Conferences of John Cassian - Part III

John Cassian (c. AD 360–435)

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Chapter I.

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

After visiting and conversing with those three Elders, whose Conferences we have at the instance of our brother Eucherius tried to describe, as we were still more ardently desirous to seek out the further parts of Egypt, in which a larger and more perfect company of saints dwelt, we came - urged not so much by the necessities of our journey as by the desire of visiting the saints who were dwelling there - to a village named Diolcos, lying on one of the seven mouths of the river Nile. For when we heard of very many and very celebrated monasteries rounded by the ancient fathers, like most eager merchants, at once we undertook the journey on an uncertain quest, urged on by the hope of greater gain.And when we wandered about there for some long time and fixed our curious eyes on thosemountains of virtue conspicuous for their lofty height, the gaze of those around first singled out Abbot Piamun, the senior of all the anchorites living there and their presbyter, as if he were some tall lighthouse. For he was set on the top of a high mountain like that city in the gospel, and at once shed his light on our faces, whose virtues and miracles, which were wrought by him under our very eyes, Divine Grace thus bearing witness to his excellence, if we are not to exceed the plan and limits of this volume, we feel we must pass over in silence.

For we promised to commit to memory what we could recollect, not of the miracles of God, but of the institutes and pursuits of the saints, so as to supply our readers merely with necessary instruction for the perfect life, and not with matter for idle and useless admiration without any correction of their faults. And so when Abbot Piamun had received us with welcome, and had refreshed us with becoming kindness, as he understood that we were not of the same country, he first asked us anxiously whence or why we had visited Egypt, and when he discovered that we had come thither from a monastery in Syria out of desire for perfection he began as follows: -

Chapter II.

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

Chapter III.

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

Chapter IV.

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

Chapter V.

Of the founders who originated the order of coenobites.

And so the system of coenobites took its rise in the days of the preaching of the Apostles. For such was all that multitude of believers in Jerusalem, which is thus described in the Acts of the Apostles: ”But the multitude of believers was of one heart and one soul, neither said any of them that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. They sold their possessions and property and divided them to all, as any man had need. And again: ”For neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as possessed fields or houses, sold them and brought the price of the things that they sold and laid them before the feet of the Apostles: and distribution was made to every man as he had need. The whole Church, I say, was then such as now are those few who can be found with difficulty in coenobia.

But when at the death of the Apostles the multitude of believers began to wax cold, and especially that multitude which had come to the faith of Christ from diverse foreign nations, from whom the Apostles out of consideration for the infancy of their faith and their ingrained heathen habits, required nothing more than that they should” abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from fornication, and from things strangled, and fromblood,” and so that liberty which was conceded to the Gentiles because of the weakness of their newly-born faith, had by degreesbegun to mar the perfection of that Churchwhich existed at Jerusalem, and the fervourof that early faith cooled down owing to thedaily increasing number both of natives andforeigners, and not only those who had accepted the faith of Christ, but even those whowere the leaders of the Church relaxed somewhat of that strictness. For some fancyingthat what they saw permitted to the Gentiles because of their weakness, was alsoallowable for themselves, thought that theywould suffer no loss if they followed the faithand confession of Christ keeping their property and possessions. But those who stillmaintained the fervour of the apostles, mindful of that former perfection left their citiesand intercourse with those who thought thatcarelessness and a laxer life was permissibleto themselves and the Church of God, andbegan to live in rural and more sequesteredspots, and there, in private and on their ownaccount, to practise those things which theyhad learnt to have been ordered by the apostles throughout the whole body of the Churchin general:

and so that whole system of whichwe have spoken grew up from those disciples who had separated themselves fromthe evil that was spreading. And these, as bydegrees time went on, were separated fromthe great mass of believers and because theyabstained from marriage and cut themselvesoff from intercourse with their kinsmen andthe life of this world, were termed monks orsolitaries from the strictness of their lonelyand solitary life. Whence it followed thatfrom their common life they were calledcoenobites and their cells and lodgings coenobia. That then alone was the earliest kindof monks, which is first not only in time butalso in grace, and which continued unbrokenfor a very long period up to the time of AbbotPaul and Antony; and even to this day wesee its traces remaining in strict coenobia

Chapter VI.

Of the system of the Anchorites and its beginning.

Out of this number of the perfect, and, if I may use the expression, this most fruitful root of saints, were produced afterwards theflowers and fruits of the anchorites as well. And of this order we have heard that the originators were those whom we mentioned just now; viz., Saint Paul and Antony, men who frequented the recesses of the desert, not as some from faintheartedness, and the evil of impatience, but from a desire for loftier heights of perfection and divine contemplation, although the former of them is said to have found his way to the desert by reason of necessity, while during the time of persecution he was avoiding the plots of his neighbours. So then there sprang from that system of which we have spoken another sort of perfection, whose followers are rightly termed anchorites; i.e., withdrawers, because, being by no means satisfied with that victory whereby they had trodden under foot the hidden snares of the devil, while still living among men, they were eager to fight with the devils in open conflict, and a straightforward battle, and so feared not to penetrate the vast recesses of the desert, imitating, to wit, John the Baptist, who passed all his life in the desert, and Elijah and Elisha and those of whom the Apostle speaks as follows: ”They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being in want, distressed, afflicted, of whom the world was not worthy, wandering in deserts, in mountains and in dens and in caves of the earth.

Of whom too the Lord speaks figuratively to Job: ”But who hath sent out the wild ass free, and who hath loosed his bands? To whom I have given the wilderness for an house, and a barren land for his dwelling. He scorneth the multitude of the city and heareth not the cry of the driver; he looketh round about the mountains of his pasture, and seeketh for every green thing. In the Psalms also: ”Let now the redeemed of the Lord say, those whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; and after a little: ”They wandered in a wilderness in a place without water: they found not the way of a city of habitation. They were hungry and thirsty: their soul fainted in them. And they cried unto the Lord in their trouble and He delivered them out of their distress; whom Jeremiah too describes as follows: ”Blessed is the man that hath borne the yoke from his youth. He shall sit solitary and hold his peace because he hath taken it up upon himself,” and there sing in heart and deed these words of

the Psalmist: ”I am become like a pelican in the wilderness. I watched and am become like a sparrow alone upon the house-top.”

Chapter VII.

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

And while the Christian religion was rejoicing in these two orders of monks though this system had begun by degrees to deteriorate, there arose afterwards that disgusting and unfaithful kind of monks; or rather, that baleful plant revived and sprang up again which when it first shot up in the persons of Ananias and Sapphira in the early Church was cut off by the severity of the Apostle Peter - a kind which among monks has been for a long while considered detestable and execrable, and which was adopted by no one any more, so long as there remained stamped on the memory of the faithful the dread of that very severe sentence, in which the blessed Apostle not merely refused to allow the aforesaid originators of the novel crime to be cured by penitence or any amends, but actually destroyed that most dangerous germ by their speedy death.

When then that precedent, which was punished with Apostolical severity in the case of Ananias and Sapphira had by degrees faded from the minds of some, owing to long carelessness and forgetfulness from lapse of time, there arose the race of Sarabaites, who owing to the fact that they have broken away from the congregations of the coenobites and each look after their own affairs, are rightly named in the Egyptian language Sarabaites, and these spring from the number of those, whom we have mentioned, who wanted to imitate rather than truly to aim at Evangelical perfection, urged thereto by rivalry or by the praises of those who preferred the complete poverty of Christ to all manner of riches. These then while in their feeble mind they make a pretence of the greatest goodness and are forced by necessity to join this order, while they are anxious to be reckoned by the name of monks without emulating their pursuits, in no sortof way practise discipline, or are subject to the will of the Elders, or, taught by their traditions, learn to govern their own wills or take up and properly learn any rule of sound discretion;

but making their renunciation only as a public profession, i.e., before the face of men, either continue in their homes devoted to the same occupations as before, though dignified by this title, or building cells for themselves and calling them monasteries remain in them perfectly free and their own masters, never submitting to the precepts of the gospel, which forbid them to be busied with any anxiety for the day's food, or troubles about domestic matters: commands which those alone fulfil with no unbelieving doubt, who have freed themselves

from all the goods of this world and subjected themselves to the superiors of the coenobia so that they cannot admit that they are at all their own masters. But those who, as we said, shirk the severity of the monastery, and live two or three together in their cells, not satisfied to be under the charge and rule of an Abbot, but arranging chiefly for this; viz., that they may get rid of the yoke of the Elders and have liberty to carry out their wishes and go and wander where they will, and do what they like, these men are more taken up both day and night in daily business than those who live in the coenobia, but not with the same faith and purpose. For these Sarabaites do it not to submit the fruits of their labours to the will of the steward, but to procure money to lay by. And see what a difference there is between them.

For the others think nothing of the morrow, and offer to God the most acceptable fruits of their toil: while these extend their faithless anxiety not only to the morrow, but even to the space of many years, and so fancy that God is either false or impotent as He either could not or would not grant them the promised supply of food and clothing. The one seek this in all their prayers; viz., that they may gain a0kthmosu/nhn i.e., the deprivation of all things, and lasting poverty: the other that they may secure a rich quantity of all sorts of supplies. The one eagerly strive to go beyond the fixed rule of daily work that whatever is not wanted for the sacred purposes of the monastery, may be distributed at the will of the Abbot either among the prisons, or in the guest-chamber or in the infirmary or to the poor; the others that whatever the day's gorge leaves over, may be useful for extravagant wants or else laid by through the sin of covetousness. Lastly, if we grant that what has been collected by them with no good design, may be disposed of in better ways than we have men- tioned, yet not even thus do they rise to the merits of goodness and perfection.

For the others bring in such returns to the monastery, and daily report to them, and continue in such humility and subjection that they are deprived of their rights over what they gain by their own efforts, just as they are of their rights over themselves, as they constantly renew the fervour of their original act of renunciation, while they daily deprive themselves of the fruits of their labours: but these are puffed up by the fact that they are bestowing something on the poor, and daily fall headlong into sin. The one party are by patience andthe strictness whereby they continue devoutly in the order which they have once embraced, so as never to fulfil their own will, crucified daily to this world and made living martyrs; the others are cast down into hell by the lukewarmness of their purpose. These two sorts of monks then vie with each other in almost equal numbers in this province; but in other provinces, which the need of the Catholic faith compelled me to visit, we have found that this third class of Sarabaites flourishes and is almost the only one, since in the time of Lucius who was a Bishop of Arian mis-belief in the reign of Valens, while we carried alms to our brethren;

viz., those from Egypt and the Thebaid, who had been consigned to the mines of Pontus and Armenia for their steadfastness in the Catholic faith, though we found the system of coenobia in some cities few and far between, yet we never made out that even the name of anchorites was heard among them.

Chapter VIII.

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

Chapter IX.

A question as to what is the difference between a coenobiumand a monastery. Germanus: Is there any distinction between a coenobium and a monastery, or is the same thing meant by either name?

Chapter X.

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

Chapter XI.

Of true humility, and how Abbot Serapion exposed the monkhumility of a certain man.

Wherefore as I see that you have learnt the first principles of this life from the best sort of monks, i.e., that starting from the excellent school of the coenobium you are aim- ing at the lofty heights of the anchorite's rule, you should with genuine feeling of heart pursue the virtue of humility and patience, which I doubt not that you learnt there; and not feign it, as some do, by mock humility in words, or by an artificial and unnecessary readiness for some duties of the body. And this sham humility Abbot Serapion once laughed to scorn most capitally. For when one had come to him making a great display of his lowliness by his dress and words, and the old man urged him, after his custom, to "collect the prayer" he would not consent to his request, but debasing himself declared that he was involved in such crimes that he did not deserve even to breathe the air which is common to all, and refusing even the use of the mat preferred to sit down on the bare ground.

But when he had shown still less inclination for the washing of the feet, then Abbot Serapion, when supper was finished, and the customary Conference gave him an opportunity, began kindly and gently to urge him not to roam with shifty lightmindedness over the whole world, idly and vaguely, especially as he was young and strong, but to keep to his cell in accordance with the rule of the Elders and to elect to be supported by his own efforts rather than by the bounty of others; which even the Apostle Paul would not allow, and though when he was labouring in the cause of the gospel this provision might lightly have been made for him, yet he preferred to work night and day, to provide daily food for himself and for those who were ministering to him and could not do the work with their own hands. Whereupon the other was filled with such vexation and disgust that he could not hide by his looks the annoyance which he felt in his heart. To whom the Elder: Thus far, my son, you have loaded yourself with the weight of all kinds of crimes, not fearing lest by the confession of such awful sins you bring a reproach upon your reputation; how is it then, I pray, that now, at our simple admonition, which involved no reproof, but simplyshowed a feeling for your edification and love,I see that you are moved with such disgust that you cannot hide it by your looks, or conceal it by an appearance of calmness?

Perhaps while you were humiliating yourself, you were hoping to hear from our lips this saying: "The righteous man is the accuser of himself in the opening of his discourse? Fur-

ther, true humility of heart must be preserved, which comes not from an affected humbling of body and in word, but from an inward humbling of the soul: and this will only then shine forth with clear evidences of patience when a man does not boast about sins, which nobody will believe, but, when another insolently accuses him of them, thinks nothing of it, and when with gentle equanimity of spirit he puts up with wrongs offered to him.

Chapter XII.

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

Chapter XIII.

The answer.

Piamun: True patience and tranquillity is neither gained nor retained without profound humility of heart: and if it has sprung from this source, there will be no need either of the good offices of the cell or of the refuge of the desert. For it will seek no external support from anything, if it has the internal support of the virtue of humility, its mother and its guardian. But if we are disturbed when attacked by anyone it is clear that the foundations of humility have not been securely laid in us, and therefore at the outbreak even of a small storm, our whole edifice is shaken and ruinously disturbed. For patience would not be worthy of praise and admiration if it only preserved its purposed tranquillity when attacked by no darts of enemies, but it is grand and glorious because when the storms of temptation beat upon it, it remains unmoved. For wherein it is believed that a man is annoyed and hurt by adversity, therein is he strengthened the more; and he is therein the more exercised, wherein he is thought to be annoyed. For everybody knows that patience gets its name from the passions and endurance, and so it is clear that no one can be called patient but one who bears without annoyance all the indignities offered to him, and so it is not without reason that he is praised by Solomon: ”Better is the patient man than the strong, and he who restrains his anger than he who takes a city; and again:

”For a long-suffering man is mighty in prudence, but a faint-hearted man is very foolish. When then anyone is overcome by a wrong, and blazes up in a fire of anger, we should not hold that the bitterness of the insult offered to him is the cause of his sin, but rather the manifestation of secret weakness, in accordance with the parable of our Lord and Saviour which He spoke about the two houses, one of which was founded upon a rock, and the other upon the sand, on both of which He says that the tempest of rain and waters and storm beat equally: but that one which was founded on the solid rock felt no harm at all from the violence of the shock, while that which was built on the shifting and moving sand at once collapsed. And it certainly appears that it fell, not because it was struck by the rush of the storms and torrents. but because it was imprudently built upon the sand. For a saint does not differ from a sinner in this, that he is not himself tempted in the same way, but because he is not worsted even by a great assault, while the other is overcome even by a slight temptation. For the fortitude of any good man would not, as we said, be worthy of

praise, if his victory was gained without his being tempted, as most certainly there is no room for victory where there is no struggle and conflict:

for ”Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he has been proved he shall receive the crown of life which God hath promised to them that love Him. According to the Apostle Paul also ”Strength is made perfect” not in ease and delights but ”in weakness. ”For behold,” says He, ”I have made thee this day a fortified city, and a pillar of iron, and a wall of brass, over all the land, to the kings of Judah, and to the princes thereof, and to the priests thereof, and to all the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee, and shall not prevail: for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee.”

Chapter XIV.

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

OF this patience then I want to give you at least two examples: one of a certain religious woman, who aimed at the virtue of patience so eagerly that she not only did not avoid the assaults of temptation, but actually made for herself occasions of trouble that she might not cease to be tried more often. For this woman as she was living at Alexandria and was born of no mean ancestors, and was serving the Lord religiously in the house which had been left to her by her parents, came to Athanasius the Bishop, of blessed memory, and entreated him to give her some other widow to support, who was being provided for at the expense of the Church. And, to give her petition in her own words: ”Give me,” she said, ”one of the sisters to look after. When then the Bishop had commended the woman’s purpose because he saw that she was very ready for a work of a mercy, he ordered a widow to be chosen out of the whole number, who was preferred to all the rest for the goodness of her character, and her grave and well-regulated life, for fear lest her wish to be liberal might be overcome by the fault of the recipient of her bounty, and she who sought gain out of the poor might be disgusted at her bad character and so suffer an injury to her faith.

And when the woman was brought home, she ministered to her with all kinds of service, and found out her excellent modesty and gentleness, and saw that every minute she was honoured by thanks from her for her kind offices, and so after a few days she came back to the aforesaid Bishop, and said: I asked you to bid that a woman be given to me for me to support and to serve with obedient complaisance. And when he, not yet understanding the woman’s object and desire, thought that her petition had been neglected by the deceitfulness of the superior, and inquired not without some anger in his mind, what was the reason of the delay, at once he discovered that a widow who was better than all the rest had been assigned to her, and so he secretly gave orders that the one who was the worst of all should be given to her, the one, I mean, who surpassed in anger and quarrelling and wine-bibbing and talkativeness all who were under the power of these faults. And when she was only too easily found and given to her, she began to keep her at home, and to minister to her with the same care as to the former widow, or even more attentively, and this was all the thanks which she got from her for her services;

viz., to be constantly tried by unworthy wrongs and continually annoyed by her by reproaches and upbraiding, as she complained of her, and chid her with spiteful and disparaging remarks, because she had asked for her from the Bishop not for her refreshment but rather for her torment and annoyance, and had taken her away from rest to labour instead of from labour to rest. When then her continual re- proaches broke out so far that the wanton woman did not restrain herself from laying hands on her, the other only redoubled her services in still humbler offices, and learnt to overcome the vixen not by resisting her, but by subjecting herself still more humbly, so that, when provoked by all kinds of indignities, she might smooth down the madness of the shrew by gentleness and kindness. And when she had been thoroughly strengthened by these exercises, and had attained the perfect virtue of the patience she had longed for, she came to the aforesaid Bishop to thank him for his decision and choice as well as for the blessing of her exercise, because he had at last as she wished provided her with a most worthy mistress for her patience, strengthened daily by whose constant annoyance as by some oil for wrestling, she had arrived at complete patience of mind; and, at last, said she, you have given me one to support, for the former one rather honoured and refreshed me by her services.

This may be sufficient to have told about the female sex, that by this tale we may not only be edified, but even confounded, as we cannot maintain our patience unless we are like wild beasts removed in caves and cells.

Chapter XV.

Of the example of patience given by Abbot Paphnutius.

Now let us give the other instance of Abbot Paphnutius, who always remained so zealously in the recesses of that renowned and far-famed desert of Scete, in which he is now Presbyter, so that the rest of the anchorites gave him the name of Bubalis, because he always delighted in dwelling in the desert as if with a sort of innate liking. And so as even in boyhood he was so good and full of grace that even the renowned and great men of that time admired his gravity and steadfast constancy, and although he was younger in age, yet put him on a level with the Elders out of regard for his virtues, and thought fit to admit him to their order, the same envy, which formerly excited the minds of his brethren against the patriarch Joseph, inflamed one out of the number of his brethren with a burning and consuming jealousy. And this man wanting to mar his beauty by some blemish or spot, hit on this kind of devilry, so as to seize an opportunity when Paphnutius had left his cell to go to Church on Sunday: and secretly entering his cell he slyly hid his own book among the boughs which he used to weave of palm branches, and, secure of hiswell-planned trick, himself went off as if with a pure and clean conscience to Church. Andwhen the whole service was ended as usual,in the presence of all the brethren he brought his complaint to S.

Isidore who was Presbyter of this desert before this same Paphnutius, and declared that his book had been stolen from his cell. And when his complaint had so disturbed the minds of all the brethren, and more especially of the Presbyter, so that they knew not what first to suspect or think, as all were overcome with the utmost astonishment at so new and unheard of a crime, such as no one remembered ever to have been committed in that desert before that time, and which has never happened since, he who had brought forward the matter as the accuser urged that they should all be kept in Church and certain selected men be sent to search the cells of the brethren one by one. And when this had been entrusted to three of the Elders by the Presbyter, they turned over the bed-chambers of them all, and at last found the book hidden in the cell of Paphnutius among the boughs of the palms which they call seira/, just as the plotter had hidden it.

And when the inquisitors at once brought it back to the Church and produced it before all, Paphnutius, although he was perfectly clear in the sincerity of his conscience, yet like one who acknowledged the guilt of thieving, gave himself up entirely to make amends and

humbly asked for a plan of repentance, as he was so careful of his shame and modesty (and feared) lest if he tried to remove the stain of the theft by words, he might further be branded as a liar, as no one would believe anything but what had been found out. And when he had immediately left the Church not cast down in mind but rather trusting to the judgment of God, he continually shed tears at his prayers, and fasted thrice as often as before, and prostrated himself in the sight of men with all humility of mind. But when he had thus submitted himself with all contrition of flesh and spirit for almost a fortnight, so that he came early on the morning of Saturday and Sunday not to receive the Holy Communion but to prostrate himself on the threshold of the Church and humbly ask for pardon, He, Who is the witness of all secret things and knows them, suffered him to be no longer tried by Himself or defamed by others.

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

If then we want to attain to his height of virtue, we must lay the same foundation to begin with.

Chapter XVI.

On the perfection of patience.

A Twofold reason however led me to relate this fact, first that we may weigh this steadfastness and constancy of the man, and as we are attacked by less serious wiles of the enemy, may the better secure a greater feeling of calmness and patience, secondly that we may with resolute decision hold that we cannot be safe from the storms of temptation and assaults of the devil if we make all the protection for our patience and all our confidence consist not in the strength of our inner man but in the doors of our cell or the recesses of the desert, and companionship of the saints, or the safeguard of anything else outside us. For unless our mind is strengthened by the power of His protection Who says in the gospel ”the kingdom of God is within you,” in vain do we fancy that we can defeat the plots of our airy foe by the aid of men who are living with us, or that we can avoid them by distance of place, or exclude them by the protection of walls. For though none of these things was wanting to Saint Paphnutius yet the tempter did not fail to find a way of access against him to attack him; nor did the encircling walls, or the solitude of the desert or the merits of all those saints in the congregation repulse that most foul spirit.

