The Doubtful Letters

Pseudo-Sulpicius Severus (the Doubtful Letters) (4th–5th century)

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Authorship. These letters were once printed with the works of Sulpicius Severus, but his authorship is doubtful and most scholars do not accept it.

Chapter I

On reading your letters, my feelings were, in many ways, deeply moved, and I could not refrain from tears. For I both wept for joy because I could perceive from the very language of your letters, that you were living according to the precepts of the Lord God, and out of my exceeding desire after you, I could not help lamenting that, without any fault on my part, I was parted from you l and I would have felt this still more strongly had you not sent me a letter. Should I not, then, enjoy the company of such a sister? But I call your salvation to witness, that I have very often wished to come to you, but have up till now been prevented, through the opposition of him who is accustomed to hinder us. For, in my eager desire, I was both urgent to satisfy my wishes by seeing you; and we seemed, if we should meet, likely to accomplish more effectually the work of the Lord, since by comforting one another we should live with the heavy load of this world trodden under our feet. But I do not now fix the day or time of visiting you, because, as often as I have done so, I have not been able to fulfil my purpose. I shall wait on the will of the Lord, and hope that, by my supplications and your prayers, he may bring it about that we reap some advantage from our perseverance.

Chapter II.

But because you have desired from me in all my letters which I had sent to you precepts to nourish your life and faith, it has come to pass that, through the frequency of my writings to you, I have now exhausted language of that kind; and I can really write nothing new to you, so as to avoid what I have written before. And in truth, through the goodness of God, you do not now need to be exhorted, inasmuch as, perfecting your faith at the very beginning of your saintly life, you display a devoted love in Christ. One thing, however, I do press upon you, that you do not go back on things you have already passed away from, that you do not long again for things you have already scorned, and that, having put your hand to the plow, you do not look back again, retracing your steps; for, undoubtedly, by falling into this fault, your furrow will lose its straightness, and the cultivator will not receive his own proper reward. Moreover, he does not secure even a measure of thereward, if he has, in a measure, failed. For, as we must flee from sin to righteousness, so he who has entered on the practice of righteousness must beware lest he lay himself open to sin. For it is written that ”his righteousness shall not profit the righteous on the day on which hehas gone astray.

For this, then, we must take our stand, for this we must labor, that we, who have escaped from sins, do not lose the prepared rewards. For the enemy stands ready against us, that he may at once strike the man who has been stripped of the shield of faith. Our shield, therefore, is not to be cast aside, lest our side be exposed to attack; and our sword is not to be put away, lest the enemy then begin to give up all fear: moreover, we know that if he sees a man fully armed, he will retreat. Nor are we ignorant that it is a hard and difficult thing daily to fight against the flesh and the world. But if you reflect upon eternity, and if you consider the kingdom of heaven, which undoubtedly the Lord will condescend to bestow upon us although we are sinners, what suffering, I ask, is sufficiently great, by which we may merit such things? And besides, our struggle in this world is but for a short time; for although death do not speedily overtake us, old age will come. The years flow on, and time glides by; while, as I hope, the Lord Jesus will speedily call us to himself, as being dear to his heart.

Chapter III.

O How happy shall be that departure of ours, when Christ shall receive us into his own abode after we have been purged from the stains of sin through the experience of a better life! Martyrs and prophets will meet with us, apostles will join themselves to us, angels will be glad, archangel; will rejoice, and Satan, being conquered, will look pale, though still retaining his cruel countenance, inasmuch as he will lose all advantage from our sins which he had secured for himself in us. He will see glory granted us through mercy, and merits honored by means of glory. We shall triumph over our conquered foe. Where shall now the wise men of the world appear?Where shall the covetous man, where shall the adulterer, where shall the irreligious, where shall the drunkard, where shall the evil-speaker be recognized? What shall these wretched beings say in their own defense? "We did not know thee, Lord; we did not see that thou wast in the world: thou didst not send the prophets: thou didst not give the law to the world: we did not see the patriarchs: we did not read the lives of the saints. Thy Christ never was upon the earth: Peter was silent: Paul refused to preach: no Evangelist taught. There were no martyrs whose example we should follow: no one predicted thy future judgment no one commanded us to clothe the poor: no one enjoined us to restrain lust: no one persuaded us to fight against covetousness: we fell through ignorance, not knowing what we did."

Chapter IV.

Against these, from among the company of the saints, righteous Noah shall first proclaim, "I, Lord, predicted that a deluge was about to. come on account of the sins of men, and afterthe deluge I set an example to the good in my own person; since I did not perish with the wicked who perished, that they might know both what was the salvation of the innocent, and what the punishment of sinners. After him, faithful Abraham will say in opposition to them, "I, Lord, about the mid-time of the age of the world, laid the foundation of the faith by which the human race should believe in thee; I was chosen as the father of the nations, that they might follow my example; I did not hesitate, Lord, to offer Isaac, while yet a youth, as a sacrifice to thee, that they might understand that there is nothing which ought not to be presented to the Lord, when they perceived that I did not spare even my only son: I left, Lord, my country, and my family, at thy command, that they also might have an example teaching them to leave the wickedness of the world and the age: I, Lord, was the first to recognize thee, though under a corporeal form, nor did I hesitate to believe who it was that I beheld, although thou didst appear to me in a different form from thine own, that these might learn to judge, not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

Him the blessed Moses will support in his pleadings, saying: "I Lord, delivered the law to all these, at thy command, that those whom a free faith did not influence, the spoken law at least might restrain: I said, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' in order that I might prevent the licentiousness of fornication: I said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor,' that affection might abound; I said, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord alone,' in order that these might not sacrifice to idols, or allow temples to exist; I commanded that false witness should not be spoken, that I might shut the lips of these people against all falsehood. I set forth the things which had been done and said from the beginning of the world, through the working within me of the spirit of thy power, that a knowledge of things past might convey to these people instruction about things to come. I predicted, O Lord Jesus, thy coming, that it might not be an unexpected thing to these people, when they were called to acknowledge him whom I had before announced as about to come."

Chapter V.

After him, there will stand up David worthy of his descendant the Lord, and declare: ”I, Lord, proclaimed thee by every means; I set forth that only thy name was to be worshiped; I said, ‘Blessed is the man who fears the Lord’; I said too, ‘The saints shall be joyful in glory’; and I said, ‘The desire of the wicked shall perish,’ that these people might acknowledge thee and cease to sin. I, whet I had become possessed of royal power, clothed in sackcloth, with dust spread beneath me, and with the emblems of my greatness laid aside, lay down in my clothes, that an example might be given to these people of gentleness and humility. I spared my enemies who desired to slay me, that these people might approve of my mercifulness, as worthy of being imitated.” After him, Isaiah, who was worthy of the Spirit of God, will not be silent; but will say: ”I, Lord, whilst thou wast speaking through my mouth, gave this warning,-‘Woe to those who join house to house,’ that I might set a limit to covetousness. I bore witness that thine anger came upon the wicked, that at any rate fear of punishment, if not hope of reward, might keep back these people from their evil deeds.”

