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. 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,” 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,” 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. Forthese words of wise Solomon are true: ”Contention breeds hatred: but friendship will be a defence to all who do not strive.”

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," 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," 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 ex-tolled 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.” 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.” 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.”

Chapter XIV.

On the different grades of love.

IT is possible then for all to show that love which is called a0ga/ph, 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. 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. But dia/qesij, 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; 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,” 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. 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. Some-thing 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.

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'sgrievances 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."

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."

Chapter XVII.

Of those who hold that patience should be shown to worldlypeople 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,” 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, foris said: ”Every one who is angry with a It 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 toanger 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.

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. 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. 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 reigned love; to whom the Lord said: ”Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?

i.e., the bitter- ness 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.”

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."

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;" 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 exchangeof 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" (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.

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 fall 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,” butthe 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." 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."

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 affec- tion 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;

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.”

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,” 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,” 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; 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” 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.

For hedoes not lay it down that a shamefuloutburst 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 openedwide, 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. 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. 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.”

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.

Chapter I.

Of the vigils which we endured. When then he 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.”

Chapter III.

My ideas on this subject. Then I replied: The counsel or rather the authority of the Eider 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 Eider, 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?" 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, saidhe, 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, 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 promisesabsolutely, 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 oathsaying "Thou shalt never wash my feet," 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." 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, andon 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. 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 desirefor 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. 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,” 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 shall destroy all those who utter a lie;” and: ”the mouth that speaketh a lie, shall slay the soul.”

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 oi0konomi/aj, 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 deceitcould 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 beenvouchsafed to her to be inserted in the progenitors of our Lord's nativity, 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. Towhich 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 reigned 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; 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.”

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. 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 shall 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. 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. 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? 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”; 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;

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? 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 thetruth 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; 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," 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. 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; 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.

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, 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. 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. 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, 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," 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? 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: 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 inconside-rately 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."

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," 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." 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 hisbrother 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 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 owngood deeds, and their own acts, which they were obliged to bring forward in Conference if or 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, trader 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.”

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. 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. 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.

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. 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. 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 Judaea. 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. 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.

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 shall 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. 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; 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 reallygoing 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; 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 nota 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.

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. 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. 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.

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. 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. 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 lsrael.”

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?” 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, 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'spower will be made upon him, both to annoy land betray you, and to make him break his oath as quickly as possible.

Chapter XXX.

That no determination should be made on those things whichconcern 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.” 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.

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, 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, 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, will, I fancy, satisfy your wants and your ardour.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only

divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.