But because the holy servant of God had fixed the hope of his heart not on those external things but on Him Who is the judge of all secrets, he could not be moved even by the machinations of such an assault as that. On the other hand did not the man whom envy had hurried into so grievous a sin enjoy the benefit of solitude and the protection of a retired dwelling, and intercourse with the blessed Abbot and Presbyter Isidore and other saints? And yet because the storm raised by the devil found him upon the sand, it not only drove in his house but actually overturned it. We need not then seek for our peace in externals, nor fancy that another person’s patience can be of any use to the faults of our impatience. For just as ”the kingdom of God is within you,” so ”a man’s foes are they of his own household. For no one is more my enemy than my own heart which is truly the one of my household closest to me. And therefore if we are careful, we cannot possibly be injured by intestine enemies. For where those of our own household are not opposed to us, there also the kingdom of God is secured in peace of heart. For if you diligently investigate the matter, I cannot be injured by any man however spiteful, if I do not fight against myself with warlike heart.

But if I am injured, the fault is not owing to the other's attack, but to my own impatience. For as strong and solid food is good for a man in good health, so it is bad for a sick one. But it cannot hurt the man who takes it, unless the weakness of its recipient gives it its power to hurt. If then any similar temptation ever arises among brethren, we need never be shaken out of the even tenor of our ways and give an opening to the blasphemous snarls of men living in the world, nor wonder that some bad and detestable men have secretly found their way into the number of the saints, because so long as we are trodden down and trampled in the threshing floor of this world, the chaff which is destined for eternal fire is quite sure to be mingled with the choicest of the wheat. Finally if we bear in mind that Satan was chosen among the angels, and Judas among the apostles, and Nicholas the author of a detestable heresy among the deacons, it will be no wonder that the basest of men are found among the ranks of the saints.

For although some maintain that this Nicholas was not the same man who was chosen for the work of the ministry by the Apostles, nevertheless they cannot deny that he was of the number of the disciples, all of whom were clearly of such a character and so perfect as those few whom we can now with difficulty discover in the coenobia. Let us then bring forward not the fall of the above-mentioned brother, who fell in the desert with so grievous a collapse, nor that horrible stain which he afterwards wiped out by the copious tears of his penitence, but the example of the blessed Paphnutius; and let us not be destroyed by the ruin of the former, whose ingrained sin of envy was increased and made worse by his affected piety, but let us imitate with all our might the humility of the latter, which in his case was no sudden production of the quiet of the desert, but had been gained among men, and was consummated and perfected by solitude. However you should know that the evil of envy is harder to be cured than other faults, for I should almost say that a man whom it has once tainted with the mischief of its poison is without a remedy. For it is the plague of which it is figuratively said by the prophet: "Behold I will send among you serpents, basilisks, against which there is no charm: and they shall bite you.

Rightly then are the stings of envy compared by the prophet to the deadly poison of basilisks, as by it the first author of all poisons and their chief perished and died. For he slew himself before him of whom he was envious, and destroyed himself before that he poured forth the poison of death against man: for "by the envy of the devil death entered into the world: they therefore who are on his side follow him. For just as he who was the first to be corrupted by the plague of that evil, admitted no remedy of penitence, nor any healing plaster, so those also who have given themselves up to be smitten by the same pricks, exclude all the aid of the sacred charmer, because as they are tormented not by the faults but by the prosperity of those of whom they are jealous, they are ashamed to display the real truth and look out for some external unnecessary and trifling causes of offence: and of these, because they are altogether false, vain is the hope of cure, while the deadly poison which they will not produce is lurking in their veins. Of which the wisest of men has fitly said: "If a serpent bite without hissing, there is no supply for the charmer. For those are silent bites, to which alone the medicine of the wise is no succour.

For that evil is so far incurable that it is made worse by attentions, it is increased by services, is irritated by presents, because as the same Solomon says: ”envy endures nothing. For just in proportion as another has made progress in humble submission or in the virtue of patience or in the merit of munificence, so is a man excited by worse pricks of envy, because he desires nothing less than the ruin or death of the man whom he envies. Lastly no submission on the part of their harmless brother could soften the envy of the eleven patriarchs, so that Scripture relates of them: ”But his brothers envied him because his father loved him, and they could not speak peaceably unto him” until their jealousy, which would not listen to any entreaties on the part of their obedient and submissive brother, desired his death, and would scarcely be satisfied with the sin of selling a brother. It is plain then thatenvy is worse than all faults, and harder to get rid of, as it is inflamed by those remedies by which the others are destroyed. For, for example, a man who is grieved by a loss that has been caused to him, is healed by a liberal compensation: one who is sore owing to a wrong done to him, is appeased by humble satisfaction being made.

What can you do with one who is the more offended by the very fact that he sees you humbler and kinder, who is not aroused to anger by any greed which can be appeased by a bribe; or by any injurious attack or love of vengeance, which is overcome by obsequious services; but is only irritated by another’s success and happiness? But who is there who in order to satisfy one who envies him, would wish to fall from his good fortune, or to lose his prosperity or to be involved in some calamity? Wherefore we must constantly implore the divine aid, to which nothing is impossible, in order that the serpent may not by a single bite of this evil destroy whatever is flourishing in us, and animated as it were by the life and quickening power of the Holy Ghost. For the other poisons of serpents, i.e., carnal sins and faults, in which human frailty is easily entangled and from which it is as easily purified, show some traces of their wounds in the flesh, whereby although the earthly body is most dangerously inflamed, yet if any charmer well skilled in divine incantations applies a cure and antidote or the remedy of words of salvation, the poisonous evil does not reach to the everlasting death of the soul. But the poison of envy as if emitted by the basilisk, destroys the very life of religion and faith, even before the wound is perceived in the body.

For he does not raise himself up against men, but, in his blasphemy, against God, who carps at nothing in his brother except his felicity, and so blames no fault of man, but simply the judgment of God. This then is that ”root of bitterness springing up” which raises itself to heaven and tends to reproaching the very Author Who bestows good things on man. Nor shall anyone be disturbed because God threatens to send ”serpents, basilisks,” to bite those by whose crimes He is offended. For although it is certain that God cannot be the author of envy, yet it is fair and worthy of the divine judgment that, while good gifts are bestowed on the humble and refused to the proud and reprobate, those who, as the Apostle says, deserve to be given over ”to a reprobate mind,” should be smitten and consumed by envy sent as it were by Him, according to this passage: ”They have provoked me to jealousy by them that are no gods: and I will provoke them to jealousy by them that are no nation.”

By this discourse the blessed Piamun excited still more keenly our desire in which we had begun to be promoted from the infant school of the coenobium to the second standard of the anchorites' life. For it was under his instruction that we made our first start in solitary living, the knowledge of which we afterwards followed up more thoroughly in Scete.

Chapter I.

of the coenobium of Abbot Paul and the patience of a certainbrother.

After only a few days we made our way once more with great alacrity, drawn by the desire for further instruction, to the coenobium of Abbot Paul, where though a greater number than two hundred of the brethren dwell there, yet, in honour of the festival which was then being held, an enormous collection of monks from other coenobia had come there as well: for the anniversary of the death of a former Abbot who had presided over the same monastery was being solemnly kept. And we have mentioned this assembly for this reason that we may briefly treat of the patience of a certain brother, which was remarkable for immovable gentleness on his part in the presence of all this congregation. For though the object of this work has regard to another person; viz., that we may produce the utterances of Abbot John who left the desert and submitted himself to that coenobium with the utmost goodness and humility, yet we think it not at all absurd to relate without any unnecessary verbiage, what we think is most instructive to those who are eager for goodness.

And so when the whole body of the monks was seated in separate parties of twelve, in the large open court, when one Of the brethren had been rather slow in fetching and bringing in a dish, the aforesaid Abbot Paul, who was busily hurrying about among the troops of brethren who were serving, saw it and struck him such a blow before them all on his open palm that the sound of the hand which was struck actually reached the ears of those whose backs were turned nd who were sitting some way off. But the youth of remarkable patience received it with such calmness of mind that not only did he let no word fall from his mouth or give the slightest sign of murmuring by the silent movements of his lips, but actually did not change colour in the slightest degree or (lose) the modest and peaceful look about his mouth. And this fact struck with astonishment not merely us, who had lately come from a monastery of Syria and had not learnt the blessing of this patience by such clear examples, but all those as well who were not without experience of such earnestness, so that by it a great lesson was taught even to those who were well advanced, because even if this paternal correction had not disturbed his patience, neither did the presence of so great a number bring the slightest sign of colour to his cheeks.

Chapter II.

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

Chapter III.

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

Chapter IV.

Of the excellence which the aforesaid old man showed in thesystem of the anchorites.

IF then anyone else delights in the recesses of the desert and would forget all human intercourse and say with Jeremiah: "I have not desired the day of man: Thou knowest," I confess that by the blessing of God's grace, I also secured or at any rate tried to secure this. And so by the kind gift of the Lord I remember that I was often caught up into such an ecstasy as to forget that I was clothed with the burden of a weak body, and my soul on a sudden forgot all external notions and entirely cut itself off from all material objects, so that neither my eyes nor ears performed their proper functions. And my soul was so filled with divine meditations and spiritual contemplations that often in the evening I did not know whether I had taken any food and on the next day was very doubtful whether I had broken my fast yesterday. For which reason, a supply of food for seven days, i.e., seven sets of biscuits were set apart in a sort of hand-basket, and laid by on Saturday, that there might be no doubt when supper had been omitted; and by this plan another mistake also from forgetfulness was obviated, for when the number of cakes was finished it showed that the course of the week was over, and that the services of the same day had come round, and that the festival and holy day and services of the congregation could not escape the notice of the solitary.

But even if that ecstasy of mind of which we have spoken should happen to interfere with this arrangement, yet stall the method of the days' work would show the number of the days and check the mistake. And to pass over in silence the other advantages of the desert (for it is not our business to treat of their number and quantity, but rather of the aim of solitude and the coenobium) I will the rather briefly explain the reasons why I preferred to leave it, which you also wanted to know, and will in a concise discourse glance at all those fruits of solitude which I mentioned, and show to what greater advantages on the other side they ought to be held inferior.

Chapter V.

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

Chapter VI.

Of the conveniences of the coenobium.Wherefore I will briefly explain what advantages I now enjoy in this manner of life. You must consider my words and judge whether those advantages of the desert outweigh these comforts, and by this you will also be able to prove whether I chose to be cramped within the narrow limits of the coenobium from dislike or from desire of that purity of the solitary life. In this life then there is no providing for the day's work, no distractions of buying and selling, no unavoidable care for the year's food, no anxiety about bodily things, by which one has to get ready what is necessary not only for one's own wants but also for those of any number of visitors, finally no conceit from the praise of men, which is worse than all these things and sometimes in the sight of God does away with the good of even great efforts in the desert.

But, to pass over those waves of spiritual pride and the deadly peril of vainglory in the life of the anchorite, let us return to this general burden which affects everybody, i.e., the ordinary anxiety in providing food, which has so far exceeded I say not the measure of that ancient strictness which altogether did without oil, but is beginning not to be content even with the relaxation of our own time according to which the requirements of all the supply of food for a year were satisfied by the preparation of a single pint of oil and a modius of lentils prepared for the use of visitors; but now the needful supply of food is scarcely met by two or three times that amount. And to such an extent has the force of this dangerous relaxation grown among some that, when they mix vinegar and sauce, they do not add that single drop of oil, which our predecessors who followed the rules of the desert with greater powers of abstinence, were accustomed to pour in simply for the sake of avoiding vainglory, but they break an Egyptian cheese for luxury and pour over it more oil than is required, and so take, under a single pleasant relish, two sorts of food which differ in their special flavour, each of which ought singly to be a pleasant refreshment at different times for a monk.

To such a pitch however has this u9likh\ kih=sij, i.e., acquisition of material things grown, that actually Under pretence of hospitality and welcoming guests anchorites have begun to keep a blanket in their cells-a thing which I cannot mention without shame-to omit those things by which the mind that is awed by and intent on spiritual meditation is more especially hampered; viz., the concourse of brethren, the duties of receiving the coming and speeding the parting guest, visits to each other and the endless worry of various confabula-

tions and occupations, the expectation of which owing to the continuous character of these customary interruptions keeps the mind on the stretch even during the time when these bothers seem to cease. And so the result is that the freedom of the anchorite's life is so hindered by these ties that it can never rise to that ineffable keenness of heart, and thus loses the fruits of its hermit life. And if this is now denied to me while I am living in the congregation and among others, at least there is no lack of peace of mind and tranquillity of heart that is freed from all business. And unless this is ready at hand for those also who live in the desert, they will indeed have to undergo the labours of the anchorite's life, but will lose its fruits which can only be gained in peaceful stability of mind.

Finally even if there is any diminution of my purity of heart while I am living in the coenobium, I shall be satisfied by keeping in exchange that one precept of the Gospel, which certainly cannot be less esteemed than all those fruits of the desert; I mean that I should take no thought for the morrow, and submitting myself completely to the Abbot seem in some degree to emulate

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

Chapter VII.

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

Chapter VIII.

The answer to the question proposed.

John: I should absolutely maintain that one and the same man could not attain perfection in both lives unless I was hindered by the example of some few. And since it is no small matter to find a man who is perfect in either of them, it is clear how much harder and I had almost said impossible it is for a man to be thoroughly efficient in both. And if this has ever happened, it cannot come under any general rule. For a general rule must be based not on exceptional instances, i.e., on the experience of a very few, but on what is within the power of the many or rather of all. But what is attained to here and there by but one or two, and is beyond the capacity of ordinary goodness, must be kept out of general rules as something permitted outside the condition and nature of human weakness, and should be brought forward as a miracle rather than as an example. Wherefore I will, as my slender ability allows, briefly intimate what you want to know. The aim indeed of the coenobite is to mortify and crucify all his desires and, according to that salutary command of evangelic perfection, to take no thought for the morrow. And it is perfectly clear that this perfection cannot be attained by any except a coenobite, such a man as the prophet Isaiah describes and blesses and praises as follows:

"If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy own will in my holy day, and glorify Him, while thou dost not thine own ways, and thine own will is not found to speak a word: then shalt thou be delighted in the Lord, and I will lift thee up above the high places of the earth, and will feed thee with the inheritance of Jacob thy father. For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. But the perfection for a hermit is to have his mind freed from all earthly things, and to unite it, as far as human frailty allows, with Christ: and such a man the prophet Jeremiah describes when he says: "Blessed is the man who hath borne the yoke from his youth. He shall sit solitary and hold his peace, because he hath taken it upon himself; the Psalmist also: "I am become like a pelican in the desert. I watched and became as a sparrow alone upon the housetop. To this aim then, which we have described as that of either life, unless each of them attains, in vain does the one adopt the system of the coenobium, and the other of the hermitage: for neither of them will get the good of his method of life.

Chapter IX.

Of true and complete perfection. But this is merikh=, i.e., no thorough and altogether complete perfection, but only a partial one. Perfection then is very rare and granted by God's gift to but a very few. For he is truly and not partially perfect who with equal imperturbability can put up with the squalor of the wilderness in the desert, as well as the infirmities of the brethren in the coenobium. And so it is hard to find one who is perfect in both lives, because the anchorite cannot thoroughly acquire a0kthmosu/nh, i.e., a disregard for and stripping oneself of material things, nor the coenobite purity in contemplation, although we know that Abbot Moses and Paphnutius and the two Macarii were masters of both in perfection. And so they were perfect in either life, and while they withdrew further than all the dwellers in the desert and delighted themselves unceasingly in the retirement of the wilderness, and as far as in them lay never sought intercourse with other men, yet they put up with the presence and the infirmities of those who came to them so that when a large number of the brethren came to them for the sake of seeing them and profiting by it, they endured this almost continuous trouble of receiving them with imperturbable patience, and men fancied that all the days of their life they had neither learnt nor practised anything but how to show common civility to those who came, so that it was a puzzle to all to say in which-life their zeal was mainly shown, i.e., whether their greatness adapted itself more remarkably to the purity of the hermitage or to the common life.

Chapter X.

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

Chapter XI.

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

John: To those who are really seeking relief, healing remedies from the true Physician of souls will certainly not be wanting; and to those above all will they be given who do not disregard their ill-condition (either because they despair of it, or because they do not care about it), nor hide the danger they are in from their wound, nor in their wanton heart reject the remedy of penitence, but with an humble and yet careful heart flee to the heavenly Physician for the diseases they have contracted from ignorance or error or necessity. And so we ought to know that if we retire to solitude or secret places, without our faults being first cured, their operation is but repressed, while the power of feeling them is not extinguished. For the root of all sins not having been eradicated is still lying hid in us, or rather creeping up, and that it is still alive we can tell by these signs. For instance, if, when we are living in solitude we receive the approach of some brethren, or any very slight tarrying on their part, with any anxiety or fretfulness of mind, we should recognize that an incentive to the most hasty impatience is still existing in us.

But if when we are hoping for the coming of a brother, and fromsome cause he perhaps delays a little, our mental indignation either silently blames his slowness, and annoyance at this inconvenient waiting disturbs our mind, the examination of our conscience will show

that the sin of anger and vexation is plainly still remaining in us. Again, if when a brother asks for our book to read, or for some other article to use,his request annoys us, or a refusal on our part disgusts him, there can be no doubt that we are still entangled in the meshes of avarice or covetousness. But if a sudden thought or a passage of Holy Scripture brings up the recollection of a woman and we feel that weare at all attracted towards her, we should know that the fire of fornication is not yet extinguished in us. But if on a comparison of our own strictness with the laxity of anothereven the slightest conceit tries our mind, it is clear that we are affected with the dreadful plague of pride. When then we detect these signs of faults in our heart, we should clearly recognize that it is only the opportunity and not the passion of sin of which we are deprived.

And certainly these passions, if at any time we were to mingle in the ordinary life of men, would at once start up from their lurking places in our thoughts and prove that they did not then for the first time come into existence when they broke out, but that they were then at last made public, because they had been long lying hid. And so even a solitary can detect by sure signs that the roots of each fault are still implanted in him, if he tries not to show his purity to men, but to maintain it inviolate in His sight, from whom no secrets of the heart can be hid.

Chapter XIII.

A question how a man can be cured who has entered on solitude without having his faults eradicated. Germanus: We very clearly and plainly see the proofs by which the signs of infirmities are inferred, and the method of discerning diseases, i.e., how the faults which are concealed in us can be detected: for our every day experience and the daily motions of our thoughts show us all these as they have been stated. It remains then that as the proofs and causes of our maladies have been exposed to us in a most clear way so their remedies and cures may also be shown. For no one can doubt that one who has first discovered the grounds and beginnings of ailments, with the approving witness of the conscience of those affected, can best discourse on their remedies. And so though the teaching of your holiness has laid bare the secrets of our wounds whereby we venture to have some hope of a remedy, because so clear a diagnosis of the disease gives promise of the hope of a cure, yet because, as you say, the first elements of salvation are acquired in the coenobium, and men cannot be in a sound condition in solitude, unless they have first been healed by the medicine of the coenobium, we have fallen again into a dangerous state of despair lest as we left the coenobium in an imperfect condition we may not now that we are in the desert succeed in becoming perfect.

Chapter XIV.

The answer on their remedies.

John: For those who are anxious for the cure of their ailments a saving remedy is sure not to be wanting, and therefore remedies should be sought by the same means that the signs of each fault are discovered. For as we have said that the faults of men's ordinary life are not wanting to solitaries, so we do not deny that all zeal for virtue, and all the means of healing are at the disposal of all those who are cut off from men's ordinary life. When then anyone discovers by those signs which we described above, that he is attacked by outbreaks of impatience or anger, he should always practise himself in the opposite and contrary things, and by setting before himself all sorts of injuries and wrongs, as if offered to him by somebody else, accustom his mind to submit with perfect humility to everything that wickedness can bring upon him; and by often representing to himself all kinds of rough and intolerable things, continually consider with all sorrow of heart with what gentleness he ought to meet them. And, by thus looking at the sufferings of all the saints, or indeed at those of the Lord Himself, he will admit that the various reproaches as well as punishments are less than he deserves, and prepare himself to endure all kinds of griefs.

And when occasionally he has been recalled by so, me invitation to the assembly of the brethren-a thing which cannot but happen every now and then even to the strictest inmates of the desert,-if he finds that his mind is silently disturbed even for trifles, he should like some stern censor of his secret emotions charge himself with all those various hard wrongs, to theperfect endurance of which he was training himself by his daily meditations, and blaming and chiding himself as follows, say My good man, are you the fellow who while training yourself in the practising ground of solitude, ventured most determinedly to think that you would get the better of all bad qualities, and who just now, when you were representing to yourself not only all sorts of bitter reproaches, but also intolerable punishments, fancied that you were pretty strong and able to stand against all storms? How is it that that unconquered patience of yours is upset by the first trial even of a light word? How is it that even a gentle breeze has shaken that house of yours which you fancied was built so strongly on the solid rock? Where is that which you announced when during a time of peace you were in your foolish confidence longing for war? "I am ready, and am not troubled; and

this which you used often to say with the prophet: ”Prove me, 0 Lord, and try me: search out my reins and my heart; and: ”prove me, 0 Lord, and know my heart:

question me and know my paths; and see if there be any way of wickedness in me. How has a tiny ghost of an enemy frightened your grand preparations for war? With such reproaches and remorse a man should condemn himself and not allow the sudden temptation which has upset him to go unpunished, but by chastising his flesh with a severer penalty of fasting and vigils; and, by punishing his sin of lightness of mind by continual pains of self-restraint, he should while living in solitude consume in this fire of practice what he ought to have thoroughly driven out in the life of the coenobium. This at any rate we must firmly and resolutely hold to in order to secure a lasting and unbroken patience; viz., that for us, to whom by the Divine law not merely vengeance for, but even the recollection of injuries is forbidden, it is not permissible to be roused to anger because of some loss or annoyance. For what greater injury can happen to the soul than for it, owing to some sudden blindness from rage, to lose the brightness of the true and eternal light and to fail of the sight of Him ”Who is meek and lowly of heart? What I ask could be more dangerous or awkward than for a man to lose his power of judging of goodness, and his standard and rule of true discernment, and for one in his sober senses to do what even a drunken man, and a fool would not be pardoned for doing?

One then who carefully considers these and other injuries of the same kind, will readily endure and disregard not only all kinds of losses, but also whatever wrongs and punishments can be inflicted by the cruellest of men, as he will hold that there is nothing more damaging than anger, nor more valuable than peace of mind and unbroken purity of heart, for the sake of which we should think nothing of the advantages not merely of carnal matters but also of those things which appear to be spiritual, if they cannot be gained or done without some disturbance of this tranquillity.