Chapter VI.

After these, and several others who have discharged for us the duties of instruction, the Son of God himself will speak thus: ”I, certainly, exalted on a lofty seat, holding heaven in my hand, and the earth in my fist, extended within and without, in the inside of all things which are produced, and on the outside of all things that move, inconceivable, infinite in the power of nature, invisible to sight, inaccessible to touch, in order that I might exist as the least of you (for the purpose of subduing the hardness of your heart and for softening your faithlessness by sound doctrines), condescended to be born in flesh, and, having laid aside the glory of God, I assumed the form of a servant, so that, sharing with you in bodily infirmity, I might in turn bring you to a participation in my glory, through obedience to the precept of salvation. I restored health to the sick and infirm, hearing to the deaf, sight to the blind, the power of speech to the dumb, and the use of their feet to the lame; that I might influence you, by heavenly signs, all the more easily to believe in me, and in those things which I had announced, I promised you the kingdom of heaven;

I also, in order that you might have an example of escape from punishment, placed in Paradise the robber who acknowledged me almost at the moment of his death, that ye might follow even the faith of him who had been thought worthy of having his sins forgiven him. And that by my example in your behalf, ye yourselves also might be able to suffer; I suffered for you, that no man might hesitate to suffer for himself what God had endured for man. I showed myself after my resurrection, in order that your faith might not be overthrown. I admonished the Jews in the person of Peter; I preached to the Gentiles in the person of Paul; and I do not regret doing so, for good results followed. The good have understood my work; the faithful have perfected it; the righteous have completed it; the merciful have consummated it: there have been a large number of martyrs, and i a large number of saints. Those to whom I thus refer were undoubtedly in the same body and in the same world as you. Why, then, do I find no good work in you, ye descendants of vipers?Ye have shown no repentance for your wicked deeds, even at the very end of your earthly course. And what does it profit that ye honor me with your lips, when you deny me by your deeds and works? Where are now your riches, where your honors, where your powers, and where your pleasures? I pronounce no new sentence over you:

you simply incur the judgment which I formerly predicted.”

Chapter VII.

Then will the Evangelist repeat this to the wretched beings, ”Go ye into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” O ye miserable men, whom these words do not now impress! They shall then see their own punishment, and the glory of others. Let them use this present world, provided they do not enjoy that eternity which is prepared for the saints. Let them abound in riches: let them rest on gold; provided that there they be found needy and destitute. Let them be wealthy in this world, provided they be poor in eternity, for it is written regarding them, ”The rich were in want, and suffered hunger.” But the Scripture has added what follows respecting the good,-”but those who seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.” Therefore, my sister, although those people mock at us, and although they call us foolish and unhappy, let us all the more joyfully exult in such reproaches, by which glory is heaped up for us, and punishment for them. And do not let us laugh at their folly, but rather grieve over their unhappiness; because there is among :hem a large number of our own people, whom if we win over, our glory shall be increased. But however they may conduct themselves, let them be to us as Gentiles and publicans; but let us keep ourselves safe and sound. If they rejoice now over us lamenting, it will be our turn afterwards to rejoice over their suffering. Farewell, dearest sister, and tenderly beloved in Christ.

Chapter I.

How great blessedness, among heavenly gifts, belongs to holy virginity, besides the testimonies of the Scriptures, we learn also from the practice of the Church, by which we are taught that a peculiar merit belongs to those who have devoted themselves to it by special consecration. For while the whole multitude of those that believe receive equal gifts of grace, and all rejoice in the same blessings of the sacraments, those who are virgins possess something above the rest, since, out of the holy and unstained company of the Church, they are chosen by the Holy Spirit, and are presented by the bishop at the altar of God, as if being more holy and pure sacrifices, on account of the merits of their voluntary dedication. This is truly a sacrifice worthy of God, inasmuch as it is the offering of so precious a being, and none will please him more than the sacrifice of his own image. For I think that the Apostle especially referred to a sacrifice of this kind, when he said, "Now, I beseech you, brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." Virginity, therefore, possesses both that which others have, and that which others have not; while it obtains both common and special grace, and rejoices (so to speak) in its own peculiar privilege of consecration. For ecclesiastical authority permits us to style virgins also the brides of Christ; while, after the manner of brides, it veils those whom it consecrates to the Lord, openly exhibiting those as very especially about to possess spiritual marriage who have fled away from carnal fellowship. And those are worthily united, after a spiritual manner, to God, in accordance with the analogy of marriage, who, from love to him, have set at nought human alliances. In their case, that saying of the apostle finds its fullest possible fulfillment, "He who is joined to the Lord, is one spirit."

Chapter II.

For it is a great and a divine thing, almost beyond a corporeal nature, to lay aside luxury, and to extinguish, by strength of mind, the flame of concupiscence, kindled by the torch of youth; to put down by spiritual effort the force of natural delight; to live in opposition to the practice of the human race; to despise the comforts of wedlock; to disdain the sweet enjoyments derived from children; and to regard as nothing, in the hope of future blessedness, everything that is reckoned among the advantages of this present life. This is, as I have said, a great and admirable virtue, and is not undeservedly destined to a vast reward, in proportion to the greatness of its labor. The Scripture says, "I will give to the eunuchs, saith the Lord, a place in my house and within my walls, a place counted better than sons and daughters; I will give them an eternal name, and it shall not fail." The Lord again speaks concerning such enunchs in the Gospel, saying, "For there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake." Great, indeed, is the struggle connected with chastity, but greater is the reward; the restraint is temporal, but the reward will be eternal. For the blessed Apostle John also speaks concerning these, saying that "they follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." This, I think, is to be understood to the following effect, that there will be no place in the court of heaven closed against them, but that all the habitations of the divine mansions will be thrown open before them.

Chapter III.

But that the merit of virginity may shine forth more clearly, and that there may be a better understanding as to how worthy it is of God, let this be considered, that the Lord God, our Saviour, when, for the salvation of the human race, he condescended to assume mankind, chose no other than a virgin's womb, that he might show how virtue of this kind especially pleased him; and that he might point out the blessedness of chastity to both sexes, he had a virgin mother, while he himself was ever to remain in a like condition. He thus furnished in his own person to men, and in the person of his mother to women, an example of virginity, by which it might be proved, with respect to both sexes, hat the blessed state of purity possessed the fullness of divinity, for whatever dwelt in the Son was also wholly in the mother. But why should I take pains to make known the excellent and surpassing merit of chastity, and to set forth the glorious good of virginity, when I am not ignorant that many have discoursed on this subject, and have proved its blessedness by most conclusive reasons, and since it can never be a matter of doubt to any reflecting mind, that a thing has all the more merit, the more difficult it is of accomplishment?For if any one judges chastity to be of no moment or only of small consequence, it is certain that he is either ignorant of the matter, or is not willing to incur the trouble it implies. Hence it comes to pass that those always derogate from the importance of chastity, who either do not possess it, or who are unwillingly compelled to maintain it.