Chapter XV.

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

Chapter XVI.

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

John: Your shrewd question has anticipated the subject, which even if you had said nothing must have arisen from our discourse, and therefore I do not doubt that it will be effectually grasped by your minds, since indeed your sharp wits have outstripped our instruction. For the puzzle of any question is easily removed, when the inquiry anticipates the answer, and is the first to travel along the road which it is to follow. And so to the treatment of those faults of which we have spoken above, intercourse with other men is not merely no hindrance, but a considerable help, for the more often that the outbursts of their impatience are exposed, the more thorough is the sorrow and compunction which they bring on those who have failed, and the speedier is the recovery of health which they confer on those who struggle against them. Wherefore even when we are living in solitude, though the incentive to irritation and matter for it cannot arise from men, yet we ought of set purpose to meditate on incitements to it, that as we are fighting against it with a continual struggle in our thoughts a speedier cure for it may be found for us. But against the spirit of fornication the system is different, and the method an altered one. For as we must deprive the body of opportunities of lust, and contact with flesh, so we must deprive the mind of the recollection of it.

For it is sufficiently dangerous for bosoms that are still weak and infirm even to tolerate the slightest recollection of this passion, in such a way that sometimes at the remembrance of holy women, or in reading a story in Holy Scripture a stimulus of dangerous excitement is aroused. For which reason our Elders used deliberately to omit passages of this kind when any of the juniors were present. However for those who are perfect and established in the feelings of chastity there can be no lack of proofs by which they may examine themselves, and establish their perfect uprightness of heart by the uncorrupted judgment of their own conscience. There will then be for the man who is thoroughly established a similar test even in regard to this passion, so that one who is sure that he has altogether exterminated the roots of this evil may for the sake of ascertaining his chastity, call up some picture as with a lascivious mind. But it is by no means proper for such a test to be attempted by those who are still weak (for to them it will be dangerous rather than useful), ut conjunctionem femineam et palpationem quodammodo teneram atque mollissimam corde pertractent.

Cure ergo perfects quis virtute fundatus ad illecebram blandissimorum tactuum, quos cogitando confinxerit, nullum mentis assensum, nullam commotionem carnis in se deprehenderit exagitatam, he will have a very sure proof of his purity, so that training himself to this steadfast purity he will not only possess the blessing of chastity and freedom from defilement in his heart, but even if he is obliged to touch the body of a woman, he will be horrified at it.

With this Abbot John brought his Conference to an end, as he saw that it was just time for the refreshment of the ninth hour.

Chapter I.

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

Now that I am going to relate the precepts of that excellent and remarkable man, Abbot Pinufius, on the end of penitence, I fancy that I can dispose of a very large part of my material, if out of consideration lest I weary my reader, I here pass over in silence the praise of his humility, which I touched on in a brief discourse in the fourth book of the Institutes, which was entitled ”Of the rules to be observed by renunciants,” especially as many who have no knowledge of that work, may happen to read this, and then all the authority of the utterances will be weakened if there is no account of the virtues of the speaker.

For this man when he was presiding as Abbot and Presbyter over a large coenobium not far from Panephysis, a city, as was there said, of Egypt, and when all that province had praised him to the skies for his virtues and miracles, so that he already seemed to himself to have received the reward of his labours in the remuneration of the praise of men, as he was afraid lest the emptiness of popular favour, which he especially disliked, might interfere with the fruits of an eternal reward, he secretly fled from his monastery and made his way to the furthest recesses of the monks of Tabennae, where he chose not the solitude of the desert, not that freedom from care of which the life of one alone affords, which even those who are imperfect and who cannot endure the effort which obedience requires in the coenobium, sometimes seek after with proud presumption, but he chose to submit himself to a most famous monastery.

Where, however, that might not be betrayed by any signs of his dress, he clothed himself in a secular garb, and lay before the doors with tears, as is the custom there, for many days, and clinging to the knees of all after being daily repulsed by those who to test his purpose said that now in extreme old age he was seeking this holy life not in sincerity, but driven by the lack of food, at last he obtained admission, and there he was told off to help a young brother who had been given the charge of a garden, and when he not only fulfilled with such marvellous and holy humility everything which his chief ordered him or which the care of the work entrusted to him demanded, but also performed in stealthy labour by night certain necessary offices which were avoided by the rest out of disgust for them, so that when morning dawned, all the congregation was delighted at such useful works but knew not their author; and when he had passed nearly three years there rejoicing in the labours,

which he had desired, but to which he was so unfairly subjected, it happened that a certain brother known to him came there from the same parts of Egypt from which he himself had come.

And this man for a time hesitated because the meanness of his clothes and of his office prevented him from readily recognizing him at once, but after looking very closely at him, fell at his feet, and first astonished all the brethren, and afterwards, when he betrayed his name, which the fame of his special sanctity had made known to them also, he smote them with sorrow and compunction because they had told off a man of his virtues and a priest to such mean offices. But he, shedding copious tears, and charging the accident of his betrayal to the serious envy of the devil, was brought in honourable custody by his brethren surrounding him to the monastery; and after that he had stayed there for a short time, he was once more troubled by the respect shown to his dignity and rank, and stealthily embarked on board ship and sailed to the Palestinian province of Syria, where he was received as a beginner and a novice in the house of that monastery in which we were living, and was charged by the Abbot to stop in our cell. But not even there could his virtues and merits long remain secret. For he was discovered and betrayed in the same way, and brought back to his own monastery with the utmost honour and respect.

Chapter II.

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

Chapter III.

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

Chapter IV.

The answer on the humility shown by our request.

Pinufius: I am indeed delighted at the very plentiful fruits of your humility, which indeed I saw with no indifferent concern, when I was formerly received in the habitation of that cell of yours, and I am very glad that you welcome with such respect the charge given by us, the least of all Christians, and the words that I have taken the liberty of saying so that if I am not mistaken you carry them out as soon as ever they are spoken by us; and though, as I remember, the importance of the words scarcely deserves the efforts you bestow on them, yet you so conceal the merits of your virtue, as if no breath ever reached you of those things which you are daily practising. But because this fact is worthy of the highest praise; viz., that you declare that those institutes of the saints are still unknown to you as if you were still beginners we will, as briefly as possible, summarize what you so eagerly ask of us. For we must even beyond our powers and ability, obey the commands of such old friends as you.

And so on the value and appeasing power of penitence many have published a great deal, not only in words but also in writing, showing how useful it is, how strong, and full of grace, so that when God is offended by our past sins, and on the point of inflicting a most just punishment for such offences, it somehow, if it is not wrong to say so, stops Him, and, if I may so say, stays the right hand of the Avenger even against His will. But I have no doubt that all this is well known to you, either from your natural wisdom, or from your unwearied study of Holy Scripture, so that from this the first shoots, so to speak, of your conversion sprang up. Finally, you are anxious not about the character of penitence but about its end, and the marks of satisfaction, and so by a very shrewd question ask what has been left out by others.

Chapter V.

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

Chapter VI.

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

Chapter VII.

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

Pinufius: Your question, as has been already said above, was not raised with regard to the character of penitence, but with regard to its end, and the marks of satisfaction: to which, as I think, a fair and pertinent reply has been given. But what you have said as to the remembrance of sins is sufficiently useful and needful to men who are still doing penance, that they may with constant smiting of the breast say: ”For I acknowledge my wickedness: and my sin is ever before me; and this too: ”And I will think for my sin. While then we do penance, and are still grieved by the recollection of faulty actions, the shower of tears which is caused by the confession of our faults is sure to quench the fire of our conscience. But when, while a man is still in this state of humility of heart and contrition of spirit and continuing to labour and to weep, the remembrance of these things fades away, and the thorns of conscience are by God’s grace extracted from his inmost heart, then it is clear that he has attained to the end of satisfaction and the reward of pardon, and that he is purged from the stain of the sins he has committed. To which state of forgetfulness we can only attain by the obliteration of our former sins and likings, and by perfect and complete purity of heart.

And this most certainly will not be attained by any of those who from sloth or carelessness have failed to purge out their faults, but only by one who by constantly continuing to groan and sigh sorrowfully has removed every spot of his former stains, and by the goodness of his heart and his labour has proclaimed to the Lord: ”I have acknowledged my sin, and mine unrighteousness have I not hid; and: ”My tears have been my meat day and night; so that in the end it may be vouchsafed to him to hear these words: ”Let thy voice cease from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for there is a reward for thy labour, saith the Lord; and these words also may be uttered of him by the voice of the Lord: ”I have blotted out as a cloud thine iniquities, and as a mist thy sins: and again: ”I even I am He that blotteth out thine iniquities for mine own sake, and thine offences I will no longer remember; and so, when he is freed from the ”cords of his sins,” by which ”everyone is bound,” he will with all thanksgiving sing to the Lord: ”Thou hast broken my chains: I will offer to thee the sacrifice of praise.”

Chapter VIII.

Of the various fruits of penitence.

For after that grace of baptism which is common to all, and that most precious gift of martyrdom which is gained by being washed in blood, there are many fruits of penitence by which we can succeed in expiating our sins. For eternal salvation is not only promised to the bare fact of penitence, of which the blessed Apostle Peter says: ”Repent and be converted that your sins may be forgiven; and John the Baptist and the Lord Himself: ”Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand: but also by the affection of love is the weight of our sins overwhelmed: for ”charity covers a multitude of sins. In the same way also by the fruits of almsgiving a remedy is provided for our wounds, because ”As water extinguishes fire, so does almsgiving extinguish sin. So also by the shedding of tears is gained the washing away of offences, for ”Every night I will wash my bed: I will water my couch with tears. Finally to show that they are not shed in vain, he adds: ”Depart from me all ye that work iniquity, for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping: Moreover by means of confession of sins, their absolution is granted: for ”I said: I will confess against myself my sin to the Lord: and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my heart; and again: ”Declare thine iniquities first, that thou mayest be justified. By afflicting the heart and body also is forgiveness of sins committed in like manner obtained, for he says:

”Look on my humility and my labour, and forgive me all my sins; and more especially by amendment of life: ”Take away,” he says, ”the evil of your thoughts from mine eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed: judge the orphan, defend the widow. And come, reason with Me, saith the Lord: and though your sins were as scarlet, yet shall they be as white as snow, though they were red as crimson, they shall be as white as wool. Sometimes too the pardon of our sins is obtained by the intercession of the saints, for ”if a man knows his brother to sin a sin not unto death, he asks, and He will give to him his life, for him that sinneth not unto death; and again: ”Is any sick among you? Let him send for the Elders of the Church and they shall pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him. Sometimes too by the virtue of compassion and faith the stains of sin are removed, according to this passage: ”By compassion and faith

sins are purged away. And often by the conversion and salvation of those who are saved by our warnings and preaching:

”For he who converts a sinner from the error of his way, shall save his soul from death, and cover a multitude of sins” Moreover by pardon and forgiveness on our part we obtain pardon of our sins: ”For if ye forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father will also forgive you your sins. You see then what great means of obtaining mercy the compassion of our Saviour has laid open to us, so that no one when longing for salvation need be crushed by despair, as he sees himself called to life by so many remedies. For if you plead that owing to weakness of the flesh you cannot get rid of your sins by fasting, and you cannot say: ”My knees are weak from fasting, and my flesh is changed for oil; for I have eaten ashes for my bread, and mingled my drink with weeping,” then atone for them by profuse almsgiving. If you have nothing that you can give to the needy (although the claims of want and poverty exclude none from thisoffice, since the two mites of the widow are ranked higher than the splendid gifts of the rich, and the Lord promises that He will give a reward for a cup of cold water), at least you can purge them away by amendment of life. But if you cannot secure perfection in goodness by the eradication of all your faults, you can show a pious anxiety for the good and salvation of another.

But if you complain that you are not equal to this service, you can cover your sins by the affection of love. And if in this also some sluggishness of mind makes you weak, at least you should submissively with a feeling of humility entreat for remedies for your wounds by the prayers and intercession of the saints. Finally who is there who cannot humbly say: ”I have acknowledged my sin: and mine unrighteousness have I not hid; so that by this confession he may be able also to add this: ”And Thou forgavest the iniquity of my heart. But if shame holds you back, and you blush to reveal them before men, you should not cease to confess them with constant supplication to Him from Whom they cannot be hid, and to say to Him: ”I acknowledge mine iniquity, and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee; as He is wont to heal them without any publication which brings shame, and to forgive sins without any reproaching. And further besides that ready and sure aid the Divine condescension has afforded us another also that is still easier, and has entrusted the possession of the remedy to our own will, so that we can infer from our own feelings the forgiveness of our

offences, when we say to Him: ”Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors. Whoever then desires to Obtain forgiveness of his sins, should study to fit himself for it by these means. Let not the stubbornness of an obdurate heart turn away any from the saving remedy and the fount of so much goodness, because even if we have done all these things, they will not be able to expiate our offences, unless they are blotted out by the goodness and mercy of the Lord, who when He sees the service of pious efforts offered by us with a humble heart, supports our small and puny efforts with the utmost bounty, and says: ”I even I am He that blotteth out thine iniquities for Mine own sake, and I will remember thy sins no more. Whoever then is aiming at this condition, which we have mentioned, will seek the

grace of satisfaction by daily fasting and mortification of heart and body, for, as it is written, ”Without shedding of blood there is no remission; and this not without good reason. For ”flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. And therefore one who would withhold ”the sword of the spirit which is the word of God” from this shedding of blood certainly comes under the lash of that curse of Jeremiah’s; for ”Cursed,” says he ”is he who withholds his sword from blood. For this is the sword which for our good sheds that bad blood whereby the material of our sins lives;

and cuts Off and pares away everything carnal and earthly which it finds to have grown up in the members of our soul; and makes men die to sin and live to God, and flourish with spiritual virtues. And so he will begin to weep no more at the recollection of former sins, but at the hope of what is to come, and, thinking less of past evils than of good things to come, will shed tears not from sorrow at his sins, but from delight in that eternal joy, and ”forgetting those things which are behind,” i.e., carnal sins, will press on ”to those before,” i.e., to spiritual gifts and virtues.

Chapter IX.

How valuable to the perfect is the forgetfulness of sin.

But with regard to this that you said a little way back; viz., that you of set purpose go over the recollections of past sins, this ought certainly not to be done, nay, if it forcibly surprises you, it must be at once expelled. For it greatly hinders the soul from the contemplation of purity, and especially in the case ofone who is living in solitude, as it entangles him in the stains of this world and swamps him in foul sins. For while you are recalling those things which you did through ignorance or wantonness in accordance with the prince of this world, though I grant you that while you are engaged in these thoughts no delight in them steals in, yet at least the mere taint of the ancient filthiness is sure to corrupt your soul with its foul stink, and to shut out the spiritual fragrance of goodness, i.e., the odour of a sweet savour. When then the recollection of past sins comes over your mind, you must recoil from it just as an honest and upright man runs away if he is sought out in public by an immodest and wanton woman either by words or by embraces. And certainly unless he at once withdraws himself from contact with her, and if he allows himself to linger the very least in impure talk, even if he refuses his consent to the shameful pleasures, yet he cannot avoid the brand of infamy and scorn in the judgment of all the passers by.

So then we also, if by noxious recollections we are led to thoughts of this kind, ought at once to desist from dwelling upon them and to fulfil what we are commanded by Solomon: ”But go forth,” says he, ”do not linger in her place, nor fix thine eye on her; lest if the angels see us taken up with unclean and foul thoughts, they may not be able to say to us in passing by: ”The blessing of the Lord be upon you. For it is impossible for the soul to continue in good thoughts, when the main part of the heart is taken up with foul and earthly considerations. For this saying of Solomon’s is true: ”When thine eyes look on a strange woman, thenshall thy mouth speak wickedly, and thou shalt lie as it were in the midst of the sea, and as a pilot in a great storm. But thou shalt say: They have beaten me, but I felt no pain; and they mocked me, but I felt not. So then we should forsake not only all foul but even all earthly thoughts and ever raise the desires of our soul to heavenly things, in accordance with this saying of our Saviour: ”For where I am,” He says, ”there also shall My servant be.

For it often happens that when anyone out of pity is in thought going over his own falls or those of other faultypersons, he is affected by the delight and assent to this most subtle

attack, and that which was undertaken and started with a show of goodness ends with a filthy and damaging termination, for ”there are ways which appear to men to be right, but the ends thereof will come to the depths of hell.”

Chapter X.

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

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

Chapter XII.

Wherein we must do penance for a time only; and wherein itcan have no end.

But that description of the forgetfulness spoken of only has to do with capital offences, which are also condemned by the mosaic law, the inclination to which is destroyed and put an end to by a good life, and so also the penance for them has an end. But for those small offences in which, as it is written, ”therighteous falls seven times and will rise again” penitence will never cease. For either through ignorance, or forgetfulness, orthought, or word, or surprise, or necessity, orweakness of the flesh, or defilement in adream, we often fall every day either againstour will or voluntarily; offences for whichDavid also prays the Lord, and asks for purification and pardon, and says: ”Who canunderstand sins? from my secret ones cleanseme; and from those of others spare Thy servant; and the Apostle: ”For the goodwhich I would I do not, and the evil which Iwould not, that I do. For which also the same man exclaims with a sigh ”O wretchedman that I am! who shall deliver me fromthe body of this death? For we slip intothese so easily as it were by a law of nature,that however carefully and guardedly we areon the lookout against them, we cannot altogether avoid them. Since it was of these thatone of the disciples, whom Jesus loved, declared and laid down absolutely saying: ”Ifwe say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and His word is not in us.

Further for a man who is anxious to reach the heights of perfection it will not greatly help him to have arrived at the end of penitence, i.e., to restrain himself from unlawful acts, unless he has always urged himself forward in unwearied course to those virtues whereby we come to the signs of satisfaction. For it will not be enough for a man to have kept himself clear from those foul stains of sins which the Lord hates, unless he has also secured by purity of heart and perfect Apostolical love that sweet fragrance of virtue in which the Lord delights. Thus far Abbot Pinufius discoursed on the marks of satisfaction and the end of penitence. And although he pressed us with anxious love to decide to stay in his coenobium, yet when he could not retain us, as we were incited by the fame of the desert of Scete, he sent us on our way.

Chapter. I.

How Theonas came to Abbot John.

Before we begin to set forth the words of this Conference held with that excellent man Abbot Theonas, I think it well to describe in a brief discourse the origin of his conversion because from this the reader will be able to see more clearly both the excellence and the grace of the man. He then while still very young was by the desire and command of his parents joined in the tie of marriage, for as with pious anxiety they were careful about his chastity, and were afraid of a critical fall at a dangerous age, they thought that the passions of youth might be anticipated by the remedy of a lawful marriage. When then he had lived for five years with a wife, he came to Abbot John, who was then for his marvellous sanctity chosen to preside over the administration of the alms. For it is not anyone who likes who is of his own wish or ambition promoted to this office, but only he whom the congregation of all the Elders considers from the advantage of his age and the witness of his faith and virtues to be more excellent than, and superior to, all others.

To this blessed John then the aforesaid young man had come in the eagerness of his pious devotion, bringing gifts of piety among other owners who were eager to offer tithes and first-fruits of their substance to the old man I mentioned, and when the old man saw them pouring in upon him with many gifts, and was anxious to make some recompense in return for their offerings, he began, as the Apostle says, to sow spiritual things to them whose carnal gifts he was reaping. And finally thus began his word of exhortation.Chapter. II.The exhortation of Abbot John to Theonas and the otherswho had come together with him.I AM indeed delighted, my children, with the duteous liberality of your gifts; and yourdevout offering, the disposal of which is entrusted to me, I gratefully accept, because you are offering your firstfruits and tithes for the good and use of the needy, as a sacrifice to the Lord, of a sweet smelling savour, in the belief that by the offering of them, the abundance of your fruits and all your substance, from which you have taken away these for the Lord, will be richly blessed, and that you yourselves will according to the faith of His command be endowed even in this world with manifold richness in all good things: ”Honour the Lord from thy righteous labours, and offer to Him of the fruits of thy righteousness; that thy garners may be full of abundance of wheat, and thy vats may overflow with wine.

And as you are faithfully carrying out this service, you may know that you have fulfilled the righteousness of the old law, under which those who then lived if they transgressed it inevitably incurred guilt, while if they fulfilled it they could not attain to a pitch of perfection.Chapter. III.Of the offering of tithes and firstfruits.

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

Chapter IV.

How Abraham, David, and other saints went beyond therequirement of the law.

For so we read that Abraham went beyond the requirement of the law which was afterwards to be given, when after his victory over the four kings, he would not touch any of the spoils of Sodom, which were fairly due to him as the conqueror, and which indeed the king himself, whose spoils he had rescued, offered him; and with an oath by the Divine name he exclaimed: "I lift up my hand to the Lord Most High, who made heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread to a shoe's latchet of all that is thine. So we know that David went beyond the requirement of the law, as, though Moses commanded that vengeance should be taken on enemies, he not only did not do this, but actually embraced his persecutors with love, and piously entreated the Lord for them, and wept bitterly and avenged them when they were slain. So we are sure that Elijah and Jeremiah were not under the law, as though they might without blame have taken advantage of lawful matrimony, yet they preferred to remain virgins. So we read that Elisha and others of the same mode of life went beyond the commands of Moses, as of them the Apostle speaks as follows:

"They went about in sheepskins and in goatskins, they were oppressed, afflicted, in want, of whom the world was not worthy, they wandered about in deserts and in mountains, and in caves and in dens of the earth," What shall I say of the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab, of whom we are told that, when at the Lord's bidding the prophet Jeremiah offered them wine, they replied: "We drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying: Ye shall drink no wine, ye and your sons forever: and ye shall build no house, nor sow any seed, nor plant vineyards nor possess them: but ye shall dwell in tents all your days"? Wherefore also they were permitted to hear from the same prophet these words: "Thus saith the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel: there shall not fail a man from the stock of Jonadab the son of Rechab to stand in My sight all the days; as all of them were not satisfied with merely offering tithes of their possessions, but actually refused property, and offered the rather to God themselves and their souls, for which no redemption can be made by man, as the Lord testifies in the gospel: "For what shall a man give in exchange for his own soul?"

Chapter V.

How those who live under the grace of the Gospel ought to gobeyond the requirement of the law.