Chapter IV.

Now, therefore, since we have set forth, although in few words, both the difficulty and the merit of purity, great care must be taken lest a matter which in itself implies great virtue, and is also destined to a vast reward, should fail to produce its proper fruits. For the more precious every sort of thing is, the more it is guarded with anxious solicitude. And since there are many things which fail to secure their proper excellence, unless they are assisted by the aid of other things, as is, for instance, the case with honey, which, unless it is preserved by the protection of wax, and by the cells of the honeycombs, and is indeed, to state the matter more truly, sustained by these, loses its deliciousness and cannot exist apart by itself; and again as it is with wine, which: unless it be kept in vessels of a pleasant odor, and with the pitch frequently renewed, loses the power of its natural sweetness; so great care must be taken lest perchance some things may be necessary also to virginity, without which it can by no means produce its proper fruits, and thus a matter of so great difficulty may be of no advantage (while all the time it is believed to be of advantage), because it is possessed without the other necessary adjuncts.

For unless I am mistaken, chastity is preserved in its entirety, for the sake of the reward to be obtained in the kingdom of heaven, which it is perfectly certain no one can obtain who does not deserve eternal life. But that eternal life cannot be merited except by the keeping of all the divine commandments, the Scripture testifies, saying, ”If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. Therefore no one has that life, except the man who has kept all the precepts of the law, and he who has not such life cannot be a possessor of the kingdom of heaven, in which it is not the dead, but the living who shall reign. Therefore virginity, which hopes for the glory of the kingdom of heaven, will profit nothing by itself, unless it also possess that to which eternal life is promised, by means of which the reward of the kingdom of heaven is possessed. Above all things, therefore, the commandments which have been enjoined upon us must be kept by those who preserve chastity in its entireness, and who are hoping for its reward from the justice of God, lest otherwise the pains taken to maintain a glorious chastity and continence come to nothing. No one acquainted with the law does not know that virginity is above the commandment or precept, as the Apostle says, ”Now, as to virgins, I have no precept of the Lord, but I give my advice.

When, therefore, he simply gives advice about maintaining virginity, and lays down no precept, he acknowledges that it is above the commandment. Those, therefore, who preserve virginity, do more than the commandment requires. But it will then only profit you to have done more than was commanded, if you also do that which is commanded. For how can you boast that you have done more, if, in respect to some point, you do less?Desiring to fulfill the Divine counsel, see that, above all things, you keep the commandment: wishing to attain to the reward of virginity, see that you keep fast hold of what is necessary to merit life, that your chastity may be such as can receive a recompense. For as the observance of the commandments ensures life, so, on the other hand, does the violation give rise to death. And he who through disobedience has been doomed to death cannot hope for the crown pertaining to virginity; nor, when really handed over to punishment, can he expect the reward promised to chastity.

Chapter V.

Now, there are three kinds of virtue, by means of which the possession of the kingdom of heaven is secured. The first is chastity, the second, contempt of the world, and the third, righteousness, which, as when joined together, they very greatly benefit their possessors, so, when separated, they can hardly be of any advantage, since every one of them is required, not for its own sake only, but for the sake of another. First of all, then, chastity is demanded, that contempt of the world may more easily follow, because the world can be more easily despised by those who are not held fast in the bonds of matrimony. Contempt of the world, again, is required, in order that righteousness may be maintained, which those can with difficulty fully preserve who are involved in desires after worldly advantages, and in the pursuit of mundane pleasures. Whosoever, therefore, possesses the first kind of virtue, chastity, but does not, at the same time, have the second, which is contempt of the world, possesses the first almost to no purpose, since he does not have the second, for the sake of which the first was required. And if any one possesses the first and second, but is destitute of the third which is righteousness, he labors in vain, since the former two are principally required for the sake of the third. For what profits it to possess chastity in order to contempt of the world, and yet not to have that on account of which you have the other?

Or why should you despise the things of the world, if you do not observe righteousness, for the sake of which it is fitting that you should possess chastity, as well as contempt for the world? For as the first kind of virtue is on account of the second, and the second on account of the third, so the first and the second are on account of the third; and if it does not exist, neither the first nor the second will prove of any advantage.

Chapter VI.

But you perhaps say here, ”Teach me, then, what righteousness is, so that knowing it, I may be able more easily to fully practice it. Well, I shall briefly explain it to you, as I am able, and shah use the simplicity of common words, seeing that the subject of which we treat is such as ought by no means to be obscured by attempts at eloquent description, but should be opened up by the simplest forms of expression. For a matter which is necessary to all in common ought to be set forth in a common sort of speech. Righteousness, then, is nothing else than not to commit sin; and not to commit sin is just to keep the precepts of the law. Now, the observance of these precepts is maintained in a two-fold way-thus, that one do none of those things which are forbidden, and that he strive to fulfill the things which are commanded. This is he meaning of the following statement: ”Depart from evil, and do good. For I do not wish you to think that righteousness consists imply in not doing evil, since not to do good is also evil, and a transgression of the law takes n place in both, since he who said, ”Depart fromevil” said also, ”and do good. If you depart from evil, and do not do good, you are a transgressor of the law, which is fulfilled, not simply by abhorring all evil deeds, but also by the performance of good works.

For, indeed, you have not merely received this commandment, that you should not deprive one who is clothed of his garments, but that you should cover with your own the man who has been deprived of his; nor that you should not take away bread of his own from one who has it, but that youshould willingly impart of your bread to himwho has none; nor that you should not simply not drive away a poor man from a shelter of his own, but that you should receive him when he has been driven out, and has no shelter, into your own. For the precept which has beer, given us is ”to weep with them that weep. But how can we weep with them, if we share in none of their necessities, and afford no help to them in those matters on account of which they lament? For God does not call for the fruitless moisture of our tears; but, because tears are an indication of grief, he wishes you to feel the distresses of another as if they were your own. And just as you would wish aid to be given you if you were in such tribulation, so should you help another in accordance with the statement, ”Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them. For to weep with one that weeps, and at the same time to refuse to help, when you can, him that weeps, is a proof of mockery, and not of piety.

In short, our Saviour wept with Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, and proved the feeling of infinite compassion within him by the witness of his tears. But works, as the proofs of true affection soon followed, when Lazarus, for whose sake the tears were shed, was raised up and restored to his sisters. This was sincerely to weep with those who wept, when the occasion of the weeping was removed. But he did it, you will say, as having the power. Well, nothing is demanded of you which it is impossible for you to perform: he has fulfilled his entire duty who has done what he could.

Chapter VII.

But (as we had begun to remark) it is not sufficient for a Christian to keep himself from wickedness, unless he also has fulfilled the duties implied in good works, as is very distinctly proved by that statement in which the Lord threatened that those will be doomed to eternal fire, who, although they have done no evil, have not done all that is good, declaring "Then will the king say to those who are on his fight hand: depart from me, ye cursed, into eternal fire, which my Father has prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and ye gave me not to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink," with what follows. He did not say, "Depart from me, ye cursed, because ye have committed murder, or adultery, or theft"; for it is not because they had done evil, but because they had not done good, that they are condemned, and doomed to the punishments of the eternal Gehenna; nor because they had committed things which were forbidden, but because they had not been willing to do those things which had been commanded. And from this it is to be observed what hope those can have, who, in addition, do some of those things which are forbidden, when even such are doomed to eternal fire as have simply not done the things which are commanded.

For I do not wish you to flatter yourself in this way,-if you have not done certain things, because you have done certain other things, since it is written, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, has become guilty of all. For Adam sinned once, and died; and do you think that you can live, when you are often doing that which. killed another person, when he had only done it once? Or do you imagine that he committed a great crime, and was therefore justly condemned to a severer punishment? Let us consider, then, what it was he really did. He ate of the fruit of the tree, contrary to the commandment. What then? Did God punish man with death for the sake of the fruit of a tree?No: not on account of the fruit of the tree, but on account of the contempt of the commandment. The question, therefore, is not about the nature of the offense, but about the transgression of the commandment.

And the same being who told Adam not to eat of the fruit of the tree, has commanded you not to speak evil, not to lie, not to detract, not to listen to a detractor, to swear not at all, not to covet, not to envy, not to be drunken, not to be greedy, not to render evil for evil to any one, to love your enemies, to bless them that curse you, to pray for them that malign and persecute you, to turn the other cheek to one smiting you, and not to go to law before a

worldly tribunal, so that, if any one seeks to take away your goods, you should joyfully lose them, to flee from the charge of avarice, to beware of the sin of all pride and boastfulness, and live, humble and meek, after the example of Christ, avoiding fellowship with the wicked so completely that you will not even eat with fornicators, or covetous persons, or those that speak evil of others, or the envious, or detractors, or the drunken, or the rapacious. Now, if you despise him in any such matter, then, if he spared Adam, he will also spare you.

Yea, he might have been spared with better reason than you, inasmuch as he was still ignorant and inexperienced, and was restrained by the example of no one who had previously sinned, and who had died on account of his sin.But after such examples as you possess, after the law, after the prophets, after the gospels, and after the apostles, if you still set your mind on transgressing, I see not in what way pardon can be extended to you.

Chapter VIII.

Do you flatter yourself on account of the attribute of virginity? Remember Adam and Eve fell when they were virgins, and that the perfect purity of their bodies did not profit them when they sinned. The virgin who sins is to be compared to Eve, and not to Mary. We do not deny that, in the present life, there is the remedy of repentance, but we remind you rather to hope for reward, than to look for pardon. For it is disgraceful that those should ask for indulgence who are expecting the crown of virginity,and that those should commit anything unlawful who have even cut themselves off from things lawful; for it must be remembered that it is lawful to contract an alliance by marriage. And as those are to be praised who, from love to Christ, and for the glory of the kingdom of heaven, have despised the tie of wedlock, so those are to be condemned who, through the pleasure of incontinence, after they have vowed themselves to God, have recourse to the Apostolic remedy. Therefore, as we have said, those who decline marriage despise not things unlawful, but things lawful.

And if that class of people swear, if they speak evil of others, if they are detractors, or if they patiently listen to detractors, if they return evil for evil, if they incur the charge of covetousness with respect to other people's property, or of avarice in regard to their own, if they cherish the poison of revenge or envy, if they either say or think anything unbefitting against the institutions of the law orthe Apostles, if with a desire of pleasing in the flesh, they exhibit themselves dressed up and adorned, if they do any other unlawful things, as is only too common, what will it profit them to have spurned what is lawful, while they practice what is not lawful?If you wish it to be of advantage to you, that you have despised things lawful, take care that you do not any of those things which are not lawful. For, it is foolish to have dreaded that which is in its nature less, and not to dread that which is intrinsically more [or not to avoid those things which are inter- dicted, while such things as are permitted meet with contempt]. For the Apostle says, "She that is unmarried careth for the things of the Lord, how she may please God, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but she who is married careth for the things of this world, how she may please her husband.

He thus affirms that the married woman pleases her husband by thinking of worldly things, while the unmarried woman pleases God, inasmuch as she has no anxiety about the things of the world. Let him tell me, then, whom she desires to please, who has no husband, and yet

cares for the things of the world? Shall not the married woman, in such a case, be preferred to her? Yes, since she by caring for the things of the world pleases at least her husband, but the other neither pleases her husband, since she does not have one, nor can she please God. But it is not fitting that we should pass over in silence that which he said: "The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, how she may please God, that she may be holy both in body and spirit" [she careth, he says, for the things of the Lord; she does not care for the things of the world, or of men, but for the things of God]. What, then, are the things of the Lord? Let the Apostle tell: "Whatsoever things are holy, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise of doctrine": these are the things of the Lord, which holy and truly apostolic virgins meditate upon, and think of, day and night, without any interval of time.

Of the Lord is the resurrection of the dead, of the Lord is immortality, of the Lord is incorruption, of the Lord is that splendor of the sun which is promised to the saints, as it is written in the Gospel, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father": of the Lord are the many mansions of the righteous in the heavens of the Lord is the fruit which is produced, whether thirty fold, or sixty fold, or an hundred fold. Those virgins who think on these things, and by what works they may be able to merit them, think of the things of the Lord. Of the Lord, too, is the law of the new and old testament, in which shine forth the holy utterances of his lips; and if any virgins meditate without intermission on these things, they think of the things of the Lord. In that case, there is fulfilled in them the saying of the prophet: "The eternal foundations are upon a solid rock, and the commands of God are in the heart of the holy woman."

Chapter IX.

There follows the clause ”how she may please God,”-God, I say, not men,-” that she may be holy both in body and spirit.” He does not say that she may be holy only in a member or in the body, but that she may be holy in body and spirit. For a member is only one part of the body, but the body is a union of all the members. When, therefore, he says that she may be holy in the body, he testifies that she ought to be sanctified in all her members, because the sanctification of the other members will not avail, if corruption be found remaining in one. Also, she will not be holy in body (which consists of all the members), who is defiled by the pollution of even one of them. But in order that what I say may be made more obvious and clear, suppose the case of a woman who is purified by the sanctification of all her other members, and sins only with her tongue, inasmuch as she either speaks evil of people or bears false testimony, will all her other members secure the acquittal of one, or will all the rest be judged on account of the one? If, therefore, the sanctification of the other members will not avail, even when one only is at fault, how much more, if all are corrupted by the guilt of various sins, will the perfection of one be of no avail?

Chapter X.