Wherefore we ought to know that we from whom the requirements of the law are no longer exacted, but in whose ears the word of the gospel daily sounds: ”If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come follow Me,” when we offer to God tithes of our substance, are still in a way ground down beneath the burden of the law, and not able to rise to those heights of the gospel, those who conform to which are recompensed not only by blessings in this present life, but also by future rewards. For the law promises to those who obey it no rewards of the kingdom of heaven, but only solaces in this life, saying: ”The man that doeth these things shall live in them. But the Lord says to His disciples: ”Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven; and: ”Everyone that leaveth house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or field for My name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life. And this with good reason. For it is not so praiseworthy for us to abstain from forbidden as from lawful things, and not to use these last out of reverence for Him, Who has permitted us to use them because of our weakness.

And so if even those who, faithfully offering tithes of their fruits, are obedient to the more ancient precepts of the Lord, cannot yet climb the heights of the gospel, you can see very clearly how far short of it those fall who do not even do this. For how can those men be partakers of the grace of the gospel who disregard the fulfilment even of the lighter commands of the law, to the easy character of which the weighty words of the giver of the law bear testimony, as a curse is actually invoked on those who do not fulfil them; for it says: ”Cursed is everyone that does not continue in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them. But here on account of the superiority and excellence of the commandments it is said: ”He that can receive it, let him receive it. There the forcible compulsion of the lawgiver shows the easy character of the precepts; for he says: ”I call heaven and earth to record against you this day, that if ye do not keep the commandments of the Lord your God ye shall perish from off the face of the earth. Here the grandeur of sublime commands is shown by the very fact that He does not order, but exhorts, saying: ”if thou wilt be perfect

go" and do this or that. There Moses lays a burden that cannot be refused on those who are unwilling:

here Paul meets with counsels those who are willing and eager for perfection. For that was not to be enjoined as a general charge, nor to be required, if I may so say, as a regular rule from all, which could not be secured by all, owing to its wonderful and lofty nature; but by counsels all are rather stimulated to grace, that those who are great may deservedly be crowned by the perfection of their virtues, while those who are small, and not able to come up to "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," although they seem to be lost to sight and hidden as it were by the brightness of larger stars, may yet be free from the darkness of the curses which are in the law, and not adjudged to suffer present evils or visited with eternal punishment. Christ therefore does not constrain anyone, by the compulsion of a command, to those lofty heights of goodness, but stimulates them by the power of free will, and urges them on by wise counsels and the desire of perfection. For where there is a command, there is duty, and consequently punishment. But those who keep those things to which they are driven by the severity of the law established escape the punishment with which they were threatened, instead of obtaining rewards and a recompense.

Chapter VI.

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

Chapter VII.

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

Chapter VIII.

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

Chapter IX.

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

And when his wife was hard and would not consent to him as he constantly persisted with entreaties of this kind, but said that as she was in the flower of her age she could not altogether do without the solace of her husband, and further that supposing she was deserted by him and fell into sin, the guilt would rather be his who had broken the bonds of wedlock: to this he, when he had for a long while urged the condition of human nature (which being so weak and uncertain, it would be dangerous for it to be any longer mixed up with carnal desires and works), added the assertion that it was not right for anyone to cut himself off from that virtue to which he had learnt that he ought by all means to cleave, and that it was more dangerous to disregard goodness when discovered, than to fail to love it before it was discovered; further that he was already involved in the guilt of a fall if when he had discovered such grand and heavenly blessings he had preferred earthly and mean ones. Further that the grandeur of perfection was open to every age and either sex, and that all the members of the Church were urged to scale the heights of heavenly goodness when the Apostle said: ”So run that ye may obtain;

nor should those who were ready and eager for it hang back because of the delays of the slow and dawdlers, as it is better for the sluggards to be urged on by those running before than for those who are doing their best to be hampered by the slothful. Further that he had determined and made up his mind to renounce the world and to die to the world that he might live to God, and that if he could not attain this happiness; viz., to pass with his wife into union with Christ, he would rather be saved even with the loss of one member, and enter into the kingdom of heaven as one maimed rather than be condemned with his body whole. But he also added and spoke as follows: If Moses suffered wives to be divorced for the hardness of their hearts, why should not Christ allow this for the desire of chastity, especially when the same Lord among those other affections; viz., for fathers and mothers and children (all due regard to which not only the law but He Himself also charged to be shown, yet for His name’s sake and for the desire of perfection He decreed that they should not simply be disregarded but actually hated)-to these, I say, He joined also the mention of wives, saying: ”And everyone that hath left house, or brethren or sisters or father or mother

or wife or children for My name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold and shall inherit eternal life.

So far then is He from allowing anything to be set against that perfection which He is proclaiming, that He actually enjoins that the ties to father and mother should be broken and disregarded out of love for Him, though according to the Apostle it is the first commandment with promise; viz., "Honour thy father and thy mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee and that thy days may be long upon earth. And as the word of the gospel condemns those who break the chains of matrimony where there has been no sin of adultery, so it clearly promises a reward of an hundredfold to those who have cast off a carnal yoke out of love for Christ and the desire for chastity. Wherefore if it can be brought about that you may listen to reason and be turned together with me to this most desirable choice; viz., that we should together serve the Lord and escape the pains of hell, I will not refuse the affection of marriage, nay I will embrace it with a still greater love. For I acknowledge and honour my helpmeet assigned to me by the word of the Lord, and I do not refuse to be joined to her in an unbroken tie of love in Christ, nor do I separate from me what the Lord joined to me by the law of the original condition, if only you yourself will be what your Maker meant you to be.

But if you will not be a helpmeet, but prefer to make yourself a deceiver and an assistance not to me but to the adversary, and fancy that the sacrament of matrimony was granted to you for this reason that you may deprive yourself of this salvation which is offered to you, and also hold me back from following the Saviour as a disciple, then I will resolutely lay hold on the words which were uttered by the lips of Abbot John, or rather of Christ Himself, so that no carnal affection may be able to tear me away from spiritual blessings, for He says: "He that hateth not father and mother and children and brothers and sisters and wife and lands, yea and his own soul also, cannot be My disciple. When then by these and such like words the woman's purpose was not moved and she persisted in the same obstinate hardness, If, said the blessed Theonas, I cannot drag you away from death, neither shall you separate me from Christ: but it is safer for me to be divorced from a human person than from God. And so by the aid of God's grace he at once set about the execution of his purpose and suffered not the ardour of his desire to grow cool through any delay.

For at once he stripped himself of all his worldly goods, and fled to a monastery, where in a very short time he was so famous for the splendour of his sanctity and humility that when John of blessed memory departed this life to the Lord, and the holy Elias, a man who was no less great than his predecessor, had likewise died, Theonas was chosen by the judgment of all as the third to succeed them in the administration of the almsgiving.

Chapter X.

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

Chapter XI.

An inquiry why in Egypt they do not fast during all the fifty days (of Easter) nor bend their knees in prayer. But it is now time to follow out the plan of the promised discourse. So then when Abbot Theonas had come to visit us in our cell during Eastertide after Evensong was over we sat for a little while on the ground and began diligently to consider why they were so very careful that no one should during the whole fifty days either bend his knees in prayer or venture to fast till the ninth hour, and we made our inquiry the more earnestly because we had never seen this custom so carefully observed in the monasteries of Syria.

Chapter XII.

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

TO this Abbot Theonas thus began his reply. It is indeed right for us, even when we can- not see the reason, to yield to the authority of the fathers and to a custom of our predecessors that has been continued through so many years down to our own time, and to observe it, as handed down from antiquity, with constant care and reverence. But since you want to know the reasons and grounds for this, receive in few words what we have heard as handed down by our Elders on this subject. But before we bring forward the authority of Holy Scripture, we will, if you please, say a little about the nature and character of the fast, that afterwards the authority of Holy Scripture may support our words. The Divine Wisdom has pointed out in Ecclesiastes that for everything, i.e., for all things happy or those which are considered unfortunate and unhappy, there is a right time: saying: ”For all things there is a time, and a time for everything under the heaven. A time to bring forth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pull down what is planted; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to destroy and a time to build; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;

a time to get and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to send away; a time to scatter and atime to collect; a time to be silent and a time to speak; a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace; and below: ”For mere is a time,” it says, ”for everything and for every deed. None therefore of these things does it lay down as always good, but only when any of them are fittingly done and at the right time, so that these very things which at one time, when done at the right moment, turn out well, if they are ventured on at a wrong or unsuitable time, are found to be useless or harmful; only excepting those things which are in their own nature good or bad, and which cannot ever be made the opposite, as, e.g., justice, prudence, fortitude, temperance and the rest of the virtues, or on the other hand, those faults, the description of which cannot possibly be altered or fall under the other head. But those things which can sometimes turn out with either result, so that, in accordance with the character of those who use them, they are found to be either good or bad, these we consider to be not absolutely in their own natures useful or injurious, but only so in accordance with the mind of the doer, and the suitableness of the time.

Chapter XIII.

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

Chapter XIV.

How fasting is not good in its own nature.

And so that it is a thing indifferent is very clearly shown from this also; viz., because as it brings justification when observed, so it does not bring condemnation when it is broken in upon; unless perhaps the transgression of a command rather than the partaking of food brings punishment. But in the case of a thing that is good in its own nature, no time should be without it, in such a way as that a man may do without it, for if it ceases, the man who is careless about it is sure to fall into mischief. Nor again is any time given for what is bad in its own nature, because what is hurtful cannot help hurting, if it is indulged in, nor can it ever be made of a praiseworthy character. And further it is clear that these things, for which we see conditions and times appointed, and which sanctify, when observed without corrupting us when they are neglected, are things indifferent, as, e.g., marriage, agriculture, riches, retirement into the desert, vigils, reading and meditation on Holy Scripture and fasting itself, from which our discussion took its rise. All of which things the Divine precepts and the authority of Holy Scripture decreed should not be so incessantly aimed at, or so constantly observed, as for it to be wrong for them to be for a time intermitted. For anything that is absolutely commanded brings death if it be not fulfilled:

but whatever things we are urged to rather than commanded, when done are useful, when left undone bring no punishment. And therefore in the case of all or some of these things our predecessors commanded us either to do them with consideration, or to observe them carefully with regard to the reason, place, manner, and time, because if any of them are done suitably, it is fit and convenient, but if incongruously, then it becomes foolish and hurtful. And if at the coming of a brother in whose person he ought to refresh Christ with courtesy and to embrace him with a most kindly welcome, a man should choose to observe a strict fast, would he not rather be guilty of incivility than gain the praise or reward of devoutness? or if when the failure or weakness of the flesh requires the strength to be restored by the partaking of food, a man will not consent to relax the rigour of his abstinence, is he not to be regarded as a cruel murderer of his own body rather than as one who is careful for his salvation? So too when a festival season permits a suitable indulgence in food and a necessarily liberal repast, if a man will resolutely cling to the strict observance of a fast he must be considered as not religious so much as boorish and unreasonable.

But to those men also will these things be found bad, who are on the lookout for the praises of men by their fasts, and by a foolish show of paleness gain credit for sanctity, of whom the word of the Gospel tells us that they have received their reward in this life, and whose fast the Lord execrates by the prophet. In whose person he first objected to himself and said: "Wherefore have we fasted and Thou hast not regarded: wherefore have we humbled our souls, and Thou hast not known it? and then at once he answered and explained the reasons why they did not deserve to be heard: "Behold," he says, "in the days of your fast your own will is found and you exact of all your debtors. Behold you fast for debates and strife, and strike with the fist wickedly. Do not fast as ye have done unto this day, to make your cry to be heard on high. Is this such a fast as I have chosen, for a man to afflict his soul for a day? Is it this, to wind his head about like a circle, and to spread sackcloth and ashes? Will ye call this a fast and a day acceptable o the Lord? Then he proceeds to teach how the abstinence of one who fasts may become acceptable, and clearly lays down that faring cannot be good of itself alone, but only when it has the following reasons which are added:

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

Chapter XV.

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

Chapter XVI.

How what is good in its own nature can be distinguished fromother things that are good.

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

Chapter XVII.

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

Chapter XVIII.

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

Chapter XIX.

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

Chapter XX.

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

Chapter XXI.

A question whether the relaxation of the fast is not prejudicialto the chastity of the body. Germanus: Can the flesh, attracted by the unwonted luxuries of so long a festival fail to produce something thorny from the incentives to sin although they have been cut down? or can the soul weighed down by the consumption of unaccustomed feasts fail to mitigate the rigour of its rule over its servant the body, especially when in our case our mature age can excite our subject members to a speedy revolt, if we venture to take our usual food in larger quantities, or unaccustomed food more freely than usual?

Chapter XXII.

The answer on the way to keep control over abstinence.

Theonas: If we weigh everything that we do, by a reasonable judgment of the mind, and on the purity of our heart always consult not the opinions of other people but our own conscience, that interval for refreshment is sure not to interfere with our proper strictness, if only, as was said, our pure mind impartially considers the right limits of indulgence and abstinence, and fairly checks excess in either, and with real discrimination discerns whether the weight of the delicacies is a burden upon our spirits, or whether too much austerity in abstaining weighs down the other side, i.e., that of the body, and either depresses or raises that side which it sees to be raised or weighed down. For our Lord would have nothing done to His honour and glory without being tempered by judgment, for ”the honour of a king loveth judgment,” and therefore Solomon, the wisest of men, urges us not to let our judgment incline to either side, saying: ”Honour God with thy righteous labours and offer to Him of the fruits of thy righteousness. For we have residing in our conscience an uncorrupt and true judge who sometimes, when all are wrong, is the only person not deceived as to the state of our purity.

And so with all care and pains we should preserve a constant purpose in our circumspect heart for fear lest if the judgment of our discretion goes wrong, we may be fired with the desire for an ill-considered abstinence, or allured by the wish for an excessive relaxation, and so weigh the substance of our strength in the tongue of an unfair balance; but we should place in one of the scales our purity of soul, and in the other our bodily strength, and weigh them both in the true judgment of conscience, so that we may not perversely incline the scale of fairness to either side, either to undue strictness or to excessive relaxation, from the preponderating desire for one or the other, and so have this said to us by reason of excessive strictness or relaxation: ”If thou offerest rightly, but dost not divide rightly, hast thou not sinned? For those offerings of fasts, which we thoughtlessly extort by violently tearing our bowels, and fancy that we rightly offer to the Lord, these He execrates who ”loves mercy and judgment” saying: ”I the Lord love judgment, but I hate robbery in a burnt offering. Those also who take the main part of their offerings, i.e., their offices and actions, to benefit the flesh for their own use, but leave the remains of them and a tiny portion for the Lord, these

the Divine Word thus condemns as fraudulent workmen: ”Cursed is he that doeth the work of the Lord fraudulently.

It is not then without reason that the Lord reproves him who thus deceives himself by unfair considerations, saying: ”But vain are the children of men: the children of men are liars upon the balances that they may deceive. And therefore the blessed Apostle warns us to keep hold of the reins of discretion and not to be attracted by excess and swerve to either side, saying: ”Your reasonable service. And the giver of the law similarly forbids the same thing, saying: ”Let the balance be just and the weights equal, the bushel just and the sextarius equal,” and Solomon also gives a like opinion on this matter: ”Great and small weights and double measures are both unclean before the Lord, and one who uses them shall be hindered in his contrivances. Further not only in the way in which we have said, but also in this must we strive not to have unfair weights in our hearts, nor double measures in the storehouse of our conscience, i.e., not to overwhelm those, to whom we are to preach the word of the Lord, with precepts that are too strict and heavier than we ourselves can bear, while we take for granted that for ourselves those things which have to do with the rule of strictness are to be softened by a freer allowance of relaxation. For when we do this, what is it but to weigh and measure the goods and fruits of the Lord’s commands in a double weight and measure?

For if we dispense them in one way to ourselves and in another to our brethren, we are rightly blamed by the Lord because we have unfair balances and double measures, in accordance with the saying of Solomon which tells us that ”A double weight is an abomination to the Lord, and a deceitful balance is not good in His sight. In this way also we plainly incur the guilt of using a deceitful weight and a double measure, if out of the desire for the praise of men, we make a show before the brethren of greater strictness than what we practice in private in our own cells, trying to appear more abstinent and holier in the sight of men than in the sight of God, an evil which we should not only avoid but actually loathe. But meanwhile as we have wandered some way from the question before us, let us return to the point from which we started.

Chapter XXIII.

Of the time and measure of refreshment.

So then we should keep the observance of the days mentioned in such a way that the relaxation allowed may be useful rather than harmful to the good of body and soul, because the joy of any festival cannot blunt the pricks of the flesh, nor can that fierce enemy of ours be pacified by regard for days. In order then that the observance of the customs appointed for festival seasons may be kept and that the most salutary rule of abstinence be not at all exceeded it is enough for us to allow the permitted relaxation to go so far, as for us out of regard for the festival season to take the food, which ought to be taken at the ninth hour, a little earlier; viz., at the sixth hour, but with this condition, that the regular allowance and character of the food be not altered, for fear lest the purity of body and uprightness of soul which has been gained by the abstinence of Lent be lost by the relaxation of Easter-tide, and it profit us nothing to have acquired by our fast what a careless satiety causes us presently to lose, especially as the well-known cunning of our enemy assaults the stronghold of our purity then chiefly when he sees that our guard over it is somewhat relaxed at the celebration of some festival.

Wherefore we must most vigilantly look out that the vigour of our soul be never enervated by seductive flatteries, and we lose not the purity of our chastity, gained, as was said, by the continuous efforts of Lent, by the repose and carelessness of Eastertide. And therefore no addition at all should be made to the quality or the quantity of the food, but even on the highest festivals we should similarly abstain from those foods, by abstinence from which we preserve our uprightness on common days, that the joy of the festival may not excite in us a most deadly conflict of carnal desires, and so be turned to grief, and put an end to that most excellent festival of the heart, which exults in the joy of purity; and after a brief show of carnal joy we begin to mourn our lost purity of heart with a lasting sorrow of repentance. Moreover we should strive that this warning of the prophetic exhortation may not be uttered against us to no purpose: ”Celebrate, O Judah, thy festivals, and pay thy vows. For if the occurrence of festival days does not interfere with the continuity of our abstinence, we shall continually enjoy spiritual festivals and so, when we cease from servile work, ”there shall be month after month and Sabbath after Sabbath.”

Chapter XXIV.

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

Chapter XXV.

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

Chapter XXVI.

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

But what shall I say of the firstfruits which surely are given daily by all who serve Christ faithfully? For when men waking from sleep and arising with renewed activity after their rest, before they take in any impulse or thought in their heart, or admit any recollection or consideration of business consecrate their first and earliest thoughts as divine offerings, what are they doing indeed but rendering the firstfruits of their produce through the High Priest Jesus Christ for the enjoyment of this life and a figure of the daily resurrection? And also when roused from sleep in the same way they offer to God a sacrifice of joy and invoke Him with the first motion of their tongue and celebrate His name and praise, and throwing open, the first thing, the door of their lips to sing hymns to Him they offer to God the offices of their mouth; and to Him also in the same way their bring the earliest offerings of their hands anti steps, when they rise from bed and stand in prayer and before they use the services of their limbs for their own purposes, take to themselves nothing of their services, but for His glory advance their steps, and set them in His praise and so render the first fruits of all their movements by stretching forth the hands, bending the knees, and prostrating the whole body. For in no other way can we fulfil that of which we sing in the Psalm: ”I prevented the dawning of the day and cried; and:

”Mine eves to Thee have prevented the morning that I might meditate on Thy words; and: ”In the morning shall my prayer prevent Thee; unless after our rest in sleep when, as we said above, we are restored as from darkness and death to this light, we have the courage not to begin by taking any of all the services both of mind and body for our own uses. For there is no other morning which the prophet ”prevented,” or which in the same way we ought to prevent, except either ourselves, i.e., our occupations and feelings and earthly cares, without which we cannot exist-or the most subtle suggestions of the adversary, which he tries to suggest to us, while still resting and overcome with sleep, by the phantoms of vain dreams, with which, when we presently awake, he will fill our minds and occupy us, that he may be the first to seize and carry off the spoils of our firstfruits. Wherefore we must take the utmost care (if we want to fulfil in act the meaning of the above quoted verse) that an anxious watchfulness takes regard of our first and earliest morning thoughts, that they may not be

defiled beforehand being hastily taken possession of by our jealous adversary, and thus he may make our firstfruits to be rejected by the Lord as worthless and common.

And if he is not prevented by us with watchful circumspection of mind, he will not lay aside his habit of miserably anticipating us nor cease day after day to prevent us by his wiles. And therefore if we want to offer firstfruits that are acceptable and well pleasing to God of the fruits of our mind, we ought to spend no ordinary care to keep all the senses of our body, especially during the hours of the morning, as a sacred holocaust to the Lord pure and undefiled in all things. And this kind of devotion many even of those who live in the world observe with the utmost care, as they rise before it is light or very early, and do not at all mix in the ordinary and necessary business of this world before hastening to church and striving to consecrate in the sight of God the firstfruits of all their actions and doings.

Chapter XXVII.

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

Chapter XXVIII.

Why it is called Quadragesima, when the fast is only kept forthirty-six days.

But further, as man's carelessness dropped out of sight the reason of this, this season when, as was said, the tithes of the year are offered by fasts for thirty-six days and a half, was called Quadragesima, a name which per- haps they thought ought to be given to it for this reason; viz., that it is said that Moses and Elijah and our Lord Jesus Christ Himself fasted for forty days. To the mystery of which number are not unsuitably applied those forty years in which Israel dwelt in the wilderness, and in like manner the forty stations which they are said to have passed through with a mystic meaning. Or perhaps the tithe was properly given the name of Quadragesima from the use of the custom-house. For so that state tax is commonly called, from which the same proportion of the increment is assigned for the king's use, as the legal tribute of Quadragesima, which is required of us by the King of all the ages for the use of our life.

At any rate, although this has nothing to do with the question raised, yet I think that I ought not to omit the fact that very often our elders used to testify that especially on these days the whole body of monks was attacked according to the ancient custom of the people opposed to them, and was more vehemently urged to forsake their homes, for this reason, because in accordance with this figure, whereby the Egyptians formerly oppressed the children of Israel with grievous afflictions, so now also the spiritual Egyptians try to bow down the true Israel, i.e., the monastic folk, with hard and vile tasks, lest by means of that peace which is dear to God, we should forsake the land of Egypt, and for our good cross to the desert of virtues, so that Pharaoh rages against us and says: "They are idle and therefore they cry saying: Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord our God. Let them be oppressed with labours, and be harassed in their works, and they shall not be harassed by vain words. For certainly their folly imagines that the holy sacrifice of the Lord, which is only offered in the desert of a pure heart, is the height of folly, for "religion is an abomination to a sinner."

Chapter XXIX.