Wherefore, I beseech you, O virgin, do not flatter yourself on the ground of your purity alone, and do not trust in the perfection of one member; but according to the Apostle, maintain the sanctity of your body throughout. Cleanse thy head from all defilement, because it is a disgrace that it, after the sanctifying oil has been applied to it, should be polluted with the juice or powder of either crocus, or any other pigment, or should be adorned with gold or gems or any other earthly ornament, because it already shines with the radiance of heavenly adornment. It is undoubtedly a grave insult to Divine grace to prefer to it any mundane and worldly ornament. And next, cleanse thy forehead, that it may blush at human, and not at Divine works, and may display that shame which gives rise not to sin, but to the favor of God, as the sacred Scripture declares, ”There is a shame that causes sin, and there is a shame that brings with it the favor of God. Cleanse, too, thy neck, that it may not carry thy locks in a golden net and necklaces hung round it, but may rather bear about it those ornaments of which the Scripture says, ”Let not mercy and faith depart from thee,” and hang them upon thy heart as upon thy neck.

Cleanse thine eyes, whilst thou dost withdraw them from all concupiscence, and dost never turn them away from the sight of the poor, and dost keep them from all dyes, in that purity in which they were made by God. Cleanse thy tongue from falsehood, because ”a mouth which tells lies destroys the soul”: cleanse it from detraction, from swearing, and from perjury. I beg you not to think it is an inverted order that I have said the tongue should be cleansed from swearing before perjury, for one will then the more easily escape perjury, if he swears not at all, so that there may be fulfilled in him that statement, ”Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. And be mindful of the Apostle who says, ”Bless, and curse not. But often call to mind the following words, ”See that no one render evil for evil to any man, or cursing for cursing, but on the contrary, do ye bless them, because to this ye have been called, that ye should possess a blessing by inheritance”; and this other passage, ”If any one offend not in tongue, he is a perfect man. For it is shameful that those lips, by which you confess God, pray to him, bless him, and praise him, should be defiled by the pollution of any sin. I know not with what conscience any one can pray to God with that tongue with which he either speaks falsehood, or calumniates, or detracts.

God listens to holy lips, and speedily answers those prayers which an unpolluted tongue pours forth. Cleanse also thine ears, so that they may not listen except to holy and true discourse, that they never admit into them obscene, or infamous, or worldly words, or tolerate any one detracting from another, on account of that which is written, ”Hedge up thine ears with thorns, and do not listen to a wicked tongue, that you may have your part with him, of whom it is said, that he was righteous in hearing and seeing; i.e. he sinned neither with his eyes nor his ears. Cleanse, too, thy hands, ”that they n be not stretched out to receive, but shut against giving,” and that they be not prompt to strike, but ever ready for all the works of mercy and piety. In fine, cleanse thy feet, that they follow not the broad and ample way which leads to grand and costly worldly banquets, but that they tread rather the difficult and narrow path, which guides to heaven, for it is written, ”Make a straight path for your feet. Acknowledge that your members were formed for you by God the Maker, not for vices, but for virtues; and, when you have cleansed the whole of your limbs from every stain of sin, and they have become sanctified throughout your whole body, then understand that this purity will profit you, and look forward with all confidence to the prize of virginity.

Chapter XI.

I believe that I have now set forth, briefly indeed, but, at the same time, fully, what is implied in a woman's purity of body: it remains that we should learn what it is to be pure also in spirit; i.e. that what it is unlawful for one to do in act, it is also unlawful for one even to imagine in thought. For she is holy, alike in body and in spirit, who sins neither in mind nor heart, knowing that God is one who examines also the heart; and, therefore, she takes every pains to possess a mind as well as a body free from sin. Such a person is aware that it is written, "Keep thy heart with all diligence"; and again, "God loveth holy hearts, and all the undefiled are acceptable to him"; and elsewhere, "Blessed are those of a pure heart; for they shall see God. I think that this last statement is made regarding those whom conscience accuses of the guilt of no sin; concerning whom I think that John also spoke in his Epistle when he said, "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God, and whatsoever we ask we shall receive from him. I do not wish you to think that you have escaped the accusation of sin, although act does not follow desire, since it is written, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.

And do not say, "I had the thought, indeed, but I did not carry it out in act"; for it is unlawful even to desire that which it is unlawful to do. Wherefore also blessed Peter issues a precept to this effect: "purify your souls"; and if he had not been aware of such a thing as defilement of the soul, he would not have expressed a desire that it should be purified. But we should also very carefully consider that passage which says, "These are they who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins, and they follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth"; and should reflect whether, if these are joined to the Divine retinue, and traverse all the regions of the heavens, through the merit of chastity and purity alone, there may be also other means by which virginity being assisted may attain to the glory of so great blessedness. But whence shall we be able to know this?From the following passages (if I mistake not) in which it is written, "These were purchased from among men as the first fruits to God and the Lamb, and in their mouth there was found no falsehood, for they are without spot before the throne of God. You see, then, that they are spoken of as closely following in the footsteps of the Lord, not in virtue of one member only, but those are said to do so, who, besides virginity, had passed a life freed from all the pollution of sin.

Wherefore, let the virgin especially despise marriage on this account, that, while she is safer than others, she may the more easily accomplish what is also required from those who are married; viz. keep herself from all sin, and obey all the commandments of the law. For if she does not marry, and nevertheless indulges in those things from which even married women are enjoined to keep themselves free, what will it profit her not to have married?For although it is not allowed to any Christian to commit sin, and it befits all without exception who are purified through the sanctification of the spiritual bath, to lead an unstained life, that they may be thoroughly identified with the Church, which is described as being "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing," much more is it requisite that a virgin should reach this standard, whom neither the existence of a husband, nor of sons, nor of any other necessity, prevents from fully carrying out the demands of holy Scripture; nor shall she be able, if she fail, to defend herself by any sort of excuse.

Chapter XII.

O Virgin, maintain thy purpose which is destined for a great reward. Eminent with the Lord is the virtue of virginity and purity, if it be not disfigured by other kinds of lapses into sins and wickedness. Realize your state, realize your position, realize your purpose. You are called the bride of Christ; see that you commit no act which is unworthy of him to whom you profess to be betrothed. He will quickly write a bill of divorcement, if he perceive in you even one act of unfaithfulness. Accordingly, whosoever receives those gifts which, as an earnest, are bestowed in the case of human betrothals, immediately begins earnestly and diligently to enquire of domestics, intimates, and friends, what is the character of the young man, what he especially loves, what he receives, in what style he lives, what habits he practices, what luxuries he indulges in, and in what pursuits he finds his chief pleasure and delight. And when she has learned these things, she so conducts herself, in all respects, that her service, her cheerfulness, her diligence, and her whole mode of life, may be in harmony with the character of her betrothed. And do thou, who hast Christ as thy bridegroom, enquire from the domestics and intimates of that bridegroom of thine what is his character; yes, do thou zealously and skillfully enquire in what things he specially delights, what sort of arrangement he loves in thy dress, and what kind of adornment he desires.

Let his most intimate associate Peter tell thee, who does not allow personal adorning even to married women, as he has written in his epistle, ”Let wives, in like manner, be subject to their own husbands, so that, if any believe not the word, they may, without the word, be won over by the conduct of their wives, contemplating their chaste behavior in the fear of God; and let theirs not be an outward adornment of the hair, or the putting on of gold, or elegance in the apparel which is adopted, but let there be the hidden man of the heart in the stainlessness of a peaceful and modest spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. Let another apostle also tell thee, the blessed Paul, who, writing to Timothy, gives his approval to the same things in regard to the conduct of believing women: ”Let wives in like manner adorn themselves with the ornament of a habit of modesty and sobriety, not with curled hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array, but as becomes women that profess chastity, with good and upright behavior.”

Chapter XIII.

But perhaps you say, ”Why did not the Apostles enjoin these things on virgins? Because they did not think that necessary, lest such an exhortation, if given to them, might rather seem an insult than a means of edification. Nor, in fact, would they have believed that virgins could ever proceed to such an extreme of hardihood, as to claim for themselves carnal and worldly ornaments, not permitted even to married women. Undoubtedly, the virgin ought to adorn and array herself; for how can she be able to please her betrothed, if she does not come forth in a neat and ornamental form? Let her be adorned by all means, but let her ornaments be of an internal and spiritual kind, and not of a carnal nature; for God desires in her a beauty not of the body, but of the soul. Do thou, therefore, who desirest that thy soul should be loved and dwelt in by God, array it with all diligence, and adorn it with spiritual garments. Let nothing unbecoming, nothing repulsive, be seen in it. Let it shine with the gold of righteousness, and gleam with the gems of holiness, and glitter with the most precious pearl of purity; instead of fine linen and silk, let it be strayed in the robe of mercifulness and piety, according to what is written, ”Put ye on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved bowels of mercy, kindness, humility,” and so forth.

And let the virgin not ask for the beauty due to ceruse, or any other pigment, but let her have the brightness of innocence and simplicity, the rosy hue of modesty, and the purple glow of honorable shamefacedness. Let her be washed with the nitre of heavenly doctrine, and purified by all spiritual lavements. Let no stain of malice or sin be left in her. And lest, at any time, she should give forth the evil odor of sin, let her be imbued, through and through, with the most pleasant ointment of wisdom and knowledge.

Chapter XIV.

God seeks for adornment of this kind, and desires a soul arrayed in such a manner. Remember that you are called the daughter of God, according to what he says, ”Hearken, O daughter, and consider. But you yourself also, as often as you call God your Father, bear witness that you are the daughter of God. Wherefore, if you are the daughter of God, take care that you do none of those things which are unworthy of God, your Father; but do all things as being the daughter of God. Reflect how the daughters of nobles in this world conduct themselves, to what habits they are accustomed and by what exercises they train themselves. In some of them, there is so great modesty, so great dignity, so great self-restraint, that they excel the habits of other human beings in regard to human nobleness, and, lest they should attach any mark of disgrace on their honorable parents by their failure, they strive to acquire another nature for themselves by the mode of their acting in the world. And do you, therefore, have regard to your origin, consider your descent, attend to the glory of your nobility. Acknowledge that you are not merely the daughter of man, but of God, and adorned with the nobility of a divine birth. So present yourself to the world that your heavenly birth be seen in you, and your divine nobleness shine clearly forth.

Let there be in you a new dignity, an admirable virtue, a notable modesty, a marvelous patience, a gait becoming a virgin with a bearing of true shamefacedness, speech always modest, and such as is uttered only at theproper time, so that whosoever beholds you mayadmiringly exclaim: ”What is this exhibition of new dignity among men? What is this striking modesty, what this well-balanced excellence, what this ripeness of wisdom?This is not the outcome of human training or of mere human discipline. Something heavenly sheds its fragrance on me in that earthly body. I really believe that God does reside in some human beings. And when he comes to know that you are a handmaid of Christ, he will be seized with the greater amazement, and will reflect how marvelous must be the Master, when his handmaid manifests such excellence.

Chapter XV.

IF you wish, then, to be with Christ, you must live according to the example of Christ, who was so far removed from all evil and wickedness, that he did not render a recompense even to his enemies, but rather even prayed for them. For I do not wish you to reckon those souls Christian, who (I do not say) hate either their brothers or sisters, but who do not, before God as a witness, love their neighbors with their whole heart and conscience, since it is a bounden duty for Christians, after the example of Christ himself, even to love their enemies. If you desire to possess fellowship with the saints, cleanseyour heart from the thought of malice and sin. Let no one circumvent you; let no one delude you by beguiling speech. The court of heaven will admit none except the holy, and righteous, and simple, and innocent, and pure. Evil has no place in the presence of God. It is necessary that he who desires to reign with Christ should be free from all wickedness and guile. Nothing is so offensive, and nothing so detestable to God, as to hate any one, to wish to harm any one; while nothing is so acceptable to him as to love all men. The prophet knowing this bears witness to it when he teaches, ”Ye who love the Lord, hate evil.”

Chapter XVI.

Take heed that ye love not human glory in any respect, lest your portion also be reckoned among those to whom it was said, ”How can ye believe, who seek glory, one from another? and of whom it is said through the prophet, ”Increase evils to them; increase evils to the boastful of the earth”; and elsewhere, ”Ye are confounded from your boasting, from your reproaching in the sight of the Lord. For I do not wish you to have regard to those, who are virgins of the world, and not of Christ; who unmindful of their purpose and profession, rejoice in delicacies, are delighted with riches, and boast of their descent from a merely carnal nobility; who, if they assuredly believed themselves to be the daughters of God, would never, after their divine ancestry, admire mere human nobility, nor glory in any honored earthly father: if they felt that they had God as their Father, they would not love any nobility connected with the flesh. Why, thou foolish woman, dost thou flatter thyself about the nobleness of thy descent, and take delight in it? God, at the beginning, created two human beings, from whom the whole multitude of the human race has descended; and thus it is not the equity of nature, but the ambition of evil desire, which has given rise to worldly nobility.

Unquestionably, we are all rendered equal by the grace of the divine bath, and there can be no difference among those, whom the second birth has generated, by means of which alike the rich man and the poor man, the free man and the slave, the nobly born and the lowly born, is rendered a son of God. Thus mere earthly rank is overshadowed by the brilliance of heavenly glory, and henceforth is taken no account of, while those who formerly had been unequal in worldly honors are now equallystrayed in the glory of a heavenly and divine nobility. There is now among such no place for lowness of birth; nor is any one inferior to another whom the majesty of the divine birth adorns; except in the estimation of those who do not think that the things of heaven are to be preferred to those of earth. There can be no worldly boasting among them, if they reflect how vain a thing it is that they should, in smaller matters, prefer themselves to those whom they know to be equal to themselves in greater matters, and should regard, as placed below themselves on earth, those whom they believe to be equal to themselves in what relates to heaven. But do thou, who art a virgin of Christ, and not of the world, flee from all the glory of this present life, that thou mayest attain to the glory which is promised in the world to come.

Chapter XVII.