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

By this law of Lent then the man who is upright and perfect is not restrained nor is he content with merely submitting to that paltry rule which the heads of the church have established for those who all the year round are involved in pleasure or business, that they may be bound by this legal requirement and forced at any rate during these days to find time for the Lord, and dedicate to Him the tithe of the days of their life, all of which they would have consumed as their profits. But the righteous, for whom the law is not appointed, and who devote to spiritual duties not a small part; viz., the tenth, but the whole time of their life, because they are free from the burden of tithes according to law, for his reason, if any worthy and pious occasion happening to them constrains them, are ready to relax their station fast without any hesitation. For in their case it is no paltry tithe that is diminished, as they offer all that they have to the Lord equally with themselves. And this certainly a man could not do without being guilty of a grievous wrong, who, offering nothing of his own free will to God, is forced to pay his tithes by the stern compulsion of the law which takes no excuse.

Wherefore it is clearly established that the servant of the law cannot be perfect, who only shuns those things which are forbidden and does those things which are commanded, but that those are really perfect who do not take advantage even of those things which the law allows. And in this way, though it is said of the Mosaic law that ”the law brought nothing to perfection,” we read that some of the saints in the Old Testament were perfect because they went beyond the commands of the law and lived under the perfection of the Gospel: ”Knowing that the law is not appointed for the righteous but for the unrighteous and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the wicked and defiled, etc.”

Chapter XXX.

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

Chapter XXXI.

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

Chapter XXXII.

The answer on the difference between grace and the commandsof the law.

Theonas: Your inquiry once more raises before us a question of no small extent. The explanation of which though I know that it cannot be taught to or understood by the inexperienced, yet as far as I can, I will try to set forth in words and briefly to explain, if only your minds will follow up and act upon what we say. For whatever is known not by teaching but by experience, just as it cannot be taught by one without experience, so neither can it be grasped or taken in by the mind of one who has not laid the foundation by a similar study and training. And therefore I think it necessary for us first to inquire somewhat carefully what is the purpose or meaning of the law, and what is the system and perfection of grace, that from this we may succeed in understanding the dominion of sin and how to drive it out. And so the law chiefly commands men to seek the bonds of wedlock, saying: ”Blessed is he that hath seed in Sion and an household in Jerusalem; and: ”Cursed is the barren that hath not borne. On the other hand grace invites us to the purity of perpetual chastity, and the undefiled state of blessed virginity, saying: ”Blessed are the barren, and the breasts which have not given suck; and: ”he that hateth not father and mother and wife cannot be my disciple; and this of the Apostle: ”It remaineth that they that have wives be as though they had them not.

The law says: ”Thou shall not delay to offer thy tithes and firstfruits; grace says: ”If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor: The law forbids not retaliation for wrongs and vengeance for injuries, saying””An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Grace would have our patience proved by the injuries and blows offered to us being redoubled, and bids us be ready to endure twice as much damage; saying: ”If a man strike thee on one cheek, offer him the other also; and to him who will contend with thee at the law and take away thy coat, give him thy cloak also. The one decrees that we should hate our enemies, the other that we should love them so that it holds that even for them we ought always to pray to God.

Chapter XXXIII.

Of the fact that the precepts of the gospel are milder thanthose of the law.

Whoever therefore climbs this height of evangelical perfection, is at once raised by the merits of such virtue above every law, and disregarding as trivial all that is commanded by Moses, recognizes that he is only subject to the grace of the Saviour, by whose aid he knows that he attained to that most exalted condition. Therefore sin has no dominion over him, ”because the love of God, which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us,” shuts out all care for everything else, and can neither desire what is forbidden, or disregard what is commanded, as its whole aim and all its desire is ever fixed on divine love, and to such an extent is it not caught by the delights of worthless things, that it actually does not take advantage of those things which are permitted. But under the law, where lawful marriages are observed, although the rovings of wantonness are restrained, and bound down to one woman alone, yet the pricks of carnal lust cannot help being vigorous; and it is hard for the fire, for which fuel is expressly supplied, to be thus shut in within prearranged limits, so as not to spread further and burn up anything it touches.

As even if this objection occurs to it that it is not allowed to be kindled beyond these limits, yet even while it is kept in check, it is on fire because the will itself is in fault, and its habit of carnal intercourse hurries it into too speedy excesses of adultery. But those whom the grace of the Saviour has fired with the holy love of chastity, so consume all the thorns of carnal desires in the fire of the Lord’s love, that no dying embers of sin interfere with the coldness of their purity. The servants of the law then from the use of lawful things fall away to unlawful; the partakers of grace while they disregard lawful things know nothing of unlawful ones. But as sin is alive in one who loves marriage, so is it also in one who is satisfied with merely paying his tithes and firstfruits. For, while he is dawdling or careless, he is sure to sin in regard to either their quality or quantity, or the daily distribution of them. For as he is commanded unweariedly to minister to those in want of what is his, although he may dispense it with the fullest faith and devotion, yet it is hard for him not to fall often into the snares of sin. But over those who have not set at naught the counsel of the Lord, but who, disposing of all their property to the poor, take up their cross and follow the bestower of grace, sin can have no dominion.

For no faithless anxiety for getting food will annoy him who piously distributes and disperses his wealth already consecrated to Christ and no longer regarded as his own; nor will any grudging hesitation take away from the cheerfulness of his almsgiving, because without any thought of his own needs or fear of his own food running short he is distributing what has once for all been completely offered to God, and is no longer regarded as his own,as he is sure that when he has succeeded instripping himself as he desires, he will be fed by God much more than the birds of the air.On the other hand he who retains his goodsof this world, or, bound by the rules of the old law, distributes the tithe of his produce, and his firstfruits, or a portion of his income, although he may to a considerable degree quench the fire of his sins by this dew of almsgiving, yet, however generously he gives away his wealth, it is impossible for him altogether to rid himself of the dominion of sin, unless perhaps by the grace of the Saviour, together with his substance he gets rid of all love of possessing.

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

Chapter XXXIV.

How a man can be shown to be under grace.

Whoever then strives to reach the perfection of evangelical teaching, this man living under grace is not oppressed by the dominion of sin, for to be under grace is to do those things which grace commands. But whoever will not submit himself to the complete requirements of evangelical perfection, must not remain ignorant that, although he seems to be baptized and to be a monk, yet he is not under grace, but is still shackled by the chains of the law, and weighed down by the burden of sin. For it is the aim of Him, who by the grace of adoption accepts all those by whom He has been received, not to destroy but to build upon, not to abolish but to fulfil the Mosaic requirements. But some knowing nothing about this, and disregarding the splendid counsels and exhortations of Christ, are so emancipated by the carelessness of a freedom too hastily assumed, that they not only fail to carry out the commands of Christ as if they were too hard, but actually scorn as antiquated, the commands given to them as beginners and children by the law of Moses, saying in this dangerous freedom of theirs that which the Apostle execrates: ”We have sinned, because we are not under the law but under grace.

He then who is neither under grace, because he has never climbed the heights of the Lord’s teaching, nor under the law, because he has not accepted even those small commands of the law, this man, ground down beneath a twofold rule of sin, fancies that he has received the grace of Christ, simply and solely for this, that by this dangerous liberty of his he may make himself none of His, and falls into that state, which the Apostle Peter warns us to avoid, saying: ”Act as free, and not having your liberty as a cloak of wickedness. The blessed Apostle Paul also says: ”For ye, brethren, were called to liberty,” i.e., that ye might be free from the dominion of sin, ”only use not your liberty for an occasion of the flesh,” i.e., believe that the doing away with the commands of the law is a licence to sin. But this liberty, the Apostle Paul teaches us is nowhere but where the Lord is dwelling, for he says: ”The Lord is the Spirit, but where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. Wherefore I know not whether I could express and explain the meaning of the blessed Apostle, as those know how, who have experience; one thing I do know, that it is very clearly revealed even without anyone’s explanation to all those who have perfectly acquired praktikh;, i.e., practical training. For they will need no effort to understand in discussion what they have already learnt by practice.

Chapter XXXV.

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

Chapter XXXVI.

The answer, telling that this question should be reserved forfuture Conference.

Theonas: Your zeal indeed, whereby you desire to reach the way of perfection, not for a moment only but fully and perfectly, urges us to continue this discussion unweariedly. For you are anxiously inquiring not about external chastity or outward circumcision, but about that which is secret, as you know that complete perfection does not consist in this visible continence of the flesh which can be attained either by constraint, or by hypocrisy even by unbelievers, but in that voluntary and invisible purity of heart, which the blessed Apostle describes as follows: ”For he is not a Jew which is so outwardly, nor is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh, buthe is a Jew which is one inwardly, and the circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God,” who alone searches the secrets of the heart. But because it is not possible for your wish to be fully satisfied (as the short space of the night that is left is not enough for the investigation of this most difficult question,) I think it well to postpone it for a while. For these matters, as they should be propounded by us quietly and with an heart entirely free from all bustling thoughts, so should they be received into your minds; for just as the inquiry ought to be undertaken for the sake of our common purity, so they cannot be learnt or acquired by one who is without the gift of uprightness.

For we do not ask what arguments of empty words, but what the inward faith of the conscience and the greater force of truth can persuade. And therefore with regard to the knowledge and teaching of this purification nothing can be brought forward except by one who has had experience of it, nor can anything be committed except to one who is a most eager and very earnest lover of the truth itself, who does not hope to attain it by asking questions with mere vain words, but by striving with all his might and main, with no wish for useless chattering but with the desire to purify himself internally.

22. The Second Conference of Abbot Theonas

On Nocturnal Illusions.
This Conference is omitted.

Chapter I.

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

At the return of light therefore, as the old man was forced by our intense urgency to investigate the depths of the Apostle's subject, he spoke as follows: As for the passages by which you try to prove that the Apostle Paul spoke not in his own person but in that of sinners: "For t do not the good that I would, but the evil which I hate, that I do; or this: "But if I do that which I would not, it is no longer I that do it but sin that dwelleth in me; or what follows: "For I delight in the law of God after the inner man, but I see another law in my members opposing the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members; these passages on the contrary plainly show that they cannot possibly fit the person of sinners, but that what is said can only apply to those that are perfect, and that it only suits the chastity of those who follow the good example of the Apostles. Else how could these words apply to the person of sinners: "For I do not the good which I would, but the evil which I hate that I do"? or even this: "But if I do what I would not it is no longer I that do it but sin that dwelleth in me"? For what sinner defiles himself unwillingly by adulteries and fornication? Who against his will prepares plots against his neighbour?

Who is driven by unavoidable necessity to oppress a man by false witness or cheat him by theft, or covet the goods of another or shed his blood? Nay rather, as Scripture says, "Mankind is diligently inclined to wickedness from his youth. For to such an extent are all inflamed by the love of sin and desire to carry out what they like, that they actually look out with watchful care for an opportunity of committing wickedness and are afraid of being too slow to enjoy their lusts, and glory in their shame and the mass of their crimes, as the Apostle says in censure, and seek credit for themselves out of their own confusion, of whom also the prophet Jeremiah maintains that they commit their flagitious crimes not only not unwillingly nor with ease of heart and body, but with laborious efforts to such an extent that they come to toil to carry them out, so that they are prevented even by the hindrance of arduous difficulty from their deadly quest of sin; as he says: "They have laboured to do wickedly. Who also will say that this applies to sinners: "And so with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin," as it is plain that they serve God neither with the mind nor the flesh?

Or how can those who sin with the body serve God with the mind, when the flesh receives the incitement to sin from the heart, and the Creator of either nature Himself declares that the fount and spring of sin flows from the latter, saying: ”From the heart proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, etc. Wherefore it is clearly shown that this cannot in any way be taken of the person of sinners, who not only do not hate, but actually love what is evil and are so far from serving God with either the mind or the flesh that they sin with the mind before they do with the flesh, and before they carry out the pleasures of the body are overcome by sin in their mind and thoughts.

Chapter II.

How the Apostle completed many good actions.

IT remains therefore for us to measure its meaning and drift from the inmost feelings of the speaker, and to discuss what the blessed Apostle called good, and what he pronounced by comparison evil, not by the bare meaning of the words, but with the same insight which he showed, and to investigate his meaning with due regard to the worth and goodness of the speaker. For then we shall be able to understand the words, which were uttered by God's inspiration, in accordance with his purpose and wish, when we weigh the position and character of those by whom they were spoken, and are ourselves clothed with the same feelings (not in words but by experience), in accordance with the character of which most certainly all the thoughts are conceived and opinions uttered. Wherefore let us carefully consider what was in the main that good which the Apostle could not do when he would. For we know that there are many good things which we cannot deny that the blessed Apostle and all men as good as he either have by nature, or acquire by grace. For chastity is good, continence is praiseworthy, prudence is to be admired, kindness is liberal, sobriety is careful, temperance is modest, pity is kind, justice is holy: all of which we cannot doubt existed fully and in perfection in the Apostle Paul and his companions, so that they taught religion by the lesson of their virtues rather than their words.

What if they were always consumed with the constant care of all the churches and watchful anxiety? How great a good is this pity, what perfection it is to burn for them that are offended, to be weak with the weak! If then the Apostle abounded with such good things, we cannot recognize what that good was, inthe perfection of which the Apostle was lacking, unless we have advanced to that state of mind in which he was speaking. And so all those virtues which we say that he possessed, though they are like most splendid and precious gems, yet when they are compared with that most beautiful and unique pearl which the merchant in the gospel sought and wanted to acquire by selling all that he possessed, so does their value seem poor and trifling, so that if they are without hesitation got rid of, the possession of one good thing alone will enrich the man who sells countless good things.

Chapter III.

What is really the good which the Apostle testifies that hecould not perform.

What then is that one thing which is so incomparably above those great and innumerable good things, that, while they are all scorned and rejected, it alone should be acquired? Doubtless it is that truly good part, the grand and lasting character of which is thus described by the Lord, when Mary disregarded the duties of hospitality and courtesy and chose it: ”Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but there is but need of but few things or even of one only. Mary hath chosen the good part which shall not be taken away from her. Contemplation then, i.e., meditation on God, is the one thing, the value of which all the merits of our righteous acts, all our aims at virtue, come short of. And all those things which we said existed in the Apostle Paul, were not only good and useful, but even great and splendid.

But as, for example, the metal of alloy which is considered of some use and worth, becomes worthless when silver is taken into account, and again the value of silver disappears in comparison with gold, and gold itself is disregarded when compared with precious stones, and yet a quantity of precious stones however splendid are outdone by the brightness of a single pearl, so all those merits of holiness, although they are not merely good and useful for the present life, but also secure the gift of eternity, yet if they are compared with the merit of Divine contemplation, will be considered trifling and so to speak,fit to be sold. And to support this illustration by the authority of Scripture, does not Scripture declare of all things in general which were created by God, and say: ”And behold everything that God had made was very good; and again: ”And things that God hath made are all good in their season”? These things then which in the present time are termed not simply and solely good, but emphatically ”very good” (for they are really convenient for us while living in this world,either for purposes of life, or for remedies for the body, or by reason of some unknown usefulness, or else they are indeed ”very good,” because they enable us ”to see the invisible things of God from the creatures of the world, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead,” from this great and orderly arrangement of the fabric of the world;

and to contemplate themfrom the existence of everything in it), yet none of these things will keep the name of good if they are regarded in the light of that world to come, where

no variation of good things, and no loss of true blessedness need be feared. The bliss of which world is thus described: ”The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold as the light of seven days. These things then which are great and wondrous to be gazed on, and marvellous, will at once appear as vanity if they are compared with the future promises from faith; as David says: ”They all shall wax old as a garment, and as a vesture shall Thou change them, and they shall be changed. But Thouart the same, and Thy years shall not fail. Because then there is nothing of itself enduring, nothing unchangeable, nothing good but Deity alone, while every creature, to obtain the blessing of eternity and immutability, aimsat this not by its own nature but by participation of its Creator, and His grace, they cannotmaintain their character for goodness when compared with their Creator.

Chapter IV.

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

But if we want also to establish the force of this opinion by still clearer proofs, is it not the case that while we read of many things as called good in the gospel, as a good tree, and good treasure, and a good man, and a good servant, for He says: ”A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; and: ”a good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things; and: ”Well done, good and faithful servant; and certainly there can be no doubt that none of these are good in themselves, yet if we take into consideration the goodness of God, none of them will becalled good, as the Lord says: ”None is good save God alone”? In whose sight even the apostles themselves, who in the excellence of their calling in many ways went beyond the goodness of mankind, are said to be evil, as the Lord thus speaks to them: ”If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him. Finally as our goodness turns to badness in the eyes of the Highest so also our righteousness when set against the Divine righteousness is considered like a menstruous cloth, as Isaiah the prophet says: ”All your righteousness is like a menstruous cloth.

And to produce something still plainer, even the vital precepts of the law itself, which are said to have been ”given byangels by the the hand of a mediator,” and of which the same Apostle says: ”So the law indeed is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good,” when they are compared with the perfection of the gospel are pronounced anything but good by the Divine oracle: for He says: ”And I gave them precepts that were not good, and ordinances whereby they should not live in them. The Apostle also affirms that the glory of the law is so dimmed by the light of the New Testament that he declares that in comparison with the splendour of the gospel it is not to be considered glorious, saying: ”For even that which was glorious was not glorified by reason of the glory that excelleth. And Scripture keeps up this comparison on the other side also, i.e., in weighing the merits of sinners, so that in comparison with the wicked it justifies those who have sinned less, saying: ”Sodom is justified above thee; and again: ”For what hath thy sister Sodom sinned? and: ”The rebellious Israel hath justified her soul in comparison of the treacherous Judah. So then

the merits of all the virtues, which I enumerated above, though in themselves they are good and precious, yet become dim in comparison of the brightness of contemplation.

For they greatly hinder and retard the saints who are taken up with earthly aims even at good works, from the contemplationof that sublime good.

Chapter V.

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

For who, when ”delivering the poor from the hand of them that are too strong for him, and the needy and the poor from them that strip him,” who when ”breaking the jaws of the wicked and snatching their prey from between their teeth,” can with a calm mind regard the glory of the Divine Majesty during the actual work of intervention? Who when ministering support to the poor, or when receiving with benevolent kindness the crowds that come to him, can at the very moment when he is with anxious mind perplexed for the wants of his brethren, contemplate the vastness of the bliss on high, and while he is shaken by the troubles and cares of the present life look forward to the state of the world to come with an heart raised above the stains of earth? Whence the blessed David when laying down that this alone is good for man, longs to cling constantly to God, and says: ”It is good for me to cling to God, and to put my hope in the Lord. And Ecclesiastes also declares that this cannot be done without fault by any of the saints, and says: ”For there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not.

For who, even if he be the chief of all righteous and holy men, can we ever think could, while bound in the chains of this life, so acquire this chief good, as never to cease from divine contemplation, or be thought to be drawn away by earthly thoughts even for a short time from Him Who alone is good? Who ever takes no care for food, none for clothing or other carnal things, or when anxious about receiving the brethren, or change of place, or building his cell, has never desired the aid of man’s assistance, nor when harassed by scarcity and want has incurred this sentence of reproof from the Lord: ”Be not anxious for your life what ye shall eat, nor for your body what ye shall put on”? Further we confidently assert that even the Apostle Paul himself who surpassed in the number of his sufferings the toils of all the saints, could not possibly fulfil this, as he himself testifies to the disciples in the Acts of the Apostles: ”Ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my needs, and to the needs of those who were with me,” or when in writing in the Thessalonians he testifies that he ”worked in labour and weariness night and day. And although for this there were great rewards for his merits prepared, yet his mind, however holy and sublime it might be, could not help being sometimes drawn away from that heavenly contemplation by its attention to earthly labours.

Further, when he saw himsetf enriched with such practical fruits, and on theother hand considered in his heart the good of meditation, and weighed as it were in one scale the profit of all these labours and in the other the delights of divine contemplation, when for a long time he had corrected the balance in his breast, while the vast rewards for his labours delighted him on one side, and on the other the desire for unity with and the inseparable companionship of Christ inclined him to depart this life, at last in his perplexity he cries out and says: "What I shall choose I know not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, for it were much better: but to abide in the flesh is more necessary for your sakes. Though then in many ways he preferred this excellent good to all the fruits of his preaching, yet he submits himself in consideration of love, without which none can gain the Lord; and for their sakes, whom hitherto he had soothed with milk as nourishment from the breasts of the gospel, does not refuse to be parted from Christ, which is bad for himself though useful for others. For he is driven to choose this the rather by that excessive goodness of his whereby for the salvation of his brethren he is ready, were it possible, to incur even the last evil of an Anathema.

"For I could wish," he says, "that I myself were Anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, who are my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites," i.e., I could wish to be subject not only to temporal, but even to perpetual punishment, if only all men, were it possible, might enjoy the fellowship of Christ: for I am sure that the salvation of all would be better for Christ and for me than my own. That then the Apostle might perfectly gain this chief good, i.e., to enjoy the vision of God and to be joined continually to Christ, he was ready to be parted from this body, which as it is feeble and hindered by the many requirements of its frailties cannot help separating from union with Christ: for it is impossible for the mind, that is harassed by such frequent cares, and hampered by such various and tiresome troubles, always to enjoy the Divine vision. For what aim of the saints can be so persistent, what purpose can be so high that that crafty plotter does not sometimes destroy it? Who has frequented the recesses of the desert and shunned intercourse with all men in such a way that he never trips by unnecessary thoughts, and by looking on things or being occupied in earthly actions falls away from that contemplation of God, which truly alone is good?

Who ever could preserve such fervour of spirit as not sometimes to pass by roving thoughts from his attention to prayer, and fall away suddenly from heavenly to earthly things? Which of us (to pass over other times of wandering) even at the very moment when heraises his soul in prayer to God on high, does not fall into a sort of stupor, and even against his will offend by that very thing from which he hoped for pardon of his sins? Who, I ask, is so alert and vigilant as never, while he is singing a Psalm to God, to allow his mind to wander from the meaning of Scripture? Who is so intimate with and closely joined to God, as to congratulate himself on having carried out for a single day that rule of the Apostle's, whereby he bids us pray without ceasing? And though all these things may seem to some, who are involved in grosser sins, to be trivial and altogether foreign to sin, yet to those who know the value of perfection a quantity even of very small matters becomes most serious.

Chapter VI.

How those who think that they are without sin are like purblindpeople.