Avoid words of contention and causes of animosity: flee also from all occasions of discord and strife. For if, according to the doctrine of the Apostle "the servant of the Lord must not strive," how much more does this become the handmaid of the Lord, whose mind ought to be more gentle, as her sex is more bashful and retiring. Restrain thy tongue from evil speaking, and put the bridle of the law upon thy mouth; so that you shall speak, if you speak at all, only when it would be a sin to be silent. Beware lest you utter anything which might be justly found fault with. A word once spoken is like a stone which has been thrown: wherefore it should be long thought over before it is uttered. Blessed, assuredly, are the lips, which never utter what they would wish to recall. The talk of a chaste mind ought itself also to be chaste, such as may always rather edify than injure the hearers, according to that commandment of the Apostle when he says, "Let no corrupt communications proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good for the edification of faith, that it may convey grace to them that hear. Precious to God is that tongue which knows not to form words except about divine things, and holy is that mouth from which heavenly utterances continually flow forth.

Put down by the authority of Scripture calumniators of those who are absent, as being evil-minded persons, because the prophet mentions this also as among the virtues of a perfect man, if, in the presence of the righteous an evil-minded man, who brings forward things against his neighbor which cannot be proved, is brought down to nothing. For it is not lawful for you patiently to listen to evil-speaking against another, inasmuch as you would not wish that to be done by others when directed against yourself. Certainly, everything is unrighteous which goes against the Gospel of Christ, and that is the case, if you quietly permit anything to be done to another, which you would feel painful, if done by any one to yourself. Accustom your tongue always to speak about those who are good, and lend your ears rather to listen to the praises of good men than to the condemnation of such as are wicked. Take heed that all the good actions you perform are done for the sake of God, knowing that for every such deed you will only receive a reward, so far as you have done it out of regard to his fear and love. Study rather to be holy than to appear so, because it is of no avail to be reckoned what you are not; and the guilt of a twofold sin is contracted when you do not have what you are credited with having, and when you pretend to possess what you do not possess.

Chapter XVIII.

Delight thyself rather in fastings than in feastings, mindful of that widow who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers day and night. Now, if she who was a widow, and a Jewish widow, proved herself such, what is it fitting that a virgin of Christ should now attain to?Love more than any other thing the feast of the divine word, and desire that you be filled with spiritual dainties, while you seek for such food as refreshes the soul, rather than for that which only pleases the body. Flee from all kinds of flesh and wine, as being the sources of heat and provocatives to lust. And only then, if need be, use a little wine, when the stomach's uneasiness, or great infirmity of body, requires you to do so. Subdue anger, restrain enmity, and whatever there may be which gives rise to remorse when it is done, avoid as an abomination giving rise to immediate sin. It is fitting that that mind should be very tranquil and quiet, as well as free from all the tumults of anger, which desires to be the dwelling-place of God, as he testifies through the prophet, saying, "Upon what other man shall I rest than upon him who is humble and quiet, and who trembleth at my words?" Believe that God is a witness of all thy deeds and thoughts, and take good heed lest you either do or think anything which is unworthy of the divine eyesight. When you desire to engage in prayer, show yourself in such a frame of mind as becomes one who is to speak with the Lord.

Chapter XIX.

When you repeat a psalm, consider whose words you are repeating and delight yourself more with true contrition of soul, than with the pleasantness of a trilling voice. For God sets a higher value on the tears of one thus praising him, than on the beauty of his voice; as the prophet says, ”Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Now, where there are fear and trembling, there is no lifting up of the voice, but humility of mind with lamentation and tears. Display diligence in all thy doings; for it is written, ”Cursed is the man who carelessly performs the work of the Lord. Let grace grow in you with years; let righteousness increase with age; and let your faith appear the more perfect the older you become; for Jesus, who has left us an example how to live, increased not only in years as respected his body, but in wisdom and spiritual grace before God and men. Reckon all the time in which you do not perceive yourself growing better as positively lost. Maintain to the last that purpose of virginity which you have formed; for it is the part of virtue not merely to begin, but to finish, as the Lord says in the Gospel, ”Whosoever shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved. Beware, therefore, lest you furnish to any one an occasion even of evil desire, because thy God, betrothed to thee, is jealous; for an adulteress against Christ is more guilty than one against her husband.

Be thou, therefore, a model of life to all; be an example; and excel in actual conduct those whom you precede in your consecration to chastity. Show thyself in all respects a virgin; and let no stain of corruption be brought as a charge against thy person. And let one whose body is perfect in its purity be also irreproachable in conduct. Now, as we said in the beginning of this letter, that you have become a sacrifice pertaining to God, such a sacrifice as undoubtedly imparts its own sanctity also to others, that, as every one worthily receives from it, he himself also may be a partaker of sanctification, so then, let the other virgins also be sanctified through you, as by means of a divine offering. Show yourself to them so holy in all things, that, whosoever comes in contact with thy life, whether by hearing or seeing, may experience the power of sanctification, and may feel that such an amount of grace passes to him from your manner of acting, that, while he desires to imitate thee, he himself becomes worthy of being a sacrifice devoted to God.

Letter 3

After I learned that all thy cooks had given up thy kitchen (I believe because they felt indignant at having to fulfill the duty towards cheap dishes of pulse), I sent a little boy to you out of our own workshop. He is quite skillful enough to cook pale beans and to pickle homely beet-root, with vinegar and sauce, as wellas to prepare cheap porridge for the jaws of the hungry monks. He knows nothing, however, of pepper or of laser, but he is quite at home with cumin, and is especially clever in plying the noisy mortar with sweetly smelling plants. He has one fault, that he is no kindly foe to admit to any garden; for if let in, he will mow down with a sword all things within his reach, and he will never be satisfied with the slaughter simply of mallows. However, in furnishing himself with fuel he will not swindle you. He will burn whatever comes in his way; he will cut down and not hesitate to lay hands upon buildings, and to carry off old beams from the household. We present him, then, to you, with this character and these virtues; and we wish you to regard him not as a servant, but as a son, because you are not ashamed to be the father of very small creatures. I myself would have wished to serve you instead of him; but if good-will may be taken as in some measure standing for the deed do you only, in return, take care to remember me amid your breakfasts and delightful dinners because it is more proper to be your slave, than the master of others. Pray for me.

Letter 4

The faithful exponent of our holy religion so arranges all things that no place be found in future for transgressors: for what else do you, for instance, promise us by so great sanctity of character, than that, all errors being laid aside, we should lead a blessed life?In this matter, I see that the greatest praise befits thy virtues, because you have changed even an uninstructed mind by your exhortations, and drown it over to an excellent condition. But it would not seem so wonderful, if you had simply strengthened educated minds by instilling wisdom into them for intelligent men have a sort of relationship to devotion, but rustic natures are not easily won over to the side of severity. Just as those who shape the forms of animals out of stone, undertake a business of a pretty difficult kind, when they strike very hard rocks with their chisels, while those who make their attempts on substances of a softer nature feel that their hands are aided by the ease of fashioning these materials, and it is deemed proper that the labor of the workman; when difficult, should be held in the highest honor, so, Sir, singular commendation ought so be given to you, because you have made unpolished and rustic minds, set free from the darkness of sin, both to think what is human, and to understand what is divine.

No less is Xenocrates, by far the most learned of the philosophers, held in estimation, who succeeded by severe exhortations in having luxury conquered. For when a certain Polemo, heavy with wine, staggered openly out of a nocturnal revel at the time when his hearers were flocking to the school of Xenocrates, he, too, entered the place, and impudently took his seat among the crowd of disciples, in that dress in which he had come forth from the banquet. A chaplet of flowers covered his head, and yet he did not feel ashamed that he would seem unlike all the others, because, in truth, indulgence in a long drinking-bout had upset his brains, which are the seat of reason. As the rest of those there present began to murmur grievously, because so unsuitable a hearer had found his way in among a multitude of men of letters, the master himself was not in the slightest degree disturbed, but, on the contrary, began to discourse on the science of morals, and the laws of moderation. And so powerful proved the influence of the teacher that the mind of that impudent intruder was persuaded to the love of modesty. First of all, then, Polemo, in utter confusion, took off the chaplet from his head, and professed himself a disciple. And in course of time he conformed himself so thoroughly to the duties implied in dignity, and surrendered himself so entirely to the exhibition of modesty, that a glorious amendment of character threw a cloak over the

habits of his former life. Now we admire this very thing in your instructions, that, without the use of any threats, and without having recourse to terrors of any kind, you have turned infatuated minds to the worship of God; so that even a badly ordered intellect should believe it preferable to live well and happily with all, rather than to hold unrighteous opinions with a few.

Letter 5

Although my lord and brother has already begged of your nobleness that you would see that Tutus should be most safe, yet it has been allowed to me to Commend the same person in a letter, in order that, by the petition being doubled, he may be held all the safer. For let it be granted that a youthful fault and error of a yet unsettled age has injured him, so as to inflict a stare on his early years; still one, who did not yet know what was due to right conduct, has gone wrong almost without contracting blame. For when he came to a fight state of mind and to reflection, he understood on better thoughts that a theatrical life was to be condemned. However, he could not be completely cleared of his fault, unless he should wash its guilt away by the aid of Deity, since, by the remedy obtained through the Catholic religion, changing his views, he has denied himself the enjoyment of a less honorable place, and has withdrawn himself from the eyes of the people.OF The Master AS Above.

Since, therefore, both divine and state laws do not permit a faithful body and sanctified minds to exhibit disgraceful though pleasing spectacles, and to set forth vulgar means of enjoyment, especially since an injury seems in some degree to accrue to the chaste dedication of one's self, in case any one who has been renewed by holy baptism should fall back upon his old licentiousness, it behooves your Excellency to show favor to good intentions, so that he who, by the goodness of God, has entered on a pious duty, should not be forced to sink into the pitfall of the theatre. He does not, however, refuse compliance with the judgment of you all, if you enjoin other fitting actions on his part in behalf of the requirements of our common country.

Letter 6

Forensic excitement ought to be at full heat during the time of business in the law-courts; for it is fitting that the arms of industry, as it struggles daily, should display energetic movements. But when loud-toned eloquence has sounded a retreat, and has retired to peaceful groves and pleasant dwelling-places, it is right that one lay aside idle murmurs, and cease to utter ineffectual threats. For we know that palm-bearing steeds, when they have retired from the circus, rest with the utmost quietness in their stables. Neither constant fear nor doubtful palms of victory distress them, but at length, haltered to the peaceful cribs, they now no longer stand in awe of the master urging them on, enjoying sweet oblivion of the restless rivalry which had prevailed. In like manner, let it delight the boastful soldier after his term of service is completed, to hang up his trophies, and patiently to bear the burden of age.

But I do not quite understand why you should take a delight in terrifying miserable husbandmen; and I do not comprehend why you wish to harass my rustics with the fear of want of sustenance; as if, indeed, I did not know how to console them, and to deliver them from fear, and to show them that there is not so great a reason to fear as you pretend. I confess that, while we were occupied in the plain, I was often frightened by the arms of your eloquence, but frequently I returned you corresponding blows, as far as I was able. I certainly learned along with you, by what right, and in what order, thehusbandmen are demanded back, to whom a legal process is competent, and to whom the issue of a process is not competent. You say that the Volusians wished you brought back, and frequently, in your wrath, you repeat that you · will withdraw the country people from my little keep; and you, the very man, as I hope and desire, bound to me by the ties of old relationship, now rashly threaten that, casting our agreement to the winds, you will lay hold upon my men. I ask of your illustrious knowledge, whether there is one law for advocates, and another for private persons, whether one thing is just at Rome, and quite another thing at Matarum.

In the meantime, I do not know that you were ever lord of the Volusian property, since Dionysius is said to have preserved the right of possession to it, and he never wanted heirs; who, while he lived, was accustomed to hurl the envenomed jibes of his low language upon a multitude of individuals. There was, at that time, one Porphyrius, the son of Zibberinus, and yet he was not properly named the son of Zibberinus. He kept hidden, by military

service, the question as to his birth, and, that he might dispel the cloud from his forehead, he took part in officious services and willing acts of submission. He was much with me both at home and in the forum, having often employed me as his defender with my father, and as his advocate before the judge. Sometimes I even kept back Dionysius, feeling that he ought not, for the sake of twenty acres to discharge vulgar abuse upon Porphyrius.

See, here is the reason why thy remarkable prudence threatened my agents, so that, though you are not the owner of the place, you everywhere make mention of my husbandmen.But if you give yourself out as the successorof Porphyrius, you must know that the narrow space of twenty acres cannot certainly be managed by one cultivator, or, if mindful of your proper dignity and determined to maintain it, you shrink from naming yourself the heir of Porphyrius, it is certain and obvious that he can commence proceedings, to whom the right of doing so belongs, so as to go to law with those who have no property in that land. But if you diligently look into the matter, you will see that the endeavor to recover it most especially devolves on me. Wherefore, my much esteemed lord and brother, it behooves you to be at peace, and to return to friendship with me, while you condescend to come to a private conference. Cease, I pray you, to disturb inactive and easily frightened persons, and utter your boastful words at a distance. Believe me, however, that I am delighted with your high spirit, and by no means offended;for we are neither of a harsh disposition, nor destitute of learning, Let Maximinus at least render you gentle.

Letter 7

The faith and piety of souls, no doubt, remain, but this should be made known by the evidence of a letter, in order that an increase of affection may be gained by such mutual courtesy. For just as a fertile field cannot bring forth abundant fruits, if its cultivation has been neglected, and the good qualities of soil are lost through the indolence of one who rests, instead of working, so I think that the love and kindly feelings of the mind grow feeble, unless those who are absent are visited, as if present, by means of a letter.

Authorship. These letters were once printed with the works of Sulpicius Severus, but his authorship is doubtful and most scholars do not accept it.

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.