As if we were to suppose that two men, one of whom was clear sighted with perfect vision, and the other, one whose eyesight was obscured by dimness of vision, had together entered some great house that was filled with a quantity of bundles, instruments, and vessels, would not he, whose dullness of vision prevented his seeing everything, assert that there was nothing there but chests, beds, benches, tables, and whatever met the fingers of one who felt them rather than the eyes of one who saw them, while on the other hand would not the other, who searched out what was hidden with clear and bright eyes, declare that there were there many most minute articles, and what could scarcely be counted; which if they were ever gathered up into a single pile, would by their number equal or perhaps exceed the size of those few things which the other had felt.

So then even saints, and, if we may so say, men who see, whose aim is the utmost perfection, cleverly detect in themselves even those things which the gaze of our mind being as it were darkened cannot see, and condemn them very severely, to such an extent that those who have not, as it seems to our carelessness, dimmed the whiteness of their body, which is as it were like snow, with even the slightest spot of sin, seem to themselves to be covered with many stains, if, I will not say any evil or vain thoughts creep into the doors of their mind, but even the recollection of a Psalm which has to be said takes off the attention of the kneeler at the time for prayer. For if, say they, when we ask some great man, I will not say for our life and salvation, but for some advantage and profit, we fasten all our attention of mind and body upon him, and hang with trembling expectation on his nod, with no slight dread lest haply some foolish or unsuitable word may turn aside the pity of our hearer, and then too, when we are standing in the forum or in the courts of earthly judges, with our opponent standing over against us, if in the midst of the prosecution and trial any coughing, or spitting, or laughing, or yawning, or sleep overtakes us, with what malice will our ever watchful opponent stir up the severity of the judge to our damage:

how much more, when we entreat Him who knows all secrets, should we, by reason of our imminent danger of everlasting death, plead with earnest and anxious prayer for the kindness of the judge, especially as on the other side there stands one who is both our crafty seducer and our accuser! And not without reason will he be bound by no light sin, but by a

grievous fault of wickedness, who, when he pours forth his prayer to God, departs at once from His sight as if from the eyes of one who neither sees nor hears, and follows the vanity of wicked thoughts. But they who cover the eyes of their heart with a thick veil of their sins, and as the Saviour says, "Seeing see not and hearing hear not nor understand," hardly regard in the inmost recesses of their breast even those faults which are great and deadly. and cannot with clear eyes look at any deceitful thoughts, nor even those vague and secret desires which strike the mind with slight and subtle suggestions, nor the captivities of their soul, but always wandering among impure thoughts they know not how to be sorry when they are distracted from that meditation which is so special, nor can they grieve that they have lost anything as while they lay open their mind to the entrance of any thought as they please, they have nothing set before them to hold to as the main thing or to desire in every way.

Chapter VII.

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

The reason however which drives us into this error is that, as we are utterly ignorant of the virtue of being without sin, we fancy that we cannot contract any guilt from those idle and random vagaries of our thoughts, but being rendered stupid by dullness and as it were smitten with blindness we can see nothing in ourselves but capital offences, and think that we have only to keep clear of those things which are condemned also by the severity of secular laws, and if we find that even for a short time we are free from these we at once imagine that there is no sin at all in us. Accordingly we are distinguished from the number of those who see, because we do not see the many small stains, which are crowded together in us, and are not smitten with saving contrition, if the malady of vexation overtakes our thoughts, nor are we sorry that we are struck by the suggestions of vainglory, nor do we weep over our prayers offered up so tardily and coldly, nor consider it a fault if while we are singing or praying, something else besides the actual prayer or Psalm fills our thoughts, nor are we horrified because we do not blush to conceive many things which we are ashamed to speak or do before men, in our heart, which, as we know, lies open to the Divine gaze;

nor do we purge away the pollution of filthy dreams with copious ablutions of our tears, nor grieve that in the pious act of almsgiving when we are assisting the needs of the brethren, or ministering support to the poor, the brightness of our cheerfulness is clouded over by a stingy delay, nor do we think that we are affected by any loss when we forget God and think about things that are temporal and corrupt, so that these words of Solomon fairly apply to us: ”They smite me but I have not grieved, and they have mocked me, but I knew it not.”

Chapter VIII.

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

Those on the other hand who make the sum of all their joy and delight and bliss consist in the contemplation of divine and spiritual things alone, if they are unwillingly withdrawn from them even for a short time by thoughts that force themselves upon them, punish this as if it were a kind of sacrilege in them, and avenge it by immediate chastisement, and in their grief that they have preferred some worthless creature (to which their mental gaze was turned aside) to their Creator, charge themselves with the guilt (I had almost said) of impiety, and although they turn the eyes of their heart with the utmost speed to behold the brightness of the Divine Glory, yet they cannot tolerate even for a very short time the darkness of carnal thoughts, and execrate whatever keeps back their soul's gaze from the true light. Finally when the blessed Apostle John would instill this feeling into everybody he says: "Little children, love not the world, neither the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of God is not in him: for everything that is in the world is the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, which is not of the Father but of the world. And the world perisheth and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.

The saints therefore scorn all those things on which the world exists, but it is impossible for them never to be carried away to them by a brief aberration of thoughts, and even now no man, except our Lord and Saviour, can keep his naturally wandering mind always fixed on the contemplation of God so as never to be carried away from it through the love of something in this world; as Scripture says: "Even the stars are not clean in His sight," and again: "If He puts no trust in His saints, and findeth iniquity in His angels," or as the more correct translation has it: "Behold among His saints none is unchangeable, and the heavens are not pure in His sight."

Chapter IX.

Of the care with which a monk should preserve the recollectionof God.

I Should say then that the saints who keep a firm hold of the recollection of God and are borne along, as it were, with their steps suspended on a line stretched out on high, may be rightly compared to rope dancers, com-inertly called funambuli, who risk all their safety and life on the path of that very narrow rope, with no doubt that they will immediately meet with a most dreadful death if their foot swerves or trips in the very slightest degree, or goes over the line of the course in which alone is safety. And while with marvellous skill they ply their airy steps through space, if they keep not their steps to that all too narrow path with careful and anxious regulation, the earth which is the natural base and the most solid and safest foundation for all, becomes to them an immediate and clear danger, not because its nature is changed, but because they fall headlong upon it by the weight of their bodies. So also that un-wearied goodness of God and His unchanging nature hurts no one indeed, but we ourselves by falling from on high and tending to the depths are the authors of our own death, or rather the very fall becomes death to the fuller. For it says: ”Woe to them for they have departed from Me: they shall be wasted because they have transgressed against Me; and again: ”Woe to them when I shall depart from them. For ”thine own wickedness shall reprove thee, and thy apostasy shall rebuke thee.

Know thou and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God; for ”every man is bound by the cords of his sins. To whom this rebuke is aptly directed by the Lord: ”Behold,” He says, ”all you that kindle a fire, encompassed with flames, walk ye in the light of your fire and in the flames which you have kindled; and again: ”He that kindleth iniquity, shall perish by it.”

Chapter X.

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

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

Chapter XI.

Explanation of the phrase: ”For I delight in the law of Godafter the inner man,” etc.

And they ”delight” indeed ”in the law of God after the inner man,” which soars above all visible things and ever strives to be united to God alone, but they ”see another law in their members,” i.e., implanted in their natural human condition, which ”resisting the law of their mind,” brings their thoughts into captivity to the forcible law of sin, com, pelling them to forsake that chief good and submit to earthly notions, which though they may appear necessary and useful when they are taken up in the interests of some religious want, yet when they are set against that good which fascinates the gaze of all the saints, are seen by them to be bad and such as should be avoided, because by them in some way or other and for a short time they are drawn away from the joy of that perfect bliss. For the law of sin is really what the fall of its firstfather brought on mankind by that fault of his, against which there was uttered this sentence by the most just Judge: ”Cursed is the ground in thy works; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread.

This, I say, is the law, implanted in the members of all mortals, which resists the law of our mind and keeps it back from the vision of God, and which, as the earth is cursed in our works after the knowledge of good and evil, begins to produce the thorns and thistles of thoughts, by the sharp pricks of which the natural seeds of virtues are choked, so that without the sweat of our brow we cannot eat our bread which ”cometh down from heaven,” and which ”strengtheneth man’s heart. The whole human race in general therefore is without exception subject to this law. For there is no one, however saintly, who does not take the bread mentioned above with the sweat of his brow and anxious efforts of his heart. But many rich men, as we see, are fed on that common bread without any sweat of their brow.

Chapter XII.

Of this also: ”But we know that the law is spiritual,” etc.

And this law the Apostle also calls spiritual saying: ”But we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For this law is spiritual which bids us eat in the sweat of our brow that ”true bread which cometh down from heaven” but that sale under sin makes us carnal. What, I ask, or whose is that sin? Doubtless Adam’s, by whose fall and, if I may so say, ruinous transaction and fraudulent bargain we were sold. For when he was led astray by the persuasion of the serpent he brought all his descendants under the yoke of perpetual bondage, as they were alienated by taking the forbidden food. For this custom is generally observed between the buyer and seller, that one who wants to make himself over to the power of another, receives from his buyer a price for the loss of his liberty, and his consignment to perpetual slavery. And we can very plainly see that this took place between Adam and the serpent. For by eating of the forbidden tree he received from the serpent the price of his liberty, and gave up his natural freedom and chose to give himself up to perpetual slavery to him from whom he had obtained the deadly price of the forbidden fruit; and thenceforth he was bound by this condition and not without reason subjected all the offspring of his posterity to perpetual service to him whose slave he had become. For what can any marriage in slavery produce but slaves? What then?

Did that cunning and crafty buyer take away the rights of ownership from the true and lawful lord? Not so. For neither did he overcome all God’s property by the craft of a single act of deception so that the true lord lost his rights of ownership, who though the buyer himself was a rebel and a renegade, yet oppressed him with the yoke of slavery; but because the Creator had endowed all reasonable creatures with free will, he would not restore to their natural liberty against their will those who contrary to right had sold themselves by the sin of greedy lust. Since anything that is contrary to goodness and fairness is abhorrent to Him who is the Author of justice and piety. For it would have been wrong for Him to have recalled the blessing of freedom granted, unfair for Him to have by His power oppressed man who was free, and by taking him captive, not to have allowed him to exercise the prerogative of the freedom he had received, as He was reserving his salvation for future ages, that in due season the fulness of the appointed time might be fulfilled.

For it was right that his offspring should remain under the ancient conditions for so long a time, until by the price of His own blood the grace of the Lord redeemed them from their original chains and set them free in the primeval state of liberty, though He was able even then to save them, but would not, because equity forbade Him to break the terms of His own decree. Would you know the reason for your being sold? Hear thy Redeemer Himself proclaiming openly by Isaiah the prophet: "What is this bill of the divorce of your mother with which I have put her away? Or who is My creditor to whom I sold you? Behold you are sold for your iniquities and for your wicked deeds have I put your mother away. Would you also plainly see why when you were consigned to the yoke of slavery He would not redeem you by the might of His own power? Hear what He added to the former passage, and how He charges the same servants of sin with the reason for their voluntary sale. "Is My hand shortened and become little that I cannot redeem, or is there no strength in Me to deliver? But what it is which is always standing in the way of His most powerful pity the same prophet shows when he says: "Behold the hand of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is His ear heavy that it cannot hear:

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

Chapter XIII.

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

Because then the original curse of God has made us carnal and condemned us to thorns and thistles, and our father has sold us by that unhappy bargain so that we cannot do the good that we would, while we are torn away from the recollection of God Most High and forced to think on what belongs to human weakness, while burning with the love of purity, we are often even against our will troubled by natural desires, which we would rather know nothing about; we know that in our flesh there dwelleth no good thing viz., the perpetual and lasting peace of this meditation of which we have spoken; but there is brought about in our case that miserable and wretched divorce, that when with the mind we want to serve the law of God, since we never want to remove our gaze from the Divine brightness, yet surrounded as we are by carnal darkness we are forced by a kind of law of sin to tear ourselves away from the good which we know, as we fall away from that lofty height of mind to earthly cares and thoughts, to which the law of sin, i.e., the sentence of God, which the first delinquent received, has not without reason condemned us. And hence it is that the blessed Apostle, though he openly admits that he and all saints are bound by the constraint of this sin, yet boldly asserts that none of them will be condemned for this, saying:

”There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus: for the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath set me free from the law of sin and death,” i.e., the grace of Christ day by day frees all his saints from this law of sin and death, under which they are constantly reluctantly obliged to come, whenever they pray to the Lord for the forgiveness of their trespasses. You see then that it wasin the person not of sinners but of those who are really saints and perfect, that the blessed Apostle gave utterance to this saying: ”ForI do not the good that I would, but the evil which I hate, that I do; and: ”I see another law in my members resisting the law of my mind and bringing me captive to the law of sin which is in my members.”

Chapter XIV.

An objection, that the saying: "For I do not the good that I would," etc., applies to the persons neither of unbelievers nor of saints. Germanus: We say that this does not apply to the persons either of those who are involved in capital offences, or of an Apostle and those who have advanced to his measure, but we think that it ought properly to be taken of those who after receiving the grace of God and the knowledge of the truth, are anxious to keep themselves from carnal sins but, as ancient custom like a natural law rules most forcibly in their members, they are carried away to the ingrained lust of their passions. For the custom and frequency of sinning becomes like a natural law, which, implanted in the man's weak members, leads the feelings of the soul that is not yet instructed in all the pursuits of virtue, but is still, if I may say so, of an uninstructed and tender chastity, captive to sin and subjecting them by an ancient law to death, brings them under the yoke of sin that rules over them, not suffering them to obtain the good of purity which they love, but rather forcing them to do the evil which they hate.

Chapter XV.

The answer to the objection raised.

Theonas: Your notion does not come to much; as you yourselves have actually now begun to maintain that this cannot possibly stand in the person of those who are out and out sinners, but that it properly applies to those who are trying to keep themselves clear from carnal sins. And since you have already separated these from the number of sinners, it follows that you must shortly admit them into the ranks of the faithful and holy. For what kinds of sin do you say that those can commit, from which, if they are involved in them after the grace of baptism, they can be freed by the daily grace of Christ? or of what body of death are we to think that the Apostle said: ”Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord”? Is it not clear, as truth compels you yourselves also to admit, that it is spoken not of those members of capital crimes, by which the wages of eternal death are gained; viz., murder, fornication, adultery, drunkenness, thefts and robberies, but of that body before mentioned, which the daily grace of Christ assists?

For whoever after baptism and the knowledge of God falls into that death, must know that he will either have to be cleansed, not by the daily grace of Christ, i.e., an easy forgiveness, which our Lord when at any moment He is prayed to, is wont to grant to our errors, but by a lifelong affliction of penitence and penal sorrow, or else will be hereafter consigned to the punishment of eternal fire for them, as the same Apostle thus declares: ”Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor defilers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous persons, nor drunkards, nor railers, nor extortioners shall possess the kingdom of God. Or what is that law warring in our members which resists the law of our mind, and when it has led us resisting but captives to the law of sin and death, and has made us serve it with the flesh, nevertheless suffers us to serve the law of God with the mind? For I do not suppose that this law of sin denotes crimes or can be taken of the offences mentioned above, of which if a man is guilty he does not serve the law of God with the mind, from which law he must first have departed in heart before he is guilty of any of them with the flesh. For what is it to serve the law of sin, but to do what is commanded by sin?

What sort of sin then is it to which so great holiness and perfection feels that it is captive, and yet doubts not that it will be freed from it by the grace of Christ, saying: ”O wretched

man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord"? What law, I ask, will you maintain to be implanted in our members, which, withdrawing us from the law of God and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin, could make us wretched rather than guilty so that we should not be consigned to eternal punishment, but still as it were sigh for the unbroken joys of bliss, and, seeking for a helper who shah restore us to it, exclaim with the Apostle: 'O wretched man that I am! Who shaft deliver me from the body of this death? For what is it to be led captive to the law of sin but to continue to perform and commit sin? Or what other chief good can be given which the saints cannot fulfil, except that in comparison with which, as we said above, everything else is not good? Indeed we know that many things in this world are good, and chiefly, modesty, continence, sobriety, humility, justice, mercy, temperance, piety: but all of these things fail to come up to that chief good, and can be done I say not by apostles, but even by ordinary folk;

and, those by whom they are not done, are either chastised with eternal punishment, or are set free by great exertions, as was said above, of penitence, and not by the daily grace of Christ. It remains then for us to admit that this saying of the Apostle is rightly applied only to the persons of saints, who day after day falling under this law, which we described, of sin not of crimes, are secure of their salvation and not precipitated into wicked deeds, but, as has often been said, are drawn away from the contemplation of God to the misery of bodily thoughts, and are often deprived of the blessing of that true bliss. For if they felt that by this law of their members they were bound daily to crimes, they would complain of the loss not of happiness but of innocence, and the Apostle Paul would not say: "O wretched man that I am," but "Impure," or "Wicked man that I am," and he would wish to be rid not of the body of this death, i.e., this mortal state, but of the crimes and misdeeds of this flesh. But because by reason of his state of human frailty he felt that he was captive, i.e., led away to carnal cares and anxieties which the law of sin and death causes, he groans over this law of sin under which against his will he had fallen, and at once has recourse to Christ and is saved by the present redemption of His grace.

Whatever of anxiety therefore that law of sin, which naturally produces the thorns and thistles of mortal thoughts and cares, has caused to spring up in the ground of the Apostle's breast, that the law of grace at once plucks up. "For the law," says he, "of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath set me free from the law of sin and death."

Chapter XVI.

What is the body of sin.

This then is that body of death from which we cannot escape, pent in which those who are perfect, who have tasted ”how gracious the Lord is,” daily feel with the prophet ”how bad for himself and bitter it is for a man to depart from the Lord his God. This is the body of death which restrains us from the heavenly vision and drags us back to earthly things, which causes men while singing Psalms and kneeling in prayer to have their thoughts filled with human figures, or conversations, or business, or unnecessary actions. This is the body of death, owing to which those, who would emulate the sanctity of angels, and who long to cling continually to God, yet are unable to arrive at the perfection of this good, because the body of death stands in their way, but they do the evil that they would not, i.e., they are dragged down in their minds even to the things which have nothing to do with their advance and perfection in virtue. Finally that the blessed Apostle might clearly denote that he said this of saintly and perfect men, and those like himself, he in a way points with his finger to himself and at once proceeds: ”And so I myself,” i.e, I who say this, lay bare the secrets of my own not another’s conscience. This mode of speech at any rate the Apostle is familiarly accustomed to use, whenever he wants to point specially to himself, as here:

”I, Paul, myself beseech you by the mildness and modesty of Christ; and again: ”except that I myself was not burdensome to you; and once more: ”But be it so: I myself did not burden you; and elsewhere: ”I, Paul, myself say unto you: if ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing; and to the Romans: ”For I could wish that I myself were Anathema from Christ for my brethren. But it cannot unreasonably be taken in this way, that ”And so I myself” is expressly said with emphasis, i.e., I whom you know to be an Apostle of Christ, whom you venerate with the utmost respect, whom you believe to be of the highest character and perfect, and one in whom Christ speaks, though with the mind I serve the law of God, yet with the flesh I confess that I serve the law of sin, i.e., by the occupations of my human conditionam sometimes dragged down from heavenly to earthly things and the height of my mind is brought down to the level of care for humble matters. And by this law of sin I find that at every moment I am so taken captive that although I persist in my immovable longing around the law of God, yet in no way can I escape the power of this captivity, unless I always fly to the grace of the Saviour.

Chapter XVII.

How all the saints have confessed with truth that they wereunclean and sinful.

And therefore with daily sighs all the saints grieve over this weakness of their nature and while they search into their shifting thoughts and the secrets and inmost recesses of their conscience, cry out in entreaty: ”Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified; and this: ”Who will boast that he hath a chaste heart? or who will have confidence that he is pure from sin? and again: ”There is not a righteous man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not; and this also: ”Who knoweth his faults? And so they have recognized that man’s righteousness is weak and imperfect and always needs God’s mercy, so that one of those whose iniquities and sinsGod purged away with the live coal of His word sent from the altar, after that marvellous vision of God, after his view of the Seraphim on high and the revelation of heavenly mysteries, said: ”Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. And I fancy that perhaps even then he would not have felt the uncleanness of his lips, unless it had been given him to recognize the true and complete purity of perfection by the vision of God, at the sight of Whom he suddenly became aware of his own uncleanness, of which he had previously been ignorant. For when he says: ”Woe is me!

for I am a man of unclean lips,” he shows that his confession that follows refers to his own lips, and not to the uncleanness of the people: ”and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. But even when in his prayer he confesses the uncleanness of all sinners, he embraces in his general supplication not only the mass of the wicked but also of the good, saying: ”Behold Thou art angry, and we have sinned: in them we have been always, and we shall be saved. We are all become as one unclean, and all our righteousnesses as filthy rags. What, I ask, could be clearer than this saying, in which the prophet includes not one only but all our righteousnesses and, looking round on all things that are considered unclean and disgusting, because he could find nothing in the life of men fouler or more unclean, chose to compare them to filthy rags. In vain then is the sharpness of a nagging objection raised against this perfectly clear truth, as a little while back you said: ”If no one is without sin, then no one is holy; and if no one is holy, then no one will be saved. For the puzzle of this question can be solved by the prophet’s testimony.

”Behold,” he says, ”Thou art angry and we have sinned,” i.e., when Thou didst reject our pride of heart or our carelessness, and deprive us of Thine aid, at once the abyss of our sins swallowed us up, as if one should say to the bright substance of the sun: Behold thou hast set, and at once murky darkness covered us. And yet though he here says that the saints have sinned, and have not only sinned but also have always remained in their sins, he does not altogether despair of salvation but adds: ”In them we have been always, and we shall be saved. This saying: ”Behold Thou art angry and we have sinned,” I will compare to that one of the Apostle’s: ”O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Again this that the prophet subjoins: ”In them we have been always, and we shall be saved,” corresponds to the following words of the Apostle: ”Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. In the same way also this passage of the same prophet: ”Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips,” seems to agree with the words quoted above: ”O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? And what follows in the prophet.

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

Chapter XVIII.

That even good and holy men are not without sin.

But that no one however holy is in this life free from trespasses and sin, we are told also by the teaching of the Saviour, who gave His disciples the form of the perfect prayer and among those other sublime and sacred commands, which as they were only given to the saints and perfect cannot apply to the wicked and unbelievers, He bade this to be inserted: ”And forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors. If then this is offered as a true prayer and by saints, as we ought without the shadow of a doubt to believe, who can be found so obstinate and impudent, so puffed up with the pride of the devil’s own rage, as to maintain that he is without sin, and not only to think himself greater than apostles, but also to charge the Saviour Himself with ignorance or folly, as if He either did not know that some men could be free from debts, or was idly teaching those whom He knew to stand in no need of the remedy of that prayer? But since all the saints who altogether keep the commands of their King, say every day ”Forgive us our debts,” if they sneak the truth there is indeed no one free from sin, but if they speak falsely, it is equally true that they are not free from the sin of falsehood. Wherefore also that most wise Ecclesiastes reviewing in his mind all the actions and purposes of men declares without any exception:

”that there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not,” i.e., no one ever could or ever will be found on this earth so holy, so diligent, so earnest as to be able continually to cling to that true and unique good, and not day after day to feel that he is drawn aside from it and fails. But still though he maintains that he cannot be free from wrong doing, yet none the less we must not deny that he is righteous.

Chapter XIX.

How even in the hour of prayer it is almost impossible toavoid sin.

Whoever then ascribes sinlessness to human nature must fight against no idle words but the witness and proof of his conscience which is on our side, and then only should maintain that he is without sin, when he finds that he is not torn away from this highest good: nay rather, whoever considering his own conscience, to say no more, finds that he has celebrated even one single service without the distraction of a single word or deed or thought, may say that he is without sin. Further because we admit that the discursive lightness of the human mind cannot get rid of these idle and empty things, we thus consequently confess with truth that we are not without sin. For with whatever care a man tries to keep his heart, he can never, owing to the resistance of the nature of the flesh, keep it according to the desire of his spirit. For however far the human mind may have advanced and progressed towards a finer purity of contemplation, so much the more will it see itself to be unclean, as it were in the mirror of its purity, because while the soul raises itself for a loftier vision and as it looks forth yearns for greater things than it performs, it is sure always to despise as inferior and worthless the things in which it is mixed up. Since a keener sight notices more; and a blameless life produces greater sorrow when found fault with; and amendment of life, and earnest striving after goodness multiplies groans and sighs.

For no one can rest content with that stage to which he has advanced, and however much a man may be purified in mind, so much the more does he see himself to be foul, and find grounds for humiliation rather than for pride, and, however swiftly he may climb to greater heights, so much more does he see above him whither he is tending. Finally that chosen Apostle ”whom Jesus loved,” who lay on His bosom, uttered this saying as if from the heart of the Lord: ”If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. And so if when we say that we have no sin, we have not the truth, that is Christ, in us, what good do we do except to prove ourselves by this very, profession, criminals and wicked among sinners?

Chapter XX.

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

Chapter XXI.

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

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

Chapter I.

How we laid bare the secrets of our thoughts to AbbotAbraham.

This twenty-fourth Conference of Abbot Abraham is by the favour of Christ produced, which concludes the traditions and decisions of all the Elders; and when by the aid of your prayers it has been finished, as the numbermystically corresponds to that of the four and twenty Elders who are said in the holy Apocalypse to offer their crowns to the Lamb, we think that we shall have paid the debt of all our promises. And henceforth if these four and twenty Elders of ours have been crowned with any glory for the sake of their teaching, they shall with bowed heads offer it to the Lamb who was slain for the salvation of the world: for He it was Who vouschafed for the honour of His name to grant to them such exalted feelings and to us whatever words were needful to set forth such profound thoughts. And the merits of His gift must be referred to the Author of all good, to whom the more is owed, as the more is paid. Therefore with anxious confession we laid before this Abraham the impulse of our thoughts. whereby we were urged by daily perplexities of our mind to return to our country and revisit our kinsfolk.

For from this the greatest reason for our desire sprang, because we remembered that our kinsfolk were endowed with such piety and goodness that we felt sure that they would never interfere with our purpose, and we constantly reflected, that we should gain more good out of their earnestness, and should be hampered by no cares about bodily matters, and no trouble in providing food, as they would gladly minister abundantly to the supply of all our wants, and besides this we were feeding our souls on the hope of empty joys, as we thought that we should gain the greatest good from the conversion of many, who were to be turned to the way of salvation by our example and instructions. Then besides this the very spot, where was the ancestral possession of our forefathers, and the delightful pleasantness of the neighbourhood was painted before our eyes, how pleasantly and suitably it stretched away to the desert, so that the recesses of the woods would not only delight the heart of a monk, but would also furnish him with a plentiful supply of food. And when we explained all this to the aforesaid old man, in a straightforward way, according to the faith of our consience, and showed by our copious tears that we could no longer resist the violence of the impulse, unless the grace of God came to our rescue by the healing which he, could give, he waited for a long time in silenceand at last sighed deeply and said:

Chapter II.

How the old man exposed our errors.

The feebleness of your ideas shows that you have not yet renounced worldly desires nor mortified your former lusts. For as the wandering character of your desires testifies to the sloth of your heart, this pilgrimage and absence from your kinsfolk, which you ought rather to endure with your heart, you do endure only with the flesh. For all these things would have been buried and altogether driven out of your hearts, if you had got hold of the right method of renunciation, and the main reason for the solitude in which we dwell. And so I see that you are labouring under that infirmity of sluggishness, which is thus described in Proverbs: "Every sluggard is always desiring something; and again: "Desires kill the slothful. For in our case too these supplies of worldly conveniences, which you have described, would not be wanting, if we believed that they were appropriate to our calling, or thought that we could get out of those delights and pleasures as much profit as that which is gained from this squalor of the country and bodily affliction. Nor are we so deprived of the solace of our kinsfolk, that those who delight to support us with their substance should fail us, were it not that this saying of the Saviour meets us and excludes everything that contributes to the support of this flesh, as He says: "He who doth not leave (or hate) father and mother and children and brethren cannot be My disciple.

But if we were altogether deprived of the protection of our parents, the services of the princes of this world would not be wanting, as they would most thankfully rejoice to minister to our necessities with prompt liberality. And supported by their bounty, we should be free from the care of preparing food, were it not that this curse of the prophet terribly frightened us. For "Cursed," he says, "is the man that putteth his hope in man; and: "Put not your trust in princes. We should also at any rate place our cells on the banks of the river Nile and have water at our very doors, so as not to be obliged to carry it on our necks for four miles, were it not that the blessed Apostle rendered us indefatigable in enduring this labour, and cheered us by his words, saying: "Every one shall receive his own reward according to his labour. Nor are we ignorant that there are even in our country some pleasant recesses, where plenty of fruits, and pleasant gardens, and fertile ground would furnish the food we need with the slightest bodily efforts on our part, were it not that we were afraid lest that

reproach might apply to us, which is directed against the rich man in the gospel: ”Because thou hast received thy consolation in this life.

But as we despise all these things and scorn them together with all the pleasures of this world, we delight only in this squalor, and prefer to all luxuries this dreadful and vast desert, and cannot compare any riches of a fertile soil to these barren sands, as we pursue no temporal gains of this body, but the eternal rewards of the spirit. For it is but little for a monk to have once made his renunciation, i.e., in the early days of his conversion to have disregarded the present world, unless he continues to renounce it daily. For to the very end of this life we must with the prophet say this: ”And I have not desired the day of man, Thou knowest. Wherefore also the Lord says in the gospel: ”If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”

Chapter III.

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

Chapter IV.

What sorts of work should be chosen by solitaries.

Everyone therefore who constantly perseveres in this watchfulness will effectually fulfil what is very plainly expressed by the prophet Habakkuk: ”I will stand upon my watch, and ascend upon the rock, and will look out to see what He shall say to me, and what I may answer to Him that reproveth me. And how difficult and tiresome this is, is very clearly shown by the experience of those who live in the desert of Calamus or Porphyrion. For though they are separated from all the cities and dwellings of men by a longer stretch of desert than the wilderness of Scete (since by penetrating seven or eight days' journey into the recesses of the vast wilderness, they scarcely arrive at their hiding places and cells) yet because there they are devoted to agriculture and not in the least confined to the cloister, whenever they come to these squalid districts in which we are living, or to Scete, they are annoyed by such harassing thoughts and such anxiety of mind that, as if they were beginners and men who had never given the slightest attention to the exercises of solitude, they cannot endure the life of the cells and the peace and quietness of them, and are at once driven forth and obliged to leave them, as if they were inexperienced and novices.

For they have not learnt to still the motions of the inner man, and to quell the tempests of their thoughts by anxious care and persevering efforts, as, toiling day after day in work in the open air, they are moving about all day long in empty space, not only in the flesh but also in heart; and pour forth their thoughts openly as the body moves hither and thither. And therefore they do not notice the folly of their mind in longing for many things, nor can they put a check upon its vague discursiveness; and as they cannot bear sorrow of spirit they think that the fact of a continuance of silence is unendurable, and those who are never tired by hard work in the country, are beaten by silence and worn out by the length of their rest.

Chapter V.

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

Chapter VI.

A comparison showing how a monk ought to keep guard overhis thoughts.Wherefore a monk's whole attention should thus be fixed on one point, and the rise and circle of all his thoughts be vigorously restricted to it; viz., to the recollection of God, as when a man, who is anxious to raise on high a vault of a round arch, must constantly draw a line round from its exact centre, and in accordance with the sure standard it gives discover by the laws of building all the evenness and roundness required. But if anyone tries to finish it without ascertaining its centre-though with the utmost confidence in his art and ability, it is impossible for him to keep the circumference even, without any error, or to find out simply by looking at it how much he has taken off by his mistake from the beauty of real roundness, unless he always has recourse to that test of truth and by its decision corrects the inner and outer edge of his work, and so finishes the large and lofty pile to the exact point.

So also our mind, unless by working round the love of the Lord alone as an immovably fixed centre, through all the circumstances of our works and contrivances, it either fits or rejects the character of all our thoughts by the excellent compasses, if I may so say, of love, will never by excellent skill build up the structure of that spiritual edifice of which Paul is the architect, nor possess that beautiful house, which the blessed, David desired in his heart to show to the Lord and said: "I have loved the beauty of Thine house and the place of the dwelling of Thy glory; but will without foresight raise in his heart a house that is not beautiful, and that is unworthy of the Holy Ghost, one that will presently fall, and so will receive no glory from the reception of the blessed Inhabitant, but will be miserably destroyed by the fall of his building.

Chapter VII.

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

Chapter VIII.

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

Abraham: Sometimes we see bad precedents taken from good things. For if a man ventures to do the same thing as another, but not with the same mind and purpose, or not with equal goodness, he will immediately fall into the snares of deception and death through the very things from which others gain the fruit of eternal life: As that strong armed lad matched with the warlike giant in the combat would certainly have found, if he had been clad in the heavy armour of Saul fit only for men; and that by which one of stronger age would have laid low countless hosts of foes, would only have brought certain danger to the stripling, had he not with prudent discretion chosen the sort of weapons suitable to his youth, and armed himself against his foul foe not with breastplate and shield, with which he saw that others were equipped, but with those weapons with which he was able to fight. Wherefore it is right for each one of us first to consider carefully the measure of his powers and in accordance with its limits, to choose what system he pleases, because though all are good, yet all things cannot be fit for all men. For we do not assert that because the anchorite's life is good, it is therefore suited for everybody: for by many it is felt to be not only useless, but even injurious.

Nor because we are right in taking up the system of the coenobium and the pious and praiseworthy care of the brethren, do we therefore consider that it ought to be followed by everybody. So also the fruits of the care of strangers are very plentiful, but this cannot be taken up by everybody without loss of patience. Further, the systems of your county and of this must first be weighed against each other; and then the powers of men gathered from the constant occurrence of their virtues or vices must be severally weighed in the opposite scales. For it may happen that what is difficult or impossible for a man of one nation in the case of others is somehow turned by ingrained habit into nature: just as some nations, separated by a wide difference of region, can bear tremendous force of cold or heat of the sun without any covering of the body, which certainly others who have no experience of that inclement sky, could not possibly endure, however strong they may be. So also do you who with the utmost efforts of mind and body are trying in this district to get the better of the nature of your country in many respects, diligently consider whether in those regions which,

as report says, are frozen, and bound by the cold of excessive unbelief, you could endure this nakedness, if I may so term it.

For to us the fact that our holy life is of long standing has almost naturally imparted this fortitude in our purpose, and if we see that you are our equals in virtue and constancy, you in like manner need not shun the neighbourhood of your kinsfolk and brethren.

Chapter IX.

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

But that you may be able fairly to measure the amount of your strength by a certain test of strictness I will point out to you what was done by a certain old man; viz., Abbot Apollos that if your secret scrutiny of your heart decides that you are not behind this man in purpose and goodness, you may venture on remaining in your country and living near your kinsfolk without detriment to your purpose or injury to your mode of life, and be sure that neither the feeling of nearness nor your love for the district can interfere with the strictness of this humble lot, which not only your own will but the needs also of your pilgrimage enforce upon you in this country. When then his own brother had come to this old man, whom we have mentioned, in the dead of night, begging him to come out for a little while from his monastery, to help him to rescue an ox, which as he sadly complained had stuck in the mire of a swamp a little way off, because he could not possibly rescue it alone, Abbot Apollos stolidly replied to his entreaties: ”Why did you not ask our younger brother who was nearer to you as you passed by than I? and when the other, thinking that he had forgotten the death of his brother who had been long ago buried, and that he was almost weak in his mind from excessive abstinence and continual solitude, replied:

”How could I summon one who died fifteen years ago? Abbot Apollos said: ”Don’t you know that I too have been dead to this world for twenty years, and that I can’t from my tomb in this cell give you any assistance in what belongs to the affairs of this present life? And Christ is so far from allowing me ever so little to relax my purpose of mortification on which I have entered, for extricating your ox, that He did not even permit the very shortest intermission of it for my father’s funeral, which would have been undertaken much more readily properly and piously. And so do ye now search out the secrets of your breast and carefully consider whether you also can continually preserve such strictness of mind with regard to your kinsfolk, and when you find that you are like him in this mortification of soul, then at last you may know that in the same way the neighbourhood of your kinsfolk and brothers will not hurt you, when, I mean, you hold that though they are very close to you, you are dead to them, in such a way that you suffer neither them to be benefited by your assistance, nor yourselves to be relaxed by duties towards them.

Chapter X.

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

Chapter XI.

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

Abraham: I will not give you my own opinion against this, but that of the blessed Antony, whereby he confounded the laziness of a certain brother (overcome by this luke-warmness which you describe) in such a way as also to cut the knot of your subject. For when one came as I said to the aforesaid old man, and said that the Anchorite system was not at all to be admired, declaring that it required greater virtue for a man to practise what belongs to perfection living among men rather than in the desert, the blessed Antony asked Where he lived himself, and when he said that he lived close to his relations, and boasted that by their provision he was set free from all care and anxiety of daily work, and gave himself up ceaselessly and solely to reading and prayer without any distraction of spirit, once more the blessed Antony said: ”Tell me, my good friend, whether you grieve with their griefs and misfortunes, and in the same way rejoice in their good fortune? He confessed that he shared in them both. To whom the old man: ”You should know,” said he, ”that in the world to come also you will be judged in the lot of those with whom in this life you have been affected by sharing in their gain or loss, or joy or sorrow. And not satisfied with this statement the blessed Antony entered on a still wider field of discussion, saying:

”This mode of life and this most lukewarm condition not only strike you with that damage of which I spoke (though you do not feel it now, when somehow you say in accordance with that saying in Proverbs:’They strike me but I am not grieved: and they mocked me but I knew it not;’ or this that is said in the Prophet: ’And strangers have devoured his strength, but he himself knew it not’), because day after day they ceaselessly drag down your mind to earthly things, and change it in accordance with the variations of chance; but also because they defraud you of the fruits of your hands and the due reward of your own exertions, as they do not suffer you to be supported by what these supply, or to procure your daily food for yourself with your own hands, according to the rule of the blessed Apostle, as he when giving his last charge to the heads of the Church of Ephesus, asserts that though he was occupied with the sacred duties of preaching the gospel yet he provided not only for himself, but also for those who were prevented by necessary duties with regard to his ministry, saying: ’Ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities and to the necessities

of those who were with me.' But to show that he did this as a pattern to be useful to us he says elsewhere: 'We were not idle among you;

neither did we eat any man's bread for nothing, but in labour and in toil we worked night and day lest we should be chargeable to any of you. Not as if we had not power; but that we might give ourselves a pattern unto you, to imitate us."

Chapter XII.

Of the value of work and the harm of idleness.

And so though we also might have the protection of our kinsfolk, yet we have preferred his abstinence to all riches, and have chosen to procure our daily bodily sustenance by our own exertions rather than rely on the sure provision made by our relations, having less inclination for idle meditation on holy Scripture of which you have spoken, and that fruitless attendance to reading than to this laborious poverty. And certainly we should most. gladly pursue the former, if the authority of the apostles had taught us by their examples that it was better for us, or the rules of the Elders had laid it down for our good. But you must know that you are affected by this no less than by that harm of which I spoke above, because though your body may be sound and lusty, yet you are supported by another's contributions, a thing which properly belongs only to the feeble. For certainly the whole human race, except only that class of monks, who live in accordance with the Apostle's command by the daily labours of their own hands, looks for the charity of another's compassion. Wherefore it is clear that not only those who boast that they themselves are supported either by the wealth of their relations or the labours of their servants or the produce of their farms, but also the kings of this world are supported by charity.

This at any rate is embraced in the definition of our predecessors, who have laid down that anything that is taken for the requirements of daily food which has not been procured and prepared by the labour of our own hands, ought to be referred to charity, as the Apostle teaches, who altogether forbids the help of another's bounty to the idle and says: "If a man does not work, neither let him eat. These words the blessed Antony used against some one, and instructed us also by the example of his teaching, to shun the pernicious allurements of our relations and of all who provide the needful charity for our food as well as the delights of a pleasant home, and to prefer to all the wealth of this world sandy wastes horrid with the barrenness of nature, and districts overwhelmed by living incrustations, and for that reason subject to no control or dominion of man, so that we should not only avoid the society of men for the sake of a pathless waste, but also that the character of a fruitful soil may never entice us to the distractions of cultivating it, whereby the mind would be recalled from the chief service of the heart, and rendered useless for spiritual aims.

Chapter XIII.

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

For as you hope that you can save others also, and are eager to return to your country with the hope of greater gain, hear also on this subject a story of Abbot Macarius, very neatly and prettily invented, which he also gave to a man in a tumult of similar desires, to cure him by a most appropriate story. "There was," said he, "in a certain city a very clever barber, who used to shave everybody for three pence and by getting this poor and wretched sum for his work, out of this same amount used to procure what was required for his daily food, and after having taken all care of his body, used every day to put a hundred pence into his pocket. But while he was diligently amassing this gain, he heard that in a city a long way off each man paid the barber a shilling as his pay. And when he found this out, 'how long,' said he, 'shall I be satisfied with this beggary, so as to get with my labour a pay of three pence, when by going thither I might amass riches by a large gain of shillings?' And so at once taking with him the implements of his art, and using up in the expense all that he had got together and saved during a long time, he made his way with great difficulty to that most lucrative city.

And there on the day of his arrival, he received from everyone the pay for his labour in accordance with what he had heard, and at eventide seeing that he had gained a large number of shillings he went in delight to the butcher's to buy the food he wanted for his supper. And when he began to purchase it for a large sum of shillings he spent on a tiny bit of meat all the shillings that he had gained, and did not take home a surplus of even a single penny. And when he saw that his gains were thus used up every day so that he not only failed to put by anything but could scarcely get what he required for his daily food, he thought over the matter with himself and said: 'I will go back to my city, and once more, seek those very moderate profits, from which, when all my bodily wants were satisfied, a daily surplus gave a growing sum to support my old age; which, though it seemed small and trifling, yet by being constantly increased was amounting to no slight sum.

In fact that gain of coppers was more profitable to me than is this nominal one of shillings from which not only is there nothing over to be laid by, but the necessities of my daily food are scarcely met.'" And therefore it is better for us with unbroken continuance to aim at this very slender profit in the desert, from which no secular cares, no worldly distractions, no pride of

vainglory and vanity can detract, and which the pressure of no daily wants can lessen (for ”a small thing that the righteous hath is better than great riches of the ungodly”) rather than to pursue those larger profits which even if they are procured by the most valuable conversion of many, are yet absorbed by the claims of secular life and the daily leakage of distractions. For, as Solomon says, ”Better is a single handful with rest than both hands full with labour and vexation of mind. And in these allusions and inconveniences all that are at all weak are sure to be entangled, as while they are even doubtful of their own salvation, and themselves stand in need of the teaching and instruction of others, they are incited by the devil’s tricks to convert and guide others, and as, even if they succeed in gaining any advantage from the conversion of some, they waste by their impatience and rude manners whatever they have gained. For that will happen to them which is described by the prophet Haggai:

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

Chapter XIV.

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

Chapter XV.

The answer on the threefold movement of the soul.

Abraham: Of all faults there is one source and origin, but different names are assigned to the passions and corruptions in accordance with the character of that part, or member, if I may so call it, which has been injuriously affected in the soul: As is sometimes also shown by the case of bodily diseases, in which though the cause is one and the same, yet there is a division into different kinds of maladies in accordance with the nature of the member affected. For when the violence of a noxious moisture has seized on the body's citadel, i.e., the head, it brings about a feeling of headache, but when it affects the ears or eyes, it passes into the malady of earache or ophthalmia: when it spreads to the joints and the extremities of the hands it is called the gout in the joints or hands; but when it descends to the extremities of the feet, its name is changed and it is termed podagra: and the noxious moisture which is originally one and the same is described by as many names as there are separate members which it affects. In the same way to pass from visible to invisible things, we should hold that the tendency to each fault exists in the parts and, if I may use the expression, members of our soul.

And, as some very wise men have laid down that its powers are threefold, either what is logiko/n, i.e., reasonable, or qumiko/n, i.e., irascible, or e0pi qumhtiko/n, i.e., subject to desire, is sure to be troubled by some assault. When then the force of noxious passion takes possession of anyone by reason of these feelings, the name of the fault is given to it in accordance with the part affected. For if the plague of sin has infested its rational parts, it will produce the sins of vainglory, conceit, envy, pride, presumption, strife, heresy. If it has wounded the irascible feelings, it will give birth to rage, impatience, sulkiness, accidie, pusillanimity and cruelty. If it has affected that part which is subject to desire, it will be the parent of gluttony, fornication, covetousness, avarice, and noxious and earthly desires.

Chapter XVI.

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

Chapter XVII.

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

You should then apply to this member or part of the soul which we have described as particularly wounded, the remedy of true humility: for as, so far as appears, it is weaker than the other powers of the soul in you, it is sure to be the first to yield to the assaults of the devil. As when some injuries come upon us, which are caused either by toil laid upon us or by a bad atmosphere, it is generally the case in the bodies of men that those which are the weaker are the first to give in and yield to those chances, and when the disease has more particularly laid hold of them, it affects the sound parts of the body also with the same mischief, so also, when the pestilent blast of sin breathes over us the soul of each one of us is sure to be tempted above all by that passion, in the case of which its feebler and weaker portion does not make so stubborn a resistance to the powerful attacks of the foe, and to run the risk of being taken captive by those, in the case of which a careless watch opens an easier way to betrayal.

For so Balsam gathered that God's people could be by a sure method deceived, when he advised, that in that quarter, wherein he knew that the children of Israel were weak, the dangerous snares should be set for them, as he had no doubt that when a supply of women was offered to them, they would at once fall and be destroyed by fornication, because he was aware that the parts of their souls which were subject to desire were corrupted. So then the spiritual wickednesses tempt with crafty malice each one of us, by particularly laying insidious snares for those affections of the soul, in which they have seen that it is weak, as for instance, if they see that the reasonable parts of our soul are affected, they try to deceive us in the same way that the Scripture tells us that king Ahab was deceived by those Syrians, who said: "We know that the kings of Israel are merciful: And so let us put sackcloth upon our loins, and ropes round our heads, and go out to the king of Israel, and say to him: Thy servant Benhadad saith: I pray thee, let my soul live. And thereby he was affected by no true goodness, but by the empty praise of his clemency, and said: "If he still liveth, he is my brother;

and after this fashion they can deceive us also by the error of that reasonable part, and make us incur the displeasure of God owing to that from which we were hoping that we might gain a reward and receive the recompense of goodness, and to us too the same rebuke

may be addressed: ”Because thou hast let go from thy hand a man who was worthy of death, thy life shall be for his life, and thy people for his people” Or when the unclean spirit says: ”I will go forth, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets,” he certainly spread the nets of deception by means of the reasonable feeling which he knew to be exposed to his deadly wiles. And this also the same spirit expected in the case of our Lord, when he tempted Him in these three affections of the soul, wherein he knew that all mankind had been taken captive, but gained nothing by his crafty wiles. For he approached that portion of his mind which was subject to desire, when he said: ”Command that these stones be made bread; the part subject to wrath, when he tried to incite Him to seek the power of the present life and the kingdoms of this world; the reasonable part when he said: ”If Thou art the Son of God cast Thyself down from hence.

And in these his deception availed nothing for this reason because he found that there was nothing damaged in Him, in accordance with the supposition which he had formed from a false idea. Wherefore no part of His soul yielded when tempted by the wiles of the foe, ”For lo,” He saith, ”the prince of this world cometh and shall find nothing in Me.”

Chapter XVIII.

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

Chapter XIX.

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

Abraham: Never to be resorted to by men at all is a sign of an unreasonable and ill-considered strictness, or rather of the greatest coldness. For if a man walks in this way, on which he has entered, with too slow steps, and lives according to the former man, it is right that none - I say not of the saints - but of any men should visit him. But you, if you are inflamed with true and perfect love of our Lord, and follow God, who indeed is love, with entire fervour of spirit, are sure to be resorted to by men, to whatever inaccessible spot you may flee, and, in proportion as the ardour of divine love brings you nearer to God, so will a larger concourse of saintly brethren flock to you. For, as the Lord says, "A city set on an hill cannot be hid," because "them that love Me," saith the Lord, "will I honour, and they that despise Me shall be contemned. But you ought to know that this is the subtlest device of the devil, this is his best concealed pitfall, into which he precipitates some wretched and heedless persons, so that, while he is promising them greater things, he takes away the requisite advantages of their daily profit, by persuading them that more remote and raster deserts should be sought, and by portraying them in their heart as if they were sown with marvellous delights.

And further some unknown and non-existent spots, he feigns to be well-known and suitable and already given over to our power and able to be secured without any difficulty. The men also of that country he feigns to be docile and followers of the way of salvation, that, while he is promising richer fruits for the soul there, he may craftily destroy our present profits. For when owing to this vain hope each one separates himself from living together with the Elders and has been deprived of all those things that he idly imagined in his heart, he rises as it were from a most profound slumber, and when awake will find nothing of those things of which he had dreamed. And so as he is hampered by larger requirements for this life and inextricable snares, the devil will not even allow him to aspire to those things which he had once promised himself, and as he is liable no longer to those rare and spiritual visits of the brethren which he had formerly avoided, but to daily interruptions from worldly folk, he will never suffer him to return even to the moderate quiet and system of the anchorite's life.

Chapter XX.

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

Chapter XXI.

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

Chapter XXII.

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

Chapter XXIII.

The answer with the explanation of the saying.

Abraham: We can prove by the easy teaching of our own experience that our Lord and Saviour's saying is perfectly true, if we approach the way of perfection properly and in accordance with Christ's will, and mortifying all our desires, and cutting off injurious likings, not only allow nothing to remain with us of this world's goods (whereby our adversary would find at his pleasure opportunities of destroying and damaging us) but actually recognize that we are not our own masters, and truly make our own the Apostle's words: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." For what can be burdensome, or hard to onewho has embraced with his whole heart the yoke of Christ, who is established in true humility and ever fixes his eye on the Lord's sufferings and rejoices in all the wrongs that are offered to him, saying: "For which cause I please myself in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ: for when I am weak, then am I strong"? By what loss of any common thing, I ask, will he be injured, who boasts of perfect renunciation, and voluntarily rejects for Christ's sake all the pomp of this world, and considers all and every of its desires as dung, so that he may gain Christ, and by continual meditation on this command of the gospel, scorns and gets rid of agitation at every loss: "For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, but lose his own soul?

Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the loss of what will he be vexed, who recognizes that everything that can be taken away from others is not their own, and proclaims with unconquered valour: "We brought nothing into this world: it is certain that we cannot carry anything out"? By the needs of what want will his courage be overcome, who knows how to do without "scrip for the way, money forthe purse," and, like the Apostle, glories "in many fasts, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness"? What effort, or what hard command of an Eider can disturb the peace of his bosom, who has no will of his own, and not only patiently but even gratefully accepts what is commanded him, and after the example of our Saviour, seeks to do not his own will, but the Father's, as He says Himself to His Father: "Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt"? By what wrongs also, by what persecution will he be frightened, nay, what punishment can fail to be delightful to him, who always rejoices together with apostles in stripes, and longs to be counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ?

Chapter XXIV.

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

But the fact that to us on the contrary the yoke of Christ seems neither light nor easy, must be rightly ascribed to our perverseness, as we are cast down by unbelief and want of faith, and fight with foolish obstinacy against His command, or rather advice, who says: "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell (or get rid of) all that thou hast, and come follow Me," for we keep the substance of our worldly goods. And as the devil holds our soul fast in the toils of these, what remains but that, when he wants to sever us from spiritual delights, he should vex us by diminishing these and depriving us of them, contriving by his crafty wiles that when the sweetness of His yoke and lightness of His burden have become grievous to us through the evil of a corrupt desire, and when we are caught in the chains of that very property and substance, which we kept for our comfort and solace, he may always torment us with the scourges of worldly cares, extorting from us ourselves that wherewith we are tortured?For "Each one is bound by the cords of his own sins," and hears from the prophet: "Behold all you that kindle a fire, encompassed with flames, walk in the light of your fire, and in the flames which you have kindled. Since, as Solomon is witness, "Each man shall thereby be punished, whereby he has sinned.

For the very pleasures which we enjoy become a torment to us, and the delights and enjoyments of this flesh, turn like executioners upon their originator, because one who is supported by his former wealth and property is sure not to admit perfect humility of heart, not entire mortification of dangerous pleasures. But where all these implements of goodness give their aid, there all the trials of this present life, and whatever losses the enemy can contrive, are endured not only with the utmost patience, but with real pleasure, and again when they are wanting so dangerous a pride springs up that we are actually wounded by the deadly strokes of impatience at the slightest reproach, and it may be said to us by the prophet Jeremiah: "And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the troubled water?And what hast thou to do with the way of the Assyrians, to drink the water of the river? Thy own wickedness shall reprove thee, and thy apostasy shall rebuke thee. Know thou and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God, and that My fear is not with thee, saith the Lord. How then is it that the wondrous sweetness of the Lord's yoke is felt to be bitter, but because the bitterness of our dislike injures it?

How is it that the exceeding lightness of the Divine burden becomes heavy, but because in our obstinate presumption we despise Him by whom it was borne, especially as Scripture itself plainly testifies to this very thing saying: ”For if they would walk in right paths, they-would certainly have found the paths of righteousness smooth”? It is plain, I say, that itis we, who make rough with the nasty and hardstones of our desires the right and smooth paths of the Lord; who most foolishly forsake the royal road made stony with the flints of apostles and prophets, and trodden down by the footsteps of all the saints and of the Lord Himself, and seek trackless and thorny places, and, blinded by the allurements of present delights, tear our way with torn legs and our wedding garment rent, through dark paths, overrun withthe briars of sins, so as not only to be pierced by the sharp thorns of the brambles but actually laid low by the bites of deadly serpents and scorpions lurking there. For ”there are thorns and thistles in wrong ways, but he that feareth the Lord shall keep himself from them. Of such also the Lord says elsewhere by the prophet: ”My people have forgotten, sacrificing in vain, and stumbling in their ways, in ancient paths, to walk in them in a way not trodden. For according to Solomon’s saying: ”The ways of those who do not work are strewn with thorns, but the ways of the lusty are trodden down.

And thus wandering from the king’s highway, they can never arrive at that metropolis, whither our course should ever be directed without swerving. And this also Ecclesiastes has pretty significantly expressed saying: ”The labour of fools wearies those who know not how to go to the city; viz., that ”heavenly Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all. But whoever truly gives up this world and takes upon him Christ’s yoke and learns of Him, and is trained in the daily practice of suffering wrong, for He is ”meek and lowly of heart,” will ever remain undisturbed by all temptations, and ”all things will work together for good to him. For as the prophet Obadiah says the words of God are ”good to him that walketh uprightly; and again: ”For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them; but the transgressors shall fall in them.”

Chapter XXV.

Of the good which an attack of temptation brings about.

And so by the struggle with temptation the kindly grace of the Saviour bestows on us larger rewards of praise than if it had taken away from us all need of conflict. For it is a mark of a loftier and grander virtue to remain ever unmoved when hemmed in by persecutions and trials, and to stand faithfully and courageously at the ramparts of God, and in the attacks of men, girt as it were with the arms of unconquered virtue, to triumph gloriously over impatience and somehow to gain strength out of weakness, for ”strength is made perfect in weakness. ”For behold I have made thee. saith the Lord, ”a pillar of iron and a wall of brass, over all the land, to the kings of Judah, and the princes and the priests thereof, and all the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee and shall not prevail: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Therefore according to the plain teaching of the Lord the king’s highway is easy and smooth, though it may be felt as hard and rough: for those who piously and faithfully serve Him, when they have taken upon them the yoke of the Lord, and have learnt of Him, that He is meek and lowly of heart, at once somehow or other lay aside the burden of earthly passions, and find no labour but rest for their souls, by the gift of the Lord, as He Himself testifies by Jeremiah the prophet, saying:

”Stand ye on the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, which is the good way, and walk ye in it: and you shall find refreshment for your souls. For to them at once ”the crooked shall become straight and the rough ways plain; and they shall ”taste and see that the Lord is gracious,” and when they hear Christ proclaiming in the gospel: ”Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you,” they will lay aside the burden of their sins, and realize what follows: ”For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light. The way of the Lord then has refreshment if it is kept to according to His law. But it is we who by troublesome distractions bring sorrows and troubles upon ourselves, while we try even With the utmost exertion and difficulty to follow the crooked and perverse ways of this world. But when in this way we have made the Lord’s yoke heavy and hard to us, we at once complain in a blasphemous spirit of the hardness and roughness of the yoke itself or of Christ who lays it upon us, in accordance with this passage: ”The folly of man corrupteth his ways, but he blames God in his heart; and as Haggai the prophet says, when we say that ”the way of

the Lord is not right" the reply is aptly made to us by the Lord: "Is not My way right? Are not your ways rather crooked?

And indeed ifyou will compare the sweet scented flower ofvirginity, and tender purity of chastity to the foul and fetid sloughs of lust, the calm and security of monks to the dangers and losses in which the men of this world are involved, the peace of our poverty to the gnawing vexations and anxious cares of riches, in which they are night and day consumed not without the utmost peril to life, then you will prove that the yoke of Christ is most easy and His burden most light.

Chapter XXVI.

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

Further also that recompense of reward, t wherein the Lord promises an hundredfold in this life to those whose renunciation isperfect, and says: ”And everyone that hath left house or brethren or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for My name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold in the resent time and shall inherit eternal life,” is rightly and truly taken in the same sense without any disturbance of faith. For many taking occasion by this saying, insist with crass intelligence that these things will be given carnally in the millennium, though they must certainly admit that age, which they say will be after the resurrection cannot possibly be understood as present. It is then more credible and much clearer that one, who at the persuasion of Christ has made light of any worldly affections or goods, receives from the brethren and partners of his life, who are joined to him by a spiritual tie, even in this life a love which is an hundred times better: since it is certain that among parents and children and brothers, wives and relations, where either the tie is merely formed by intercourse, or the bond of union by the claims of relationship, the love is tolerably short lived and easily broken. Finally even good and duteous children when they have grown up, are sometimes shut out by their parents from their homes and property, and sometimes for a really good reason the tie of matrimony is severed, and a quarrelsome division destroys the property of brothers.

Monks alone maintain a lasting union in intimacy, and possess all things in common,as they hold that everything that belongs to their brethren is their own, and that everything which is their own is their brethren’s. If then the grace of our love is compared to those affections where the bond of union is a carnal love, certainly it is an hundred times sweeter and finer. There will indeed also be gained from conjugal continence a pleasure that is an hundred times greater than that which arises from the union of the sexes. And instead of that joy, which a man experiences from the possession of a single field of house,he will enjoy a delight in riches a hundred times greater, if he passes over to the adoption of sons of God, and possesses as his own all things which belong to the eternal Father, and asserts in heart and soul after the fash- ion of that true Son: ”All things that the Father hath are mine; and if no longer tried by that criminal anxiety in distractions and cares, but free from care and

glad at heart he succeeds everywhere to his own, hearing daily the announcement made to him by the Apostle: ”For all things are yours, whether the world, or things present, or things to come; and by Solomon: ”The faithful man has a whole world of riches. You have then that recompense of an hundredfold brought out by the greatness of the value, and the difference of the character that cannot be estimated.

For if for a fixed weight of brass or iron or some still commoner metal, one had given in exchange the same weight only in gold, he would appear to have given much more than an hundredfold. And so when for the scorn of delights and earthly affections there is made a recompense of spiritual joy and the gladness of a most precious love, even if the actual amount be the same, yet it is an hundred times better and grander. And to make this plainer by frequent repetition: I used formerly to have a wife in the lustful passion of desire: I now have one in honourable sanctification and the true love of Christ. The woman is but one, but the value of the love has increased an hundredfold. But if instead of distrusting anger and wrath you have regard to constant gentleness and patience, instead of the stress of anxiety and trouble, peace and freedom from care, insteadof the fruitless and criminal vexation of this world the salutary fruits of sorrow, instead of the vanity of temporal joy the richness of spiritual delights, you will see in the change of these feelings a recompense of an hundredfold. And if we compare with the short-lived and fleeting pleasure of each sin the benefits of the opposite virtues the increased delights will prove that these are an hundred times better.

For in counting on your fingers you transfer the number of an hundred from the left hand to the right and though you seem to keep the same arrangement of the fingers yet there is a great increase in the amount of the quantity. For the result will be that we who seemed to bear the form of the goats on the left hand, will be removed and gain the reward of the sheep on the right hand. Now let us pass on to consider the nature of those things which Christ gives back to us in this world for our scorn of worldly advantages, more particularly according to the Gospel of Mark who says: ”There is no man who hath left house or brethren or sisters or mother or children or lands for My sake and the gospel’s sake, who shall not receive an hundred times as much now in this time: houses and brethren and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the world to come life eternal. For he who for the sake of Christ’s name disregards the love of a single father or mother or child, and gives himself over to the purest love of all who serve Christ, will receive an hundred times the amount of brethren and kinsfolk; since instead of but one he will begin to have so many fathers and brethren bound to him by a still more fervent and admirable affection.

He also will be enriched with an increased possession of lands, who has given up a single house for the love of Christ, and possesses countless homes in monasteries as his own, to whatever part of the world he may retire, as to his own house. For how can he fail to receive an hundredfold, and, if it is not wrong to add somewhat to our Lord’s words, more than an hundredfold, who gives up the faithless and compulsory service of ten or twenty slaves

and relies on the spontaneous attendance of so many noble and free born men? And that this is so you could prove by your own experience, as since you have each left but one father and mother and home, you have gained without any effort or care, in any part of the world to which you have come, countless fathers and mothers and brethren, as well as houses and lands and most faithful servants, who receive you as their masters, and welcome, and respect, and take care of you with the utmost attention. But, I say that deservedly and confidently will the saints enjoy this service, if they have first submitted themselves and everything they have by a voluntary offering for the service of the brethren. For, as the Lord says, they will freely receive back that which they themselves have bestowed on others.

But if a man has not first offered this with true humility to his companions, how can he calmly endure to have it offered to him by others, when he knows that he is burdened rather than helped by their services, because he prefers to receive attention from the brethren rather than to give it to them?

But all these things he will receive not with careless slackness and a lazy delight, but, in accordance with the Lord's word, "with persecutions," i.e., with the pressure of this world, and terrible distress from his passions, because, as the wise man testifies: "He who is easy going and without trouble shall come to want. For not the slothful, or the careless, or the delicate, or the tender take the kingdom of heaven by force, but the violent. Who then are the violent? Surely they are those who show a splendid violence not to others, but to their own soul, who by a laudable force deprive it of all delights in things present, and are declared by the Lord's mouth to be splendid plunderers, and by rapine of this kind, violently seize upon the kingdom of heaven. For, as the Lord says, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force. Those are certainly worthy of praise as violent, who do violence to their own destruction, for, "A man," as it is written, "that is in sorrow laboureth for himself and does violence to his own destruction. For our destruction is delight in this present life, and to speak more definitely, the performance of our own likes and desires, as, if a man withdraws these from his soul and mortifies them, he straightway does glorious and valuable violence to his own destruction, provided that he refuses to it the pleasantest of its wishes which the Divine word often rebukes by the prophet, saying:

"For in the days of your fast your own will is found; and again: "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, to do thy will on My holy day, and glorify him, while thou dost not thy own ways, and thy own will is not found, to speak a word. And the great blessedness that is promised to him is at once added by the prophet. "Then," he says, "shalt thou be delighted in the Lord, and I will lift thee up above the high places of the earth, and will feed thee with the inheritance of Jacob thy father. For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. And therefore our Lord and Saviour, to give us an example of giving up our own wills, says: "I came not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me; and again: "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt. And this good quality those men in particular show who live in the coenobia and are governed by the rule of the Elders, who do nothing of their own choice, but their will depends upon the will of the Abbot.

Finally to bring this discussion to a close, I ask you, do not those who faithfully serve Christ, most clearly receive grace an hundredfold in this, while for His name's sake they are honoured by the greatest princes, and though they do not look for the praise of men, yet become venerated in the trials of persecution whose humble condition would perhaps have been looked down upon even by common folk, either because of their obscure birth, or because of their condition as slaves, if they had continued in their life in the world? But because of the service of Christ no one will venture to raise a calumny against their state of nobility, or to fling in their teeth the obscurity of their origin. Nay rather, through the very opprobrium of a humble condition by which others are shamed and confounded, the servants of Christ are more splendidly ennobled, as we can clearly show by the case of Abbot John who lives in the desert which borders on the town of Lycus. For he sprang from obscure parents, but owing to the name of Christ has become so well known to almost all mankind that the very lords of creation, who hold the reins of this world and of empire, and are a terror to all powers and kings, venerate him as their lord, and from distant countries seek his advice, and entrust to his prayers and merits the crown of their empire, and the state of safety, and the fortunes of war.

In such terms the blessed Abraham discoursed on the origin of and remedy for our illusion, and exposed to our eyes the crafty thoughts which the devil had originated and suggested, and kindled in us the desire of true mortification, wherewith we hope that many also may be inflamed, even though all these things have been written in a somewhat simple style. For though the dying embers of our words cover up the glowing thoughts of the greatest fathers, yet we hope that in the case of very many who try to remove the embers of our words and to fan into a flame the hidden thoughts, their coldness will be turned into heat. But, O holy brethren, I have not indeed been so puffed up by the spirit of presumption as to give forth to you this fire (which the Lord came to send upon the earth, and which He eagerly longs to kindle) in order that by the application of this warmth I might set on fire your purpose which is already at a white heat, but in order that your authority with your children might be greater, if in addition the precepts of the greatest and most ancient fathers support what you are teaching not by the dead sound of words but by your living example. It only remains that I who have been till now tossed about by a most dangerous tempest, should be wafted to the safe harbour of silence by the spiritual gales of your prayers.

Preface

When by the help of the grace of Christ I had published ten Conferences of the Fathers, which were composed at the urgent request of the most blessed Helladius and Leontius, I dedicated.seven others to Honoratus a Bishop blessed in name as well as merits, and also to that holy servant of Christ, Eucherius. The same number also I have thought good to dedicate now to you, O holy brothers, Jovinianus, Minervius, Leontius, and Theodore. Since the last named of you founded that holy and splendid monastic rule in the province of Gaul, with the strictness of ancient virtue, while the rest of you by your instructions have stirred up monks not only before all to seek the common life of the coenobia, but even to thirst eagerly for the sublime life of the anchorite. For those Conferences of the best of the fathers are arranged with such care, and so carefully considered in all respects, that they are suited to both modes of life whereby you have made not only the countries of the West, but even the isles to flourish with great crowds of brethren; i.e., I mean that not only those who still remain in congregations with praiseworthy subjection to rule, but those also who retire to no great distance from your monasteries, and try to carry out the rule of anchorites, may be more fully instructed, according as the nature of the place and the character of their condition may require.

And to this your previous efforts and labours have especially contributed this, that, as they are already prepared and practiced in these exercises, they can more readily receive the precepts and institutes of the Elders, and receiving into their cells the authors of the Conferences together with the actual volumes of the Conferences and talking with them after a fashion by daily questions and answers, they may not be left to their own resources to find that way which is difficult and almost unknown in this country, but full of danger even there where well-worn paths and numberless instances of those who have gone before are not wanting, but may rather learn to follow the rule of the anchorite's life taught by their examples, whom ancient tradition and industry and long experience have thoroughly instructed.

